

# Arizona Wildlife Podcast

## Transcript: Episode 3 – Threatened and Endangered Species

*(Please note: this podcast was recorded live from a public presentation. It was not a rehearsed speech. This transcript attempts to capture the dialogue as it was spoken. At times when the speech was difficult to hear or understand, a good effort was made. These rare cases are noted in the text.)*

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The content for this episode came from the training day at the 2008 National Envirothon competition. It was originally recorded on July 29, 2008, outdoors at the Flagstaff Arboretum. It consisted of Arizona Game and Fish Department employees providing background information about some of the wildlife and wildlife issues found in the state. It concluded with a question and answer session by the students participating in the competition.

Listen as Kellie Tharp, a Department educator, discusses endangered species in Arizona. Sam Huselton and Eric Proctor, also Department educators, help Kellie answer questions at the end.

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**KELLIE:**

Can anybody think of a reason that species are becoming threatened or endangered?

**STUDENT:**

Habitat loss.

**KELLIE:**

Habitat loss. How are they losing habitat? Is it just disappearing?

**STUDENT:**

No.

**KELLIE:**

What's...what's happening? Tell me. How are they losing it?

**STUDENT:**

Um. By like pulling trees or something, or maybe like walking on habitats. Like...cause they're not getting enough water and once you like step on them or trample them they don't usually grow back.

**KELLIE:**

Okay, so maybe recreational vehicles destructing habitat. What's a big thing?

**STUDENT:**

Housing.

**KELLIE:**

Housing. So, urban encroachment. As we're developing, natural habitats are being lost. Let's think aquatic. How are our waterways being changed? What's happening?

**STUDENT:**

Dams.

**KELLIE:**

Dams. When you start damming an area, you're going to change the natural flow; you're going to change light infiltration; you're going to change temperature. So you're going to have a lot of native species that relied on these temperature fluctuations unable to survive causing some to go into threatened or endangered status. They rely on the warm waters. They rely on, sometime with our monsoons, the rains, the heavy rains that come in in the late afternoon. They rely on these different fluctuations. Without that, they can't survive so they might get outcompeted...different things might happen.

Also, we have a rich diversity of reptiles. Who can think of what might happen to these reptiles? Do people maybe come and seek out those reptiles? Anybody ever seen ads on Craigslist for reptiles, illegal selling on the black market? We have a big problem with that in Arizona. People actually come to Arizona seeking out our herp species and they attempt to sell them on the black market. So that's a big problem. We have a lot of wildlife managers that address that issue.

OHV use is definitely one. A lot of these misuse of recreational opportunities by humans...it can cause erosion, trampling of vegetation, so wildlife might not have the same, ah, food sources that they had in the past. Carving trails in the desert so that might alter their path.

Also with endangered species we have a lot of issues with this but how is Arizona addressing that? What reintroductions are well known in Arizona? Anybody have an idea?

**STUDENT:**

The Mexican gray wolf.

**KELLIE:**

The Mexican gray wolf.

**STUDENT:**

California Condor.

**KELLIE:**

Condor. I'm looking for one more. Black-footed ferret. So these three reintroductions took place around 1996. They're still being monitored. There's not complete assurance of long-term survival. But there's issues that come with each of these reintroductions.

With the California condor, how do they feed? How do condors feed?

**SAM:**

What do they feed on?

**KELLIE:**

What do they feed on?

**STUDENT:**

Carrion.

**KELLIE:**

Carrion. So they're scavengers. As scavengers hunt for carrion, one primary source is lead poisoning...lead shot left in the carrion. And so, Arizona Game and Fish actually works with hunters that get tags in those units and encourages them to use copper bullets. That reduces this lead poisoning and its one way to mitigate these effects.

Another problem is illegal shooting of wolves. There's a lot of issues with wolves where they've been reintroduced...predation on cattle and livestock. A lot of ranchers have lost a lot of their investment. So illegal shooting of wolves has definitely been an issue that arises with this reintroduction.

And then with the black-footed ferrets, they eat prairie dogs. And where prairie dogs are, there's the prairie dog holes. And some people have found that with prairie dog holes they think that maybe cattle or horses tend to break their ankles more. People don't like prairie dogs. It is legal to shoot prairie dogs, so as the food source diminishes that's a problem for the ferrets.

Water catchments. Why do we have water catchments?

**STUDENT:**

They're for desert animals where there's no longer precipitation or rivers flowing through.

**KELLIE:**

Where humans have come in, encroached on the habitat and maybe removed or altered the habitat, we're coming back and providing water catchments which is a water source for this wildlife to use. Now, sounds great and fine. But always are there issues that come along with things like that? Yeah.

Some issues with water catchments. They might entice predators, so predators might begin to behaviorally adapt to these water catchments and use that as a method to find prey. It also is a great way to spread pathogens; disease transmittal through water. So that's another issue regarding water catchments. Non-natives might flourish because there's now water in areas that they didn't have water. And it also can interfere with the natural function of an ecosystem.

**STUDENT QUESTION:**

So you talked about endangered and threatened species. Um, do you have any animals listed under special concern?

**SAM:**

Yes. Lots.

**ERIC:**

A lot of our reptiles.

**SAM:**

A lot of our, um, reptiles are.

**ERIC:**

Most of our rattlesnakes are.

**SAM:**

Most of our rattlesnakes. Desert tortoise is a species...

**ERIC:**

Of special concern, absolutely.

**SAM:**

Of special concern. So there are several mammals and reptiles.

**ERIC:**

Probably some of our fish, if they're not endangered.

**SAM:**

Yeah, most of our fish are threatened or endangered in some form or another.

**ERIC:**

Well, isn't the eagle now?

**SAM:**

Our eagle is, yes.

**ERIC:**

Cause it got delisted so the eagle is...

**KELLIE:**

The Arizona species...

**SAM:**

The southwestern.

**STUDENT:**

What eagle is that?

**KELLIE:**

The bald eagle.

**SAM:**

The southwestern bald eagle.

**KELLIE:**

Our breeding populations have increased and so, ah, recently it's been brought up, um, to delist, um, the Arizona population.

**ERIC:**

Yeah, there's been a lot of politics involved in whether the Arizona population of eagles is different, genetically different than the rest of the country that faces, because they are smaller here. There's a few differences. So there's been a lot involved in that and whether they should have been part of the delisting of the bald eagle.

**STUDENT QUESTION:**

You mentioned, ah, trying to get rid of the lead shot. Um, copper is also something that bioaccumulates so why would you use that instead of steel?

**SAM:**

They have used steel.

**ERIC:**

They have used steel.

**KELLIE:**

Copper has been found to be, um, the least toxic. Ah, lead poisoning was the main issue and with copper they haven't found any toxicity and residual in the birds. And hunters have been very accommodating. When a hunter is drawn in a unit that has condors released, uh, an outreach, uh, person from our agency actually provides them, in many cases, the free copper shot and they're able to use that and they've been very accommodating.

**STUDENT QUESTION:**

Could copper shot also, um like, spur more copper mining in Arizona?

**KELLIE:**

Um, the amount of tags that we're talking about in these areas is very minimal so we're not talking a large amount. There aren't that many tags drawn in these areas that are using the copper shot. That's a good point but I don't think its magnitude would cause something like that.

**ERIC:**

But it is, um, I mean, it's a valid point to make.

**KELLIE:**

Yeah.

**ERIC:**

And...and its part of that pros and cons of, you know, when we try to make one change. I mean, you do have California, which for example, they banned lead shot in the entire state of California. So you talk about California being its own economy and what's that going to be driving some of this stuff. So absolutely.

**STUDENT QUESTION:**

Once the wolves, like, start becoming really successful, what do you guys do, like other than relocating? Do they come back?

**KELLIE:**

Uh, we do avoidance...trying to, uh, move them to other areas, sometimes they'll provide supplemental feeding, carcasses, things like that, to try to entice them away from ranches, ah, where they're predators on a lot of the ranch populations. Um, and other than that just working with the ranchers if they do have, um, if they do have losses. That we're trying to work with them and try to reduce the, the number of wolves that are getting shot.

**ERIC:**

Did that answer...?

**STUDENT:**

Like if they have a cow that has been killed by wolves do you have any way of like paying for it?

**SAM:**

Yes.

**KELLIE:**

Yep.

**ERIC:**

It's...It's actually a separate, it's a nonprofit - Defenders of Wildlife runs that program.

**SAM:**

They pay for...

**KELLIE:**

Monetary reimbursement.

**ERIC:**

They compensate for the value of that cattle if it was going to go to...

**SAM:**

Market.

**ERIC:**

To market. Um...they have to prove that it was a wolf kill, not a lion kill or a coyote kill or something like that but yeah.

**STUDENT QUESTION:**

How successful has the black-footed ferret program been?

**SAM:**

It...it...it did. Uh, the third year, we had a really, really huge increase and those ferrets were doing really well. But we did have a decline because there was a plague outbreak in the prairie dogs.

**ERIC:**

But they've been...

**SAM:**

They've been doing really well.

**ERIC:**

They actually...I think they, didn't they release a second population?

**SAM:**

Yeah, in the...they released another population a little bit north of there but they are doing pretty well. They're breeding on their own, um, not with much help from us, so.

**ERIC:**

Which is really the key, the multiple populations is really the key on reintroductions.

**SAM:**

Right.

**ERIC:**

You can't just have a...you can't reintroduce in one area and say that it's good. In order to be successful you have to have those multiple populations established because that would, say, if there's a plague that hits one population it's not necessarily going to hit the other populations. So we're not successful until we start going into other areas.

**SAM:**

Right.

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