

Why You Should Care About Carnivores

We know that all species serve a purpose in their ecological niche. All species are equally worthy of being protected, but in this article, I will be focusing on the order Carnivora (the proper classification name of carnivores in taxonomy). Let's dive in!

Why is Carnivore Conservation Important?

First, carnivores have a huge impact on their ecosystems because of their place in the food web. Some carnivores are **apex predators**, which means they are the top predators in the ecosystem and have no natural predators of their own. Carnivores help maintain ecosystems. For instance, let's say we are looking at wolves, rabbits, and vegetation. If vegetation is high, there is more for the rabbits (herbivores) to eat, which will increase rabbit populations. In turn, with more rabbits there will be more for the wolves to eat. Then, wolf populations would increase and eventually the number of rabbits would decrease (being eaten by wolves) and the vegetation would grow (less rabbits consuming them). It's kind of like a cycle. And this leads into the second reason as to why carnivores are important; they can **self-regulate** populations.

Lastly, **human-wildlife conflicts** challenge carnivores because humans go after them out of frustration if the carnivore has harmed their livestock, pets, crops, or yard. These conflicts are caused by these three things:

1. **Fear**- People are scared of carnivores because of their reputation in media and stories, or personal experiences.
2. **Misunderstanding**. People may misunderstand their ecology and life history characteristics which can cause humans to not like carnivores.
3. **Distrusting Research**. There is a ton of carnivore research out there and many people show distrust or disagree with the research because it may not benefit themselves. For example, having carnivores around is ecologically beneficial, but may not be to farmers who rely on their livestock for a living and have to deal with the carnivores in the area. With carnivores present, it may be hard for people to protect their livestock. This can lead to them hunting the carnivores, which is an ecological pitfall.

For More Info...



Click this link to watch wildlife ecologist, Kathleen Carroll, discuss carnivore conservation and Wolverines. **TEDx**



How Are Carnivores Threatened?

Conservation is centered around the science of environmental/ecological problems, figuring out the cause, and implementing solutions. Unfortunately, most species of all taxonomic groups are threatened in some way- some more than others. Looking at the order Carnivora, **61% of species are threatened**. Crazy! Some of the threats that carnivores face are listed below:

- Habitat Loss
- Pollution (debris, rodenticide, etc...)
- Climate Change
- Presence of Invasive Species
- Disease
- Over-Exploitation

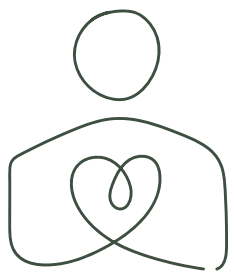
Example: The Florida Panther (*Puma concolor coryi*) is threatened by over-exploitation! Click [HERE](#) to learn about them on Jenni's Journey.



Image Source: © fotoguy22, <https://www.britannica.com/animal/Florida-panther/images-videos>

The threats listed above are not just for carnivores. So, what is it about carnivores that makes them so threatened?

- Body Size
- Rarity
- Reproductive Range
- Home Range
- Behavior
- Social Structure
- Trophic Cascading Effect (the wolf-rabbit-vegetation example previously mentioned)



Why Should You Care?

Beyond the reasons discussed previously about their ecological importance, carnivores hold many values to humans. Here are some of them:

Intrinsic Value

Intrinsic value describes the **beauty** of carnivores to human importance.

Example: Carnivores often appear in cave art and are school mascots to symbolize strength.

Ecological Value

Ecological value reflects on the **relationship** carnivores have with herbivores and primary productivity.

Example: The food web interaction between wolves, rabbits, and vegetation.

Utilitarian Value

Utilitarian value describes the **usefulness** of carnivores.

Example: Carnivores are used as pest control and ecological regulation to remove invasive species.

Economic Value

Economic value is all about the **marketable** use of carnivores.

Example: Humans will pay big money to see carnivores, like lions, at zoos, national parks, and on safaris.

How You Can Help Carnivores



Stay in the Loop!

Continue learning about carnivores and conservation by subscribing to email newsletters and following organizations, like the National Wildlife Federation, on social media!



nwf.org



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National Wildlife Federation



Make a Donation!

To ensure that conservationists can continue their work to preserve carnivores, donate to organizations that protect carnivores, like the Ruaha Carnivore Project. Click [HERE](#) to donate!

