

# Introduction

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Many people fear predators, especially big cats such as the lion, cheetah, and leopard. We are often taught to fear predators without understanding their unique behaviours, special adaptations, and essential roles in the maintenance of healthy ecosystems. Our attitudes and misconceptions about these species have led to their endangerment because often people deal with their fear of predators by eliminating them.

Endangered species exist in low population numbers and need intensive long-term management in order to survive. Attitudes toward predators must be changed if we hope to save endangered species such as the cheetah. By learning the reasons why species are endangered, students learn how the consequences of habitat destruction, environmental pollution, and the loss of biodiversity effects the overall health of the ecosystem. Through environmental education, we can all work together to change the attitudes and behaviors that have led to the endangerment of predator species and help save them from extinction. Individuals can make a difference!

To appreciate predators, we must first understand their roles in the ecosystem. Because predators must kill other animals in order to survive, many myths about them have evolved over the centuries in many cultures. The plight of cheetahs symbolize the problems that other predators face throughout the world.

Cheetahs are endangered because of:

1. Loss of habitat and prey to farming and land development
2. Persecution by farmers as vermin or livestock-killing "problem" animals
3. Poaching
4. The illegal taking of animals for the pet trade

If we are to conserve healthy wildlife populations for the future, people must understand the ecology of animals and recognize their important role in the ecosystem. Wild species maintain healthy ecosystems, provide us with food, shelter, and clothing, benefit us economically, and improve the qualities of our lives by their existence.