

NATIONAL WILDLIFE WEEK

March 19-25, 2012



HAWAIIAN MONK SEAL

Wildlife with
Special Adaptations

Scientific Name:
Monachus schauinslandi

Description: Hawaiian monk seals are the only marine mammal species found solely in U.S. waters. As adults, they have dark gray backs and light colored bellies. While they usually hunt in shallow reefs, they're known to dive over 300 meters to capture prey. Like many seals, Hawaiian monk seals exhibit bradycardia—their heart rate slows down to about 8 times less than the rate on the surface. This reduces the need for oxygen, so the seal can stay down longer.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Most live in the northwestern Hawaiian islands, and about 200 are found on the main islands. They are primarily marine, but haul out on land to rest and give birth.

Fun Fact: The term "monk seal" refers to the folds of skin near the neck that resemble the hood of a monk's robe.

Conservation Status: Endangered. There are only about 1100 Hawaiian monk seals left in the wild. Currently they are at risk from entanglement, disturbance from humans, predation, competition for prey, and disease.

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GARDEN SPIDER

Wildlife with
Special Adaptations

Scientific Name: *Argiope aurantia*

Description: Garden spiders are large, black and yellow, orb-weaving arachnids. "Orb-weaving" means that they spin a circular web. Garden spiders produce venom that is harmless to humans, but helps to immobilize prey items like flies, bees, and other flying insects that are caught in the web. The web of the garden spider contains a highly visible zigzagging X pattern called a "stabilimentum." The exact function of the stabilimentum is unknown, but its purpose may be to alert birds to the presence of the web so that they don't fly through and destroy it by mistake.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Garden spiders spin webs in sunny areas with plants on which to anchor. They can be found throughout the continental United States.

Fun Fact: Sometimes a garden spider will connect herself to the web by a thread of silk, hide in the underbrush, and wait for vibrations that signal an insect has been caught.

Conservation Status: Stable

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RAINBOW TROUT/ STEELHEAD

Wildlife with
Special Adaptations

Scientific Name:
Oncorhynchus mykiss irideus

Description: Rainbow trout are ray-finned fishes in the salmon family.

Adults are usually less than 8 pounds but can grow much larger. They get the name "rainbow" because many have beautiful, multi-hued coloration. Rainbow trout are specially adapted to several different lifestyles. Some populations will stay in the same stream their whole lives. Steelheads are anadromous, meaning that they spend their lives at sea and come back to the stream of their birth to spawn.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Rainbow trout are native to North America west of the Rockies, but this popular sport fish has been introduced in almost every other state.

Fun Fact: Steelheads get their name from their extra silvery markings.

Conservation Status: Because they've been so widely introduced, rainbow trout are not at risk of extinction, but native populations are threatened by disease, habitat degradation, and fishing.

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SPECIAL ADAPTATIONS



AMERICAN DIPPER

Wildlife with
Special Adaptations

Scientific Name: *Cinclus mexicanus*

Description: The American dipper is a medium-sized, gray songbird. On rare occasions, these birds can dive up to twenty feet and walk along river bottoms in search of insect larvae. To cope with such extreme conditions, they have a slow metabolism, lots of feathers, and the ability to carry extra oxygen in their blood. Females take care to build their nests in high places to protect their eggs from river floods.

U.S. Habitat and Range: American dippers prefer rocky, unpolluted streams throughout the American west and into Alaska. They do not migrate south, but may move to a larger body of water if their stream freezes over.

Fun Fact: American dippers are our only aquatic songbird. They get their name because they constantly dip their heads in and out of water looking for food.

Conservation Status: Stable. Water pollutants and development along rivers and streams can reduce the amount of habitat available to American dippers.

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PUERTO RICAN/ COMMON COQUI

Wildlife with
Special Adaptations

Scientific Name:
Eleutherodactylus coqui

Description: The Puerto Rican coqui is a small tree frog that is brown, yellow, or green in color. Their scientific genus name means "free toes," because they don't have webbed feet, but they do have special toe pads that allow them climb up vertical structures and cling to trees and leaves. The term coqui (pronounced "ko-kee") refers to the sound of the call produced by male coquis during mating season.

U.S. Habitat and Range: The Puerto Rican coqui is native to the forests of Puerto Rico and has been introduced to the U.S. Virgin Islands, Florida and Hawaii.

Fun Fact: Unlike most frogs, the Puerto Rican coqui does not have a tadpole stage. Instead, tiny frogs with short tails emerge from the eggs.

Conservation Status: Lowland populations are stable, but coqui numbers may be declining in the Palo Colorado Forest of Puerto Rico due to fungal disease.

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BISON

Wildlife with
Special Adaptations

Scientific Name: *Bison bison*

Description: American bison, or buffalo, are the largest terrestrial animals in North America. Adult males can grow up to 6 feet tall and weigh as much as 2000 pounds! To keep warm in the winter, they have fatty insulation and thick fur. The recognizable hump on their backs is a block of muscle supported by their backbone. Because of this hump, they are able to use their heads like snowplows in the winter to uncover grasses to eat.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Bison once numbered in the millions and lived in grasslands and prairies throughout the interior United States. They were nearly hunted to extinction and now occupy less than 1 percent of their original range.

Fun Fact: Bison roll around in the dirt in a process called "wallowing." This helps to remove old fur and keep away flies.

Conservation Status: Wild bison are only found in protected areas.

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EXTRA-ORDINARY WILDLIFE



SKUNK CABBAGE

Wildlife with
Special Adaptations

Scientific Name: *Symplocarpus foetidus*

Description: Skunk cabbage is a flowering perennial plant that is one of the first plants to emerge in the spring. The leaves that surround the

flower buds are maroon and may have patches of yellow or green coloration. Skunk cabbage has a remarkable ability to produce heat that allows it to emerge and bloom even when the ground is still frozen. During the winter when temperatures are freezing, the flower buds can warm up to 70 degrees and melt the snow around the plant.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Skunk cabbage can be found throughout the northeast, west to Minnesota and southeast to Tennessee and North Carolina. It emerges from late February through May in wetlands or near streams.

Fun Fact: Skunk cabbage gets its name from the unpleasant odor it emits. This scent is a way for the plant to attract pollinators like insects.

Conservation Status: Listed as Endangered in Tennessee.

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FIREFLIES / LIGHTNING BUGS

Wildlife with
Special Adaptations

Scientific Name: Family Lampyridae

Description: Fireflies aren't actually flies—they're beetles. They get the name firefly or lightning bug because

of the flashes of light they can naturally produce. This phenomenon is called bioluminescence. All larvae are able to produce light to deter predators, but some species lose this ability in adulthood. The Pennsylvania firefly is still bioluminescent as an adult and uses flashes to attract mates. This species also uses light to attract their prey, the big dipper firefly, which they eat to obtain defensive chemicals.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Found throughout the U.S. in parks, meadows, gardens, and woodland edges, and are easily seen on summer evenings.

Fun Fact: Bioluminescence in fireflies is nearly 100 percent efficient, meaning that little energy is wasted. By contrast, an incandescent light bulb is only 10 percent efficient—90 percent of the energy is lost as heat.

Conservation Status: Varies among species.

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ALLIGATOR SNAPPING TURTLE

Wildlife with
Special Adaptations

Scientific Name:
Macrochelys temminckii

Description: The alligator snapping turtle, one of the largest U.S.

freshwater turtles, is sometimes described as dinosaur-like because of its spiky shell and primitive-looking face. A specially-adapted lure-like projection on the tongue attracts curious fish that swim right into the turtle's mouth!

U.S. Habitat and Range: They can be found in deep river systems, lakes, and wetlands from northern Florida to eastern Texas and as far north as Iowa.

Fun Fact: Some myths claim that alligator snapping turtles are fond of attacking people, but this isn't the case. Their powerful jaws can snap through bone, though, so they should never be handled in the wild!

Conservation Status: Declining due to habitat degradation and overharvesting for meat. They are not Federally listed, but some states have imposed bans on collecting them from the wild.

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