## NATIONAL WILDLIFE WEEK March 19-25, 2012







### **BIGHORN SHEEP**

Wildlife surviving in **Unusual Habitats** 

Scientific Name: Ovis canadensis

Description: Bighorn sheep are hoofed mammals that are well adapted to living in rocky terrain. Both males and females have horns,

but they are larger and more curved in the males. During the mating season, males but their heads together to compete for females. Both sexes have special hooves with a soft, flexible surface on the bottom to help them maintain their grip and balance on steep surfaces.

*U.S. Habitat and Range:* Western U.S. Their mountainous habitat protects them from their less agile predators, such as mountain lions, coyotes, wolves, and bears.

**Fun Fact:** Bighorn sheep are ruminants with four-part stomachs. This allows them to quickly eat lots of food in low grasslands and fully re-chew and digest it later from the safety of the cliffs.

**Conservation Status:** Two subspecies are Federally listed as Endangered. Conservation efforts have helped bring the bighorn sheep back from the brink of extinction, but they are still threatened by disease and poaching.

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#### **BULL SHARK**

Wildlife surviving in **Unusual Habitats** 

Scientific Name: Carcharhinus leucas

**Description:** Bull sharks are distinguished from other sharks by their stocky, rounded appearance. Unlike most sharks, bull sharks can

survive in fresh water for long periods of time. They have even been found in the Mississippi and Amazon Rivers. They prefer shallow, coastal waters, which means that they come into contact with humans more often than we'd like. However, you're still more likely to be struck by lightning than attacked by a shark!

**U.S.** Habitat and Range: They are found off the east coast and in the Gulf of Mexico.

**Fun Fact:** Like many fish, bull sharks exhibit countershading, dark coloration on top and light coloration on the underbelly. This helps them blend into their surroundings.

Conservation Status: Because of their coastal distribution, bull sharks are at high risk from pollution and habitat degradation. They are fished intentionally and unintentionally.

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#### **PUPFISH**

Wildlife surviving in Unusual Habitats

**Scientific Name:** Family Cyprinodontidae

**Description:** Pupfish are small, rayfinned fish that feed on aquatic plants and invertebrates. When Ice

Age lakes that covered a large part of the southwest began to dry up, pupfish were confined to small areas with poor water quality. In order to survive, the various species have become highly adapted to withstanding conditions that would kill most other fish. The desert pupfish, for example, lives in water temperatures up to 110 degrees! Others tolerate huge swings in temperature or salt content three times higher than in ocean water!

*U.S. Habitat and Range:* Pupfish are known from isolated aquatic habitats in the U.S. southwest.

Fun Fact: The Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish of Nevada can live in as little as one half inch of water.

Conservation Status: Many species occur in incredibly low numbers and are Federally listed as Endangered. Pollution, invasive species, and groundwater withdrawal have led to their decline.

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# UNUSUAL HABITATS



#### RESURRECTION FERN

Wildlife surviving in **Unusual Habitats** 

Scientific Name: Pleopeltis polypodioides

**Description:** The resurrection fern is a type of epiphytic fern, meaning that it grows on top of other plants and

that it reproduces by spores, not seeds. It can lose up to 97 percent of its water content in an extreme drought. It shrivels up to a grayish brown clump of leaves in drought, then looks green and healthy again when exposed to water. It gets its name from this supposed "resurrection," but it does not die during the process. Most other plants can only lose 10 percent of their water content before they die.

**U.S.** Habitat and Range: The resurrection fern is found throughout the southeast, as far north as New York and as far west as Texas. It can be found in variety of habitats, but it needs a host plant or other substrate on which to anchor.

**Fun Fact:** In 1997, the resurrection fern was taken into space aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery to watch its resurrection in zero gravity.

Conservation status: Stable

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#### TEXAS BLIND SALAMANDER

Wildlife surviving in **Unusual Habitats** 

Scientific Name: Eurycea rathbuni

**Description:** The Texas blind salamander is highly adapted for an aquatic, underground lifestyle. Since

it lives in caves in total darkness, it has no need for vision and its eyes are reduced to two black spots. It lacks pigment and appears a translucent pink color. Bright red gills protrude from the throat area and are present from birth.

**U.S. Habitat and Range:** They are only found in water-filled caves fed by the Edwards Aquifer in Hays County, Texas.

Fun Fact: The Texas blind salamander preys upon aquatic invertebrates such as snails and shrimp. It's very sensitive to slight changes in water pressure, which allows it to find prey by sensing their movements.

Conservation Status: Federally listed as Endangered and bred in captivity. Because their range is so restricted and they face water pollution and overuse threats, the salamanders are incredibly vulnerable to extinction.

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### VERNAL POOL FAIRY SHRIMP

Wildlife surviving in **Unusual Habitats** 

Scientific Name: Branchinecta lynchi

**Description:** Vernal pool fairy shrimp are the one-inch-long relatives of lobsters and crabs. This fairy shrimp

is one of many species specialized for a short lifecycle in seasonal ponds called vernal pools. During the rainy season, when dry depressions fill with water, fairy shrimp eggs will hatch. They grow to maturity over several weeks, eating algae and plankton. Before the pool dries up again, the females produce resting eggs, called cysts, which will hatch during the next rainy season. This strategy allows them to avoid predators which can't survive in such a temporary habitat.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Habitat is limited to vernal pools in Oregon and California.

**Fun Fact:** Vernal pool fairy shrimp have 11 pairs of appendages which are used for swimming, breathing, and feeding!

Conservation Status: Federally listed as Threatened. A recovery plan for vernal pool ecosystems has been put in place in California and southern Oregon.

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# EXTRA-ORDINARY WILDLIFE



#### **POLAR BEAR**

Wildlife surviving in **Unusual Habitats** 

Scientific Name: Ursus maritimus

Description: Polar bears are the largest members of the bear family. Their skin is black, but the clear fur gives off a white appearance. They are

well adapted to the Arctic extremes—their thick fur and fat stores keep them warm, they have huge feet for paddling or walking on snow, they can hibernate over winter, and their sense of smell helps them track prey.

**U.S. Habitat and Range:** They are found throughout ice-covered waters in the Arctic, including populations in Alaska. They hunt on sea ice and must retreat landward when the ice melts.

Fun Fact: Polar bears are so well adapted to keeping warm in freezing Arctic temperatures that they sometimes go for a swim just to keep from overheating!

Conservation Status: Federally listed as Threatened.
Climate change and hunting are their biggest threats.
There has been some speculation that polar bear numbers are increasing because there have been more sightings of them near human civilization, but actually they are forced into human territory due to decreasing habitat.

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#### **WOOD FROG**

Wildlife surviving in **Unusual Habitats** 

cientific Name: Lithobates sylvaticus

**Description:** Wood frogs come in many colors, but all have a black patch resembling a robber's mask over the eyes. The wood frog has

adapted to super cold climates by freezing over the winter. During this time, it stops breathing and its heart ceases to beat. It produces a special antifreeze substance that prevents ice from forming in its cells, which would be deadly. When the weather warms again, the frog thaws and will begin feeding and mating again.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Wood frogs are found throughout the forests of Alaska and the northeast. They are found in smaller numbers as far south as Alabama and northwest into Idaho. They are the only frog that lives north of the Arctic Circle.

**Fun Fact:** When many wood frog tadpoles are in the same place, siblings will seek each other out and group together.

Conservation Status: Stable, but habitat loss to farming and development affects them in some areas.

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### MUDMINNOWS

Wildlife surviving in **Unusual Habitats** 

Scientific Name:

**Scientific Name:** Novumbra hubbsi and Umbra spp.

**Description:** Mudminnows are not actually minnows—they are more closely related to pikes. These tiny

fish get their name because of their tendency to burrow into the mud to aestivate. Aestivation, which is a state of dormancy similar to hibernation, is a way to survive when most of an aquatic habitat dries up. Some mudminnows have a modified air bladder that can act as a lung and allow them to breathe oxygen from the air. These abilities help mudminnows survive in very low-oxygen conditions for days or weeks at a time.

**U.S. Habitat and Range:** Together, the central and eastern mudminnow are distributed up and down the east coast and from Florida northwest to Montana. The Olympic mudminnow is found in Washington.

**Fun Fact:** Mudminnows escape predation by burrowing into sediment.

Conservation Status: The Olympic mudminnow may be threatened by habitat degradation and exotic species.

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