

WOOLLY MAMMOTH

If you stepped outside 20,000 years ago, you'd probably need a winter coat, even in summer. That's because Earth was experiencing an ice age—a time when sheets (= capas) of ice covered large parts of North America, Europe, and Asia. It was also a time when humans lived alongside a now-extinct group of elephants called mammoths.

A Woolly Mammoth is an extinct animal that lived during the last ice age. Although its name suggests this animal was huge, Woolly mammoths were big but not huge! They were about the size of a modern African elephant, but their ears were smaller. They were also covered in thick, brown fur to keep them warm in the cold Arctic. Even their ears had fur! The woolly mammoth's habitat crossed northern Asia, Europe, and north parts of North America during the last ice age. It's a very cold zone — it could get as low as -50°C!

They had very long tusks (= colmillos), around 15 feet long, which they used for fighting and digging deep snow.

They were herbivores (= plant eaters).

Scientists aren't sure exactly why woolly mammoths went extinct: Some think that humans hunted too many of them, and others believe that they couldn't survive Earth's naturally warming climate. Or, it could've been a combination of both.



DODO

The dodo was a flightless bird that was found on Mauritius, an island of the Indian Ocean. Biologists believe that although Dodos couldn't fly, they were closely related to pigeons. They didn't need to fly because they could find food on the ground.

Dodos were grey or brown and larger than a turkey.

They ate seeds, fruits and nuts.

The Dodo has become a symbol of extinction caused by the arrival of humans in ecosystems where humans had never before lived.

The island in which they lived had no predators to escape from, so they made their nests on the forest floor.

The dodo was not scared of people, which made it easy to hunt and kill. Also dogs, cats, rats and pigs, that were brought by the European sailors on the island, hunted Dodos. Because Dodos built their nests on the ground, the new animals ate their eggs. The forests were cut down and the Dodo lost its habitat. Within 80 years, the dodo was extinct.

The story of Dodos can help us understand the impact human can have on other species.



BLUE WHALE

The Blue Whale is the largest animal ever known to live on Earth. It is a marine mammal. Its main food source is krill, a shrimp-like crustacean. A Blue Whale can eat up to 40 million krill per day. The tongue of a Blue Whale can weigh as much as an elephant. It can be 30 meters long.

They live in all the oceans of the world, except from the Arctic and usually live alone or in pairs. Blue Whales are endangered, which means that there are not many left on Earth (only from 10.000 to 25.000 exemplars).

It is the fault of humans that blue whales are in danger, because human practiced whaling. Whaling is the act of hunting whales to sell their body parts. There are now laws that prohibit whaling to protect whales from being killed.



POLAR BEAR

Polar bears are one of the largest land carnivores.

Polar bears are found throughout the Arctic region.

They have a thick layer of body fat and a water-repellent coat that insulates them from the cold air and water. Their fur is transparent and their skin black.

Polar bears are classified as carnivores and are the most carnivorous member of the bear family.

They occupy the top level of the food chain and have no natural predators. Their major prey are seals.

Though polar bears are excellent swimmers, they rarely catch seals in open water and must employ a variety of hunting methods. The most common method they use is still-hunting, in which the bear waits motionlessly (= without moving) for hours, or even days, outside seal breathing holes for a seal to surface. When a seal does come to the surface, the bear bites the seal on the head and neck, flips it onto the ice with its claws, and drags it from the water.

When other food is unavailable on land, they seek out alternative food sources and eat anything from reindeer, birds, fish, eggs, berries, vegetation, and even human garbage.

Polar bears have a keen sense of smell. They can smell a carcass or a live seal from many miles away. Bears may beg to share another bear's kill. They adopt a submissive position by laying on or close to ground, circle around carcass, and touch the nose of the bear who 'owns' the carcass.

Sea ice is vital to polar bears. It provides a platform for them to hunt, live, breed, and in some cases, create maternal dens (= where they give birth to their puppies and take care of them).

But sea ice is more than a simple platform: it is an entire ecosystem inhabited by plankton and micro-organisms, which support a rich food chain that nourishes seals, that in turn become prey for polar bears.

It is the very foundation and defining characteristic of the Arctic marine ecosystem.

The polar bear is considered a vulnerable species, because of sea ice loss from climate change.

In addition to climate warming, other challenges to the bears include increased commercial activities, conflicts with people, pollution



GREEN SEA TURTLE

Green sea turtles are one of the world's largest species of turtle, weighing around 65-130kg and measuring between 1-1.2m long. They have a strong, tear-drop shape shell, called a "carapace", which covers most of their body, except for their head and four flippers. Their carapace can include shades of different colours, including dark brown, green, olive, yellow and black.

So, why are they called "green" sea turtles, then? Well, these cool creatures are named for their layer of green fat that lies under their shell. Scientists believe this unusual coloured fat is the result of their veggie diet – unlike most other sea turtles, the green sea turtle eats marine plants.

They like to spend most of their lives underwater, where they can rest for up to five hours at a time before coming up to breathe.

Turtles are found in most of the world's oceans, apart from cold polar seas.

For decades these, these awesome aquatic animals have suffered due to hunting (of them and of their eggs also), loss of nesting beaches and pollution. Fishing also poses a danger, too, with thousands of sea turtles accidentally caught in nets (= redes de los pescadores) and other equipment every year. Today, green sea turtles are classified as an endangered species and we need to do all we can to protect them!

