

# Precious Heritage: The Status of Biodiversity in the United States



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From the lush forests of Appalachia to the frozen tundra of Alaska, and from the tallgrass prairies of the Midwest to the subtropical rainforests of Hawaii, the United States harbors a remarkable array of ecosystems. These ecosystems in turn sustain an exceptional variety of plant and animal life. For species such as salamanders and freshwater turtles, the United States ranks as the global center of diversity. Among the nation's other unique biological features are California's coast redwoods, the world's tallest trees, and Nevada's Devils Hole pupfish, which survives in a single ten-by-seventy-foot desert pool, the smallest range of any vertebrate animal.

Precious Heritage draws together for the first time a quarter century of information on U.S. biodiversity developed by natural heritage programs from across the country. This richly illustrated volume not only documents those aspects of U.S. biodiversity that are particularly noteworthy, but also considers how our species and ecosystems are faring, what is threatening them, and what is needed to protect the nation's remaining natural inheritance. Above all, *Precious Heritage* is a celebration of the extraordinary biological diversity of the United States.



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