



# Conservation and Preservation of Animal Species

## Introduction

As we've explored in previous sections, the Torah, Talmud and other Jewish texts provide many examples of how to care for and protect the animals in our lives. One reason why this care and protection is important is because of the value of each animal (and species) in a biodiverse world. Biodiversity is the existence of many different kinds of plants and animals in an environment; as you may know well from learning about the web of life, all animal lives, including ours, are interconnected. All of our survival depends on a world where many different living organisms exist and interact with one another in shared habitats and ecosystems. Regardless of the focus of your service project, an activity from this section would be a good one to include at some point.

## Vocabulary

HEBREW	TRANSLITERATED HEBREW	ENGLISH
צִפּוֹר	<i>tzipor</i>	<b>bird</b>
שְׁלוּחַ הַקֶּן	<i>shiluach haken</i>	sending away from the nest
בַּל תַּשְׁחִית	<i>bal tashchit</i>	do not destroy/waste

# Activity 1: Writing Your Own Proverb to Support Biodiversity

*The following activity is adapted from a lesson by Laura Bellows:*

*Compassion towards all animals—be they mammals, insects, creepy-crawly or cuddly, is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition, as is the mandate to see ourselves as one important, yet interdependent, part of the animal kingdom. Each animal has its own gifts to share, even those we see as inconsequential. We even have an entire book, Perek Shirah, that outlines gifts we receive from each animal. Part of the work of conserving and preserving species is appreciating the value of even those animals we don't like.*

## We read in the book of Proverbs:

*Four are among the tiniest on Earth, yet they are the wisest of the wise: Ants are a folk without power, yet they prepare food for themselves in the summer; the Badger is a folk without strength, yet it makes its home [by digging] in the rock; the Locusts have no king, yet they all march forth in formation; you can catch the Lizard in your hand yet it is found in royal palaces.*

—Proverbs 30:24-28

אַרְבָּעָה הֵם קְטַנֵי-אָרֶץ וְהֵמָּה חֲכָמִים  
מִחֲכָמִים: הַנְּמָלִים עִם לֹא-עֹז וַיְכִינוּ  
בְּקִיץ לְחֶמֶס: שְׁפָנִים עִם לֹא-עֲצוּם  
וַיִּשְׂימוּ בַסֶּלַע בֵּיתָם: מֶלֶךְ אֵין לְאַרְבֵּה  
וַיִּצָא חִצָּץ כְּלוֹ: שְׂמֵמִית בְּיָדַיִם תִּתְפֹּשׂ  
וְהִיא בְּהִיכְלֵי מֶלֶךְ:

Based on this example, create five proverbs of your own for animals (be they mammals, reptiles, insects, etc.) that you don't like.

## Proverb 1:

\_\_\_\_\_ is an animal with/out \_\_\_\_\_,  
yet it \_\_\_\_\_.

## Proverb 2:

\_\_\_\_\_ is an animal with/out \_\_\_\_\_,  
yet it \_\_\_\_\_.

## Proverb 3:

\_\_\_\_\_ is an animal with/out \_\_\_\_\_,  
yet it \_\_\_\_\_.

## Proverb 4:

\_\_\_\_\_ is an animal with/out \_\_\_\_\_,  
yet it \_\_\_\_\_.

## Proverb 5:

\_\_\_\_\_ is an animal with/out \_\_\_\_\_,  
yet it \_\_\_\_\_.

## Activity 2:

# Illustrating Conservation

Below are two texts that relate to conservation and preservation of animal species. The first text refers to the commandment of **shiluach haken**, which instructs a person to shoo away any wild mother bird from her nest before collecting her offspring or eggs. The second relates to the ethical principle and prohibition against destruction, *bal tashchit*.

**Read each text and in the space given, draw an illustration that visually describes the core message of the text.**

*If, along the road, you chance upon a bird's nest, in any tree or on the ground, with fledglings or eggs and the mother sitting over the fledglings or on the eggs, do not take the mother together with her young. Let the mother go, and take only the young, in order that you may fare well and have a long life.*

—Deuteronomy 22:6-7

כִּי יִקְרָא קוֹן-צִפּוֹר לְפָנֶיךָ בַדֶּרֶךְ בְּכֹל-  
עֵץ אוֹ עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲפֹרָחִים אוֹ בִיצִים  
וְהָאִם רֹבֶצֶת עַל-הָאֲפֹרָחִים אוֹ עַל-  
הַבִּיצִים לֹא-תִקַּח הָאִם עִלְ-הַבָּנִים:  
שִׁלַּח תִּשְׁלַח אֶת-הָאִם וְאֶת-הַבָּנִים  
תִּקַּח-לָךְ לְמַעַן יֵיטֵב לָךְ וְהָאֲרֻכָּתְךָ  
יָמִים:

*At the time that the Holy One created the first humans, God took them on a tour of the Garden of Eden saying to them, "Look at my creation! See how lovely and perfect they are? I created it all for your sake. Make sure you don't ruin or destroy My world, for if you ruin it, there will be no one to repair it after you."*

—Midrash Rabbah Ecclesiastes 7:13

בשעה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את  
אדם הראשון, נטלו והחזירו על כל  
אילני גן עדן, ואמר לו: ראה מעשי  
כמה נאים ומשובחין הן, וכל מה  
שבראתי, בשבילך בראתי, תן דעתך  
שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי,  
שאם קלקלת אין מי שיתקן אחריך.



## Activity 3:

# A Hypothetical Interview with Rabbi Rosenn

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*Below you will find an excerpt of an article on the importance of protecting biodiversity through conservation and preservation that was written by Rabbi David Rosenn. Imagine that you're going to be doing an interview with Rabbi Rosenn about his writing and his views on the subject.*

Answer the questions below in preparation for the interview.

## Excerpt from: *Protecting Biodiversity: A Covenant With Every Living Thing*, By Rabbi David Rosenn

### *Preserving Natural Eco-Systems*

*Today, scientists suggest that the best way to preserve the world's biodiversity is to preserve as many as possible of its natural eco-systems. Especially important are those such as rain forests, which contain a large concentration of plant and animal species.*

**By protecting the global environment, and specifically by designating certain biological “hotspots” as inviolate preserves [in other words, places which cannot be harmed], we can slow the narrowing of the genetic flexibility that ensures life on Earth.**

*Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav: “Everything that God created in the world has a purpose. Even things that a person may consider to be unnecessary have their place in creation” (Midrash, Genesis Rabbah 10:8). **We are witnessing and helping produce the most rapid decline of species diversity in the history of the earth,** and yet we barely understand the place in creation of most of the world's species, including those that have been lost to us through extinction...*

*Reinforcing this midrashic awareness of the versatility of species, **Judaism contains a legal proscription against wanton destruction of property and natural resources, known by its command form *bal tashchit*, “do not destroy.” This prohibition reflects the belief that human beings are temporary tenants on God's earth (Leviticus 25:23), charged to till it for their needs, but also to tend it, that it may be saved for future generations (Genesis 2:15)...***

Preserving biodiversity is an issue of planetary survival, but it is also—as we have seen—a theological issue. Nature’s stunning variety often invokes feelings of deep fascination and awe, attitudes closely associated with religious experience. **Maintaining our capacity to appreciate such feelings—our capacity for wonder—may enable us to enlarge our sense of God’s presence in the world and to enhance our appreciation for the sidrei bereshit—the orders of creation.** Conversely, by allowing creation to be diminished, we invariably diminish ourselves as well.

## Summary

Some of Rabbi Rosenn’s key points include:

1. We must follow recommendations based in scientific evidence to preserve as many ecosystems as possible, especially those that are extremely sensitive and biodiverse.
2. We know that every species has its place in the web of life, and yet many are disappearing today at an alarming rate due to human actions.
3. We learn from the commandment *bal tashchit*, or “do not destroy,” that Judaism requires us to preserve the earth for all life’s future generations.
4. Our survival—both physical and spiritual—depends upon the survival of all creation.

## Questions

Having read Rabbi Rosenn’s writing, what three questions would you want to ask him about what he wrote or about this topic more generally?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

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Is there a part of what he wrote that you either really connected with or agreed with or really disagreed with that you would want to discuss with him? If so, what was it and how would you respond?

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# Conclusion

As it says in midrash on Genesis:

*Even things that you may regard as superfluous to the world, such as fleas, gnats and flies, even they are included in the creation of the world and the blessed Holy One carries out the Divine purpose through everything - even a snake, a scorpion, a gnat or a frog.*

—Midrash Rabbah Genesis 10:7

אֶפְלוּ דְבָרִים שְׂאֵתָהּ רוּאָה אוֹתָן שֶׁהֵן  
יְתִירָה בְּעוֹלָם כְּגוֹן זְבוּבִין וּפְרָעוּשִׁין  
וַיִּתְּוֹשִׁין אֵף הֵם בְּכֻלָּל בְּרִייתוֹ שֶׁל  
עוֹלָם הֵן, וּבְכֹל הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרַךְ הוּא  
עוֹשֶׂה שְׁלִיחוֹתוֹ: אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי נָחָשׁ,  
אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי יְתוּשׁ, אֶפְלוּ עַל יְדֵי  
צְפַרְדֵּי.

*Acknowledging and protecting the unique role of each living thing in our world is an important expression of compassion for those animals, and urges us to ensure our own and all species' survival for the future.*

