

ARKive

It's free. It's wonder-filled. It's wild.

by Hamish MacCall



Sir David at the ARKive launch

ARKive is the essential new resource for anyone who wants to find out more about our natural world, its endangered plants, animals and habitats and the urgent need to conserve them.

Launched by Sir David Attenborough in May 2003, www.arkive.org has been developed as a new kind of Noah's Ark. It is using 21st century skills and technology to provide a safe haven which, this time, isn't just for animals. What this Ark will have on board is the equally-endangered, ultimately as vital, records of the very existence of key species.

Images and recordings are one of the most emotive and powerful means of raising public awareness, igniting the very first spark of interest in natural history. ARKive gives free access to a vast and ever-expanding digital collection of films, photographs and sound recordings of endangered species, along with comprehensive species fact files.

By the end of May 2004, the project will have ARKived audio visual profiles for about 1,300 species, including 10,000 still images and over 1,000 movie clips, as well as scientifically authenticated text to accompany each profile. This ongoing project regularly uploads more species and has an ultimate aim of recording all 13,000 critically endangered species.

But the project is much more than just an on-line reference library. The website is merely a window to a vast and expanding vault containing wildlife films, photographs, sound recordings, facts and memories. The value of such records and recollections increases every time another species is threatened or disappears. But the information is itself in danger – with films and photographs scattered all around the world, often held in places where access is restricted, or its value is not fully understood.

ARKive's team is tracking down and adding more images daily; meanwhile, the international search continues for additional material. A story from the USA sums up the urgency of the effort:

"In the late 1970s I deposited my footage of the golden rumped elephant shrew with Byron Motion Pictures in Washington, DC. They had a film vault where the National Zoo also kept much of their valued footage. In the late 1980s I wanted the footage, and tried to make contact with Byron, only to find that my material (along with the entire zoo col-

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Planet ARKive

ARKive Education

www.arkive.org

www.planetarkive.org

www.arkiveducation.org

opposite page :
 Iberian lynx
 this page left to right :
 Sir David and the future
 red colobus monkey
 spotted handfish
 bottom :
 elephant shrew



lection) had totally disappeared. Apparently Byron went out of business and everyone's cine footage was lost..." - Dr Galen Rathbun, Wildlife Research Biologist (Emeritus)

To date, only a few other, short sequences of the elephant shrew have been located.

ARKive's species records are currently organised into three chapters:

The **UK CHAPTER** celebrates Britain's natural heritage. Almost 500 digital portraits now exist on native plants and animals, including the familiar as well as the rare or threatened

The development of the **GLOBALLY ENDANGERED SPECIES CHAPTER** is a huge undertaking - at present, some 13,000 species are threatened with extinction, according to the IUCN. ARKive has started by finding and storing visual and audio records of the 500 species which best represent the range of life-forms in danger. Highlights of the global chapter include:

- the only surviving film of the extinct thylacine (Tasmanian tiger)
- the last known shots of the golden toad (believed extinct)
- footage of the last male Spix macaw to be found in the wild
- rare images of the coelacanth, a fish older than the dinosaurs
- a view inside the burrow of the world's only flightless parrot, the critically endangered kakapo
- the only known footage of the Yunnan snub-nosed monkey - filmed for the first time only a few years ago after years of research.

The **CORALS CHAPTER** was funded by Defra (the UK's Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs) as a pilot identification guide to provide a wealth of information about coral species. In particular, it will help customs officials identify imported corals - around 2,000 coral species are listed in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and international trade in these species is regulated. It also provides useful information for parties to CITES and to the UK Overseas Territories, which have much of the world's coral resources.

Apart from the main ARKive site, which gives full access to all species profiles, there are also two other dedicated zones:

For children, Planet ARKive www.planetarkive.org uses bold and bright cartoon graphics to tempt young visitors to explore the natural world and its workings through interactive games, project ideas, fun facts, species profiles and a changing menu of 'creature features'. Challenges include designing a habitat, becoming a nature detective and helping a sand lizard to make survival choices.

For teachers, ARKive Education www.arkiveeducation.org provides background briefings, lesson plans, detailed project ideas and other resources and links in a simple, easy-to-download format. The material focuses on helping junior school age children to understand how, and where, living things survive, but much of it is cross-curricular, covering essential learning points for subjects including literacy, numeracy, geography, IT, design, PE and Personal & Social Health Education.

The whole ARKive project has been developed through the generous support of Hewlett Packard Laboratories (Europe) and the UK's Heritage Lottery Fund and New Opportunities Fund. It is an initiative of Wildscreen, a UK-registered educational charity which is working to raise conservation awareness by encouraging and applauding excellence in wildlife film-making and related media.



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