

Endangered Species- San Marcos

While in the town of San Marcos, it should be mandatory to visit the crystal clear San Marcos Springs. The springs are an artesian outflow from the Edwards Aquifer that provides most of the water for the San Marcos River system. Situated near the heart of the Texas State University campus, the crystal clear waters are iconic to the school and the town of San Marcos. The fresh waters of the spring are more than simply a beautiful town centerpiece; the San Marcos Springs and the upper four and a half miles of the San Marcos River are some of the most biologically diverse aquatic ecosystems in the southwestern United States, and are home to some very unique plants and animals that can only be found here.

This freshwater environment has been designated as Critical Habitat to eight known species that are found on the endangered species list or are categorized as threatened by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and Texas Parks & Wildlife Department. You might be wondering what makes a habitat so “critical.” Critical habitats are essential areas to the survival of endangered species, and are determined by careful consideration and research under the US Endangered Species Act. Several local species on this list, such as the San Marcos Salamander, Texas blind Salamander, and a small fish called the Fountain Darter, have become very well known in central Texas due to organizations in Austin and San Marcos that are concerned with ensuring that these animals do not completely disappear due to loss of their habitat.

Compared to endangered cuddly favorites such as pandas and polar bears that are often showcased in the media, these species don't get much national attention. For example, the Texas blind salamander is a sightless, cave-dwelling salamander that few people would want to cuddle or photograph. Blind salamanders aren't very pretty, but you can bet they look delicious to some other creatures which depend on this food source. Loss of a single species can set off a chain reaction affecting many other species, and disrupting the balance of an ecosystem.

The loss of habitat for these endangered species is mostly caused by human actions, such as recreational river use, pollution, habitat modification, and introduction of nonnative species. The greatest threat is the diminished Spring Flow. Cities, towns, farms and ranches in Texas are pumping so much water from the Edwards Aquifer that springs like the San Marcos may slow to a trickle or completely dry up. Once the water is gone, these animals will no longer be able to survive.

Once these species are gone, they will be gone for good. But there is hope. Through careful water conservation and management, research, and the cooperation of state and local agencies, these delicate species that call this area home can be protected. If you are interested in learning more about endangered and threatened species or helping preserve them, there are many online resources available.

Source(s):

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