

Ringtone campaign reaches milestone, activists vow to push on

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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M.—With the new year comes a new Web site and new ringtones featuring the growls, bugles and chirps of dozens of rare and endangered species from around the globe.

The Center for Biological Diversity started offering its wildlife ringtones a year ago to educate people about the plight of the animals, and the campaign had such success that the environmental group has collected more ringtones and revamped its Web site for this year.

The group plans to release an assortment of new ringtones each month, including the sounds of the African elephant and the Emperor Penguin of the Antarctic, said Peter Galvin, the group's conservation director.

"We've hit the 100,000th download in over 150 countries," Galvin said Wednesday in a telephone interview. "It's pretty interesting. We didn't realize how much of an international hit it would become."

The response, he said, reinforces the worldwide movement to save endangered and rare species.

"The extinction crisis is a global crisis," he said.

Along with the free ringtones, Web site visitors can get cell phone wallpaper and facts for each of the species. They can pick from the howl of an endangered Mexican gray wolf, the bellows of an Arctic beluga whale or the calls of dozens of other mammals, birds and reptiles.

And later this year, the site will be available in Spanish and more ringtones from species in Latin America will be added, Galvin said.

It was Galvin who came up with the idea for the free ringtones as a way to educate people—especially the younger, technologically savvy generation. He has even tried collecting some of the sounds, which has proved to be a difficult task.

He's going to make another try during a trip next month to Ecuador and Peru.

"If you're birdwatching, for example, in many cases you may or may not see the bird and then getting an actual recording of it is even harder," he said.

Despite the challenge, all but two or three of the ringtones offered on the site are from the wild. They've been collected by researchers around the world, and the Center for Biological Diversity hopes to get its hands on even more recordings.

"We'd like to have as many of the endangered species and rare species that make noise on the site because we think it's something that really reaches people in a new and unique way," Galvin said.

While downloading a ringtone might seem like a small thing, environmental activists hope those ringtones start conversations and get people interested in what Galvin calls the "interconnected web of nature" and how that relates to the survival of humanity itself.

"I'd like to think of nature's diversity as a symphony," he said, "and extinction is like one of the instruments in the symphony going silent. Eventually, it's just quiet and lonely."