

Offbeat: Hoo-Hoo's Calling?

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Wireless Week

Wireless ringtones and social consciousness. An unlikely pair? Not anymore. Now cell phone users can personalize their phones' ringtones with one – or several – of about 40 rare and endangered wildlife species.

Endangered species advocates at the nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity (CBD) are offering the selection of ringtones that showcase calls and authentic sounds from some of the world's most threatened marine mammals, tropical birds, frogs and toads. More than two dozen species of owls also are featured on the site, made available through cooperation with the nonprofit Global Owl Project.

The CBD's Website allows users to preview the ringtones, send them directly to their phones and also download photos and fact sheets for each of the featured wildlife species. Perhaps most importantly, users can take action to support the organization's efforts to save endangered species worldwide.

"People really respond to the wildlife ringtones," says CBD Conservation Director Peter Galvin, who notes a great response since the program's mid-December launch, with Website visitors downloading an average of 700 animal ringtones per day. "They personalize your phone and ... inspire people to understand and work to protect endangered wildlife," Galvin says.

Galvin developed the idea a number of years ago, but the original concept applied to landlines, something that wasn't really viable. Since then, he took a look at the mobile ecosystem and deemed it "workable." The current program has been in the works for about a year, Galvin notes, promising that the CBD will continue adding ringtones for many other imperiled species, including the polar bear and Mexican gray wolf. Other planned rollouts over the next several months will include a variety of Latin American species. The CBD also is working to translate its Web pages into Spanish.

The CBD's rare and endangered wildlife species ringtones can be downloaded for free at <http://rareearthtones.org/ringtones>.