

Stealing Beauty

More than 100 U.S. species have gone extinct since the Endangered Species Act became law in 1973. Why? Six bird species in Guam vanished for good in the 1980s, including this cardinal honey-eater. The inch-long golden coqui, a Puerto Rican tree frog; the Lotis blue butterfly, a native of the sphagnum-willow bogs of northern California; Guam's gorgeously colored cardinal honey-eater, pictured above. According to a recent report by the Center for Biological Diversity in Portland, Oregon, these are a few of the more than 100 species that became extinct between 1973, when the Endangered Species Act became law, and 1994. (Ten years must elapse without a species being sighted for it to be deemed extinct.)

The natural rate of extinction is about one per million a year. Since the United States has roughly 200,000 species, it would be logical to expect four extinctions over a 21-year period. But the actual total is 108, and those are only the ones we know about.

The center blames most of the extinctions on "a grave failure of federal management" above all a systematic pattern of delays in the listing process. About 80 percent of the species that vanished never even made it onto the federal list, and the problem has grown dramatically worse in recent years. The Clinton administration listed an average of 65 endangered species a year. And the first administration of George W. Bush? Nine.

According to a recent report by the Center for Biological Diversity in Portland OR, more than 100 US species have gone extinct since the Endangered Species Act became law in 1973. The center blames most of the extinctions on "a grave failure of federal management"—above all a systematic pattern of delays in the listing process.