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conservation

## Owl ringtone a real hoot

Cell phone ringtones are calling attention to the plight of endangered species.

*By Allison Wickler*

**S**tudents shouldn't be alarmed if they start hearing owl, whale or wolf calls around campus - it's probably just a cell phone ringtone.

Conservation biology doctoral candidate Jon Slaght, who studies the endangered Blakiston's fish owl, recently contributed two recordings of the birds' calls to a collection of free wildlife ringtones.

Slaght recorded the owls as part of his research before he heard about the Center for Biological Diversity's ringtone collection project, he said.

"As it turns out, the Blakiston's fish owl is one of the rarest species that they have," he said.

The Center for Biological Diversity, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Arizona that works to protect endangered species, created the ringtone collection to raise awareness about conservation.

Peter Galvin, conservation director at the Center, said the idea came "like a bolt of lightning," when a scientist was imitating the sound of an owl as her phone rang.

"I thought, 'Gosh, wouldn't it be cool if the phone made that sound?' " he said.

Galvin said cell phone users have downloaded more than 15,000 ringtones - ranging from whales to South American birds - since the Web site's launch in December. So far, the orca whale tone is the most popular, with nearly 4,000 downloads.

He said these wildlife ringtones are different than others because they are all recorded in the animals' natural environments.

"Generally they're recordings of recordings, or they're from the zoo," he said, "which is good but not as good as this."

Many of the collection's owl recordings were facilitated through the Global Owl Project, which studies owls in 50 countries, said the project's executive director David Johnson.

He said it was tough trying to get original, noncopyrighted recordings so they could be downloaded for free.

"We wanted to find enough differences around the world - species that look different, sound different and have different conservation issues," he said.

Slaght said between 800 and 1,000 pairs of the Blakiston's fish owl exist, and including juveniles there are between 3,000 and 5,000 total, most of which live in Russia.

His current research involves tracking about 15 pairs of birds to find out how they use their habitat, which is threatened largely by the Russian logging industry.

Slaght also uses the owl sounds himself. He has the Blakiston's fish owl "juvenile shriek" tone on his phone. "It's a pretty horrible noise," he said, "but you know, it's an attention-getter."

While Galvin said he hopes the ringtones will get younger generations thinking about conservation, some University students may be more receptive than others.

Art senior Breanne Gervais said environmental issues and conservation interest her, but said she thinks wildlife ringtones would be "kind of weird."

For more information, go to: [www.rareearthtones.org/ringtones](http://www.rareearthtones.org/ringtones)

However, food and nutrition science first-year student Brian Folger said hearing animal calls would add an interesting variety to what he typically hears.

He said introducing young people to conservation is important, "especially today, when kids are more into music, TV and computers than what's going on outside."

Galvin said people will respond to conservation calls for action once they see or hear about rare species.

"It definitely makes an impact on people," he said, "even if it was just hearing it ring on someone's cell phone."

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