



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**MEDIA NOTE:** October 21, 2023 is National Reptile Awareness Day

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### National Reptile Awareness Day: Focusing on What's Needed to Conserve the US's Most Imperiled Reptiles

*National Nonprofit is Working on the Ground Across the Country to Protect At-Risk Reptiles*

UNITED STATES, October 6, 2023 - National Reptile Awareness Day, October 21, 2023, was established to shine a light on these highly beneficial species and the threats they face across the US. Reptiles, which serve as both predators and prey, are crucial members of ecosystems, playing an integral role in energy dynamics, regulating pests, and more. The Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC), a national nonprofit to conserve imperiled wildlife, is observing National Reptile Awareness Day by focusing on programs to protect reptiles and their habitats in more than 300 locations across the US.

"Despite being one of the most endangered groups of vertebrate animals in the world, these fascinating, important species are often misunderstood and overlooked," said ARC Executive Director JJ Apodaca. 21% of reptiles worldwide are threatened with extinction, and some reptile groups are much more imperiled. For example, 52% of turtles and tortoises are in danger of disappearing forever.

There are roughly 450-500 reptile species in the US, and 120 are listed under the [US Endangered Species Act](#). Those are just the ones that have been identified as needing protection. Scientists [have reported](#) that extinction risk has likely been underestimated in certain groups, such as snakes, because of a lack of population information.

"Although it can be disheartening to think about the challenges reptiles are facing, I'm optimistic that we can turn the tide for these species," said Apodaca. "With limited resources and time, though, we have to be strategic and aim our efforts at what will matter most for endangered reptiles." Among the host of threats, from disease to pollution, causing reptile declines, habitat destruction and degradation are likely the most impactful.

Because of the critical importance of habitat, ARC's approach centers around a national strategy implemented locally in 317 [Priority Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Areas, or PARCAs](#), spanning 24

US states. These PARCAs were chosen because they contain either high densities of reptiles and amphibians (herpetofauna) or large numbers of threatened and endangered herpetofauna species - or, in many cases, both.

Within these PARCAs, ARC creates and implements a conservation plan tailored to the area's ecosystem and priority species. Of the 317 designated PARCAs, the organization is currently working on the ground in 22 of them. The habitat restoration and protection efforts and targeted conservation actions for at-risk herpetofauna look different in each one.

For example, in the [Southern Appalachian PARCAs](#) in the Southeastern US, ARC has actions underway to protect the [bog turtle](#), a tiny, incredibly cute, and highly imperiled turtle species. The challenges facing this federally-listed Threatened reptile are huge: The bogs they need have been drained for development and agriculture, they are poached for the pet trade, and they're hit by cars. The organization's work for this species and the ecosystem in these PARCAs includes installing protective wire cages around turtle nests, comprehensive year-round monitoring of the population and individual turtles, removing invasive plant species, and extracting old drainage tiles.

Just to the west, Alabama has only one endemic reptile species, the [flattened musk turtle](#). ARC is working to conserve it in the [Bankhead PARCA](#). These federally-listed Threatened turtles are impacted by unsustainable forestry practices and agriculture, mining pollution, and numerous dams and hanging culverts, which block water flow and fragment the habitat. ARC is currently conducting a sizeable threat-mapping effort involving innovative techniques like [environmental DNA \(eDNA\)](#) to identify the most important places for restoration. Plus, the organization is relying on cutting-edge genetic sequencing to determine which populations are most vulnerable to inbreeding and inform work to reconnect these populations.

Farther west in the [Gila PARCA](#), New Mexico, ARC is working to protect and restore aquatic habitats for two federally-listed Threatened snake species, narrow-headed garter snakes and northern Mexican garter snakes. Habitat loss, invasive species, and drought put them at risk for extinction.

"A world without reptiles is not a place anyone would want to live, so we work tirelessly for their conservation," said Apodaca. He explained, "Not only are reptiles essential for sustaining the ecosystems that sustain us, they provide an accessible point of connection with the natural world, sparking our senses of wonder and curiosity when spotted in the wild."

### **About Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy (ARC)**

Amphibian and Reptile Conservancy, or ARC, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit focused on identifying and conserving the highest priority places for amphibians and reptiles in the United States. We protect endangered amphibians and reptiles through a strategic, scientific, and passionate approach. We believe the conservation of amphibians, reptiles, and the habitats they depend on is vitally important. To learn more, visit [ARCProtects.org](https://ARCProtects.org).

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