



Vancouver Island marmot *Status: critically endangered*

Toronto Zoo Wildlife Conservancy  
**2020 Wildlife Conservation  
Awareness Survey**

**FEBRUARY 8, 2021**

**PREPARED BY COMMON GOOD STRATEGIES**

# 2020 Wildlife Conservation Awareness Survey



Beth Gilhespy  
Executive Director,  
Toronto Zoo Wildlife  
Conservancy

We are facing a global crisis in wildlife survival. Nearly one million species are facing extinction, many within decades. Species are vanishing at roughly 100 times the natural rate. At the same time our society is losing its connection with nature, the very thing that sustains us and our planet.

The Toronto Zoo has been connecting people to wildlife for more than 40 years. As dedicated partners of the Toronto Zoo in the fight against wildlife extinction, the Wildlife Conservancy reached out in 2020 to assess the levels of awareness of GTA residents about some of the most serious conservation issues facing wildlife. We could then use this knowledge and work with the Toronto Zoo to better address gaps in awareness.

The results of the *2020 Wildlife Conservation Awareness Survey* send a clear message that awareness is a significant factor driving conservation action: the more people know about conservation issues impacting wildlife, the more they feel they can personally make a difference for wildlife. However even those most knowledgeable about wildlife conservation are underestimating species decline in Canada.

Our commitment to supporting the Toronto Zoo in the fight against extinction is unwavering, and we look forward to working with them to bring awareness and action to make positive change for wildlife survival in Canada and worldwide.

The results of the *2020 Wildlife Conservation Awareness Survey*, prepared by our partners the Toronto Zoo Wildlife Conservancy, are an endorsement of your Toronto Zoo's role in conservation education, as well as a call to action to increase that educational role to a broader audience. Your Toronto Zoo will explore and focus on clear messaging surrounding the many ways that people can get involved and make a substantial difference in wildlife conservation through even the smallest of actions.

The pandemic has brought with it tremendous uncertainty, but with uncertainty comes the opportunity to change our perspectives and look at opportunity through a new lens. Your Toronto Zoo is committed to exploring and reflecting on how we can continue to make those important connections.

My perspective on helping wildlife and wild spaces is simple: conservation is a team sport and we need more players. Positioning conservation as a team sport is an exciting opportunity to for us to grow our efforts to improve our community.

From our perspective, the implementation of this research and insight can help your Toronto Zoo connect people, animals and conservation science to fight extinction and inspire positive action within our guests and our community.

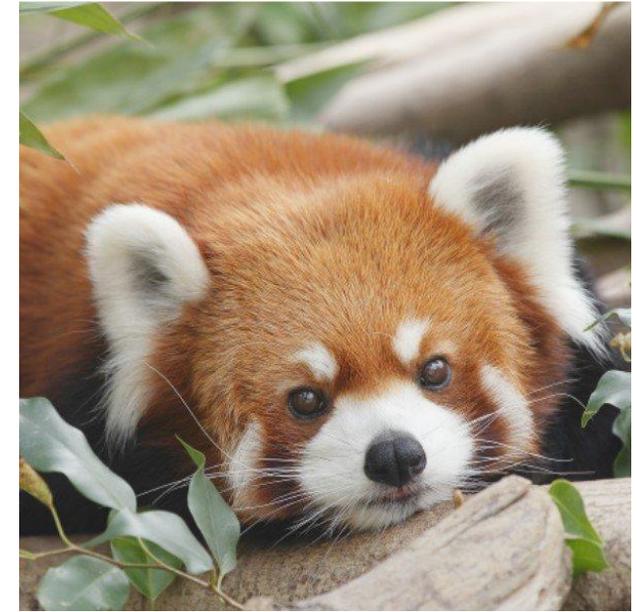


Dolf DeJong  
Chief Executive Officer,  
Toronto Zoo

# Executive Summary

- 1,002 residents of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) were surveyed between August 29th and September 7th, 2020
- Nearly all (85%) of respondents acknowledge that humans are at fault for wildlife extinction, but much fewer (52%) believe they personally can make a difference to wildlife conservation
- Higher awareness of conservation activities is associated with stronger beliefs that respondents could personally make an impact on wildlife conservation
- People are aware of many environmental issues such as pollinator decline and deforestation, but they are not aware of issues surrounding palm oil harvesting or rare earth minerals
- Frequent Toronto Zoo attendance is correlated with more knowledge of the benefits of electronic recycling and sustainable palm oil production
- Most respondents do recycle electronics, but few plant native gardens or purchase sustainable palm oil or seafood

Red panda *Status: endangered*



Grévy's zebra *Status: endangered*

# Executive Summary

- Most respondents believed that the consumption and trade of wildlife was responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic, and most thought preventing pandemics needs to be a high priority for environmental organizations
- People are most concerned about pollution's impact on air and water and disease, and less concerned about climate change and biodiversity
- Most respondents recognize that many species are threatened with extinction and agree this is an important issue to them
- People who are most concerned about biodiversity can accurately estimate ecosystem declines, while those less concerned are underestimating ecosystem declines; however, all respondents are underestimating species decline in Canada
- The more concerned someone is about declining wildlife, the more likely are to believe the Zoo is a leader in conservation

Masai giraffe *Status: endangered*



Black-footed ferret *Status: endangered*

# Objectives and Methodology

## Objectives

The Toronto Zoo Wildlife Conservancy commissioned Common Good Strategies to conduct an online survey to understand the public's familiarity of wildlife conservation initiatives and the behaviours they are adopting to contribute.

The survey was also designed to gauge how perceptions of wildlife conservation relate to broader understanding of environmental issues, and to see how the public perceives the Toronto Zoo and others working in this space.

## Methodology

A total of 1,002 residents of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) responded to the survey between August 29<sup>th</sup> and September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2020 using Leger 360's online panel platform.

The average response time was 10 minutes, and quotas were set for income, age, gender, and geography. At the regional level, responses are roughly representative of the GTA population.



Blanding's turtle *Status: endangered*

Respondents by Region	
City of Toronto	441
Peel (Mississauga, Brampton)	210
York (Markham, Vaughn, King, etc.)	171
Durham (Ajax, Pickering, Whitby, Oshawa)	99
Halton (Oakville, Milton, etc.)	82



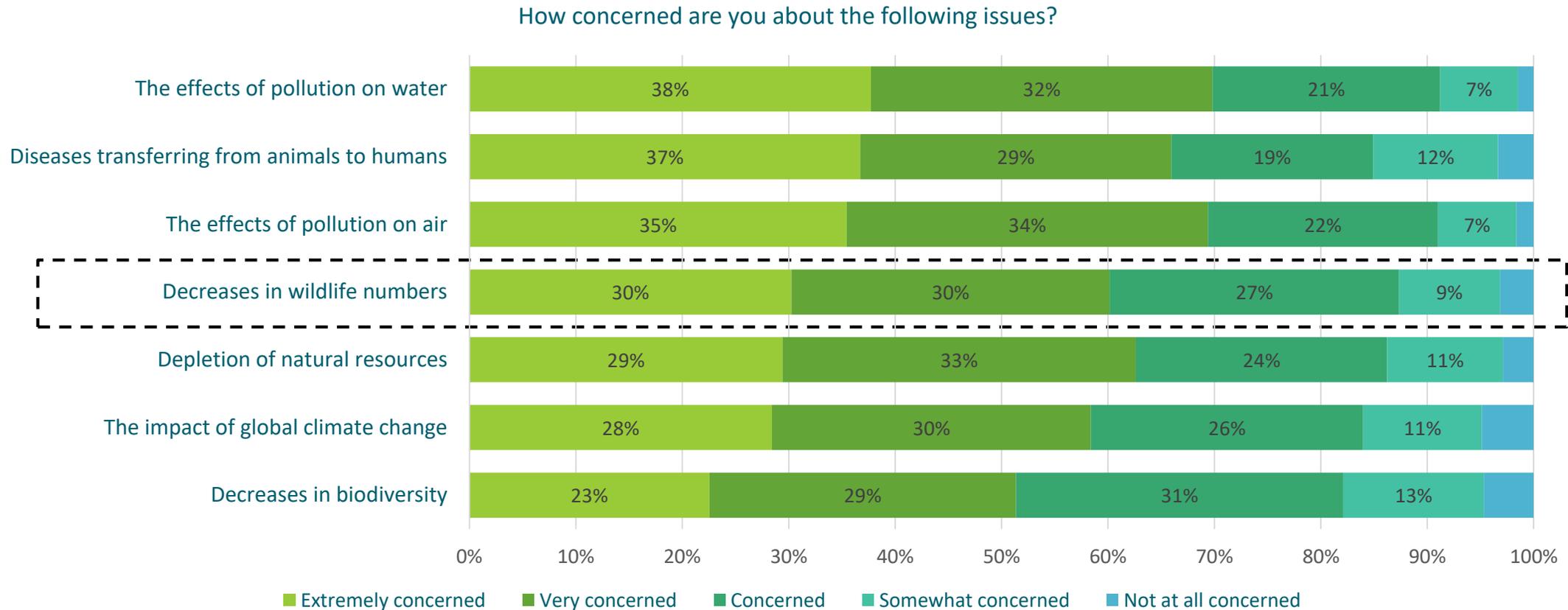
Blanding's turtle *Status: endangered*

# Concerns About the Environment

*The alteration of the world's natural systems threatens to undo the extraordinary gains in human health and well-being of the past century.*

WWF Living Planet Report 2020 – Bending the Curve of Biodiversity Loss

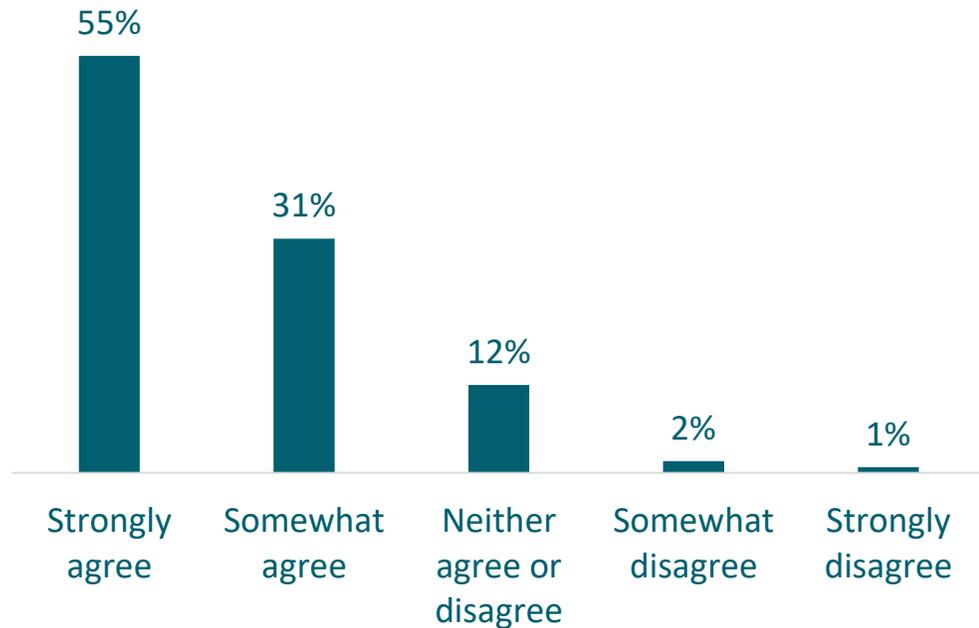
# People are most concerned about pollution's impact on air and water and disease, and less concerned about climate change and biodiversity



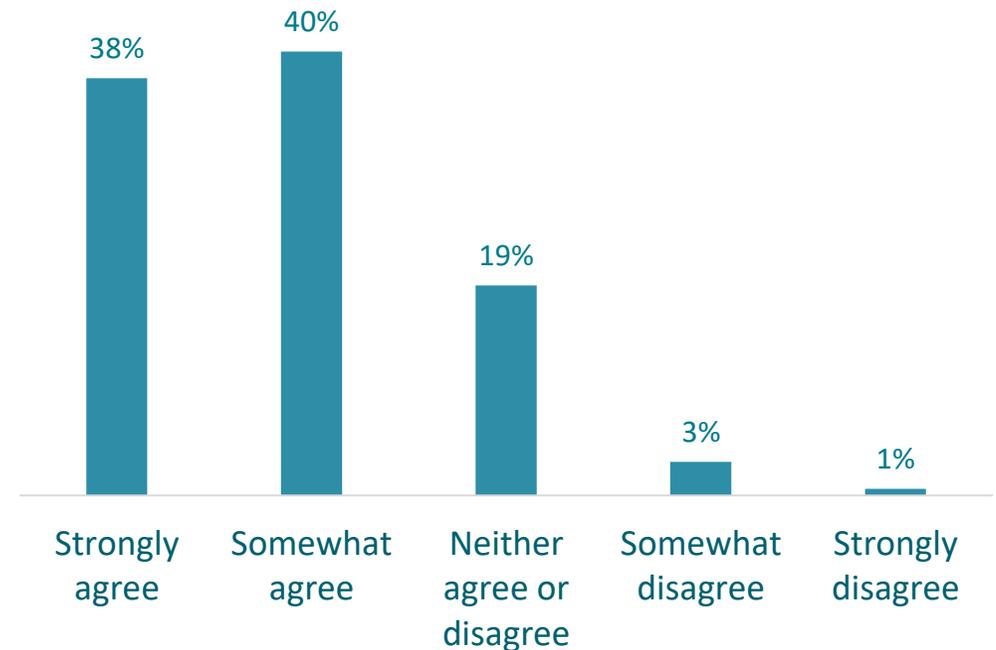
Base: Total sample (n=1002)

# Most respondents recognize that many species are threatened with extinction and agree this is an important issue to them

There is real risk that many species will go extinct in the future



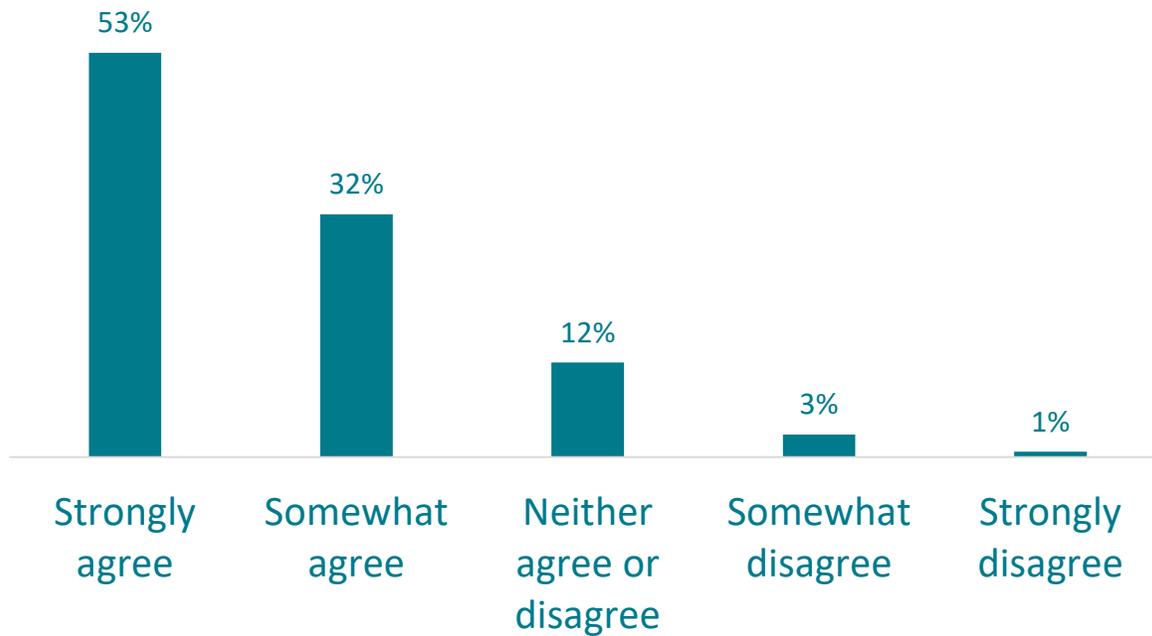
Declines in wildlife poses a substantial threat to human wellbeing



Base: Total sample (n=1002)

# People acknowledge that humans are at fault for wildlife extinction

Humans are the leading cause of wildlife extinction



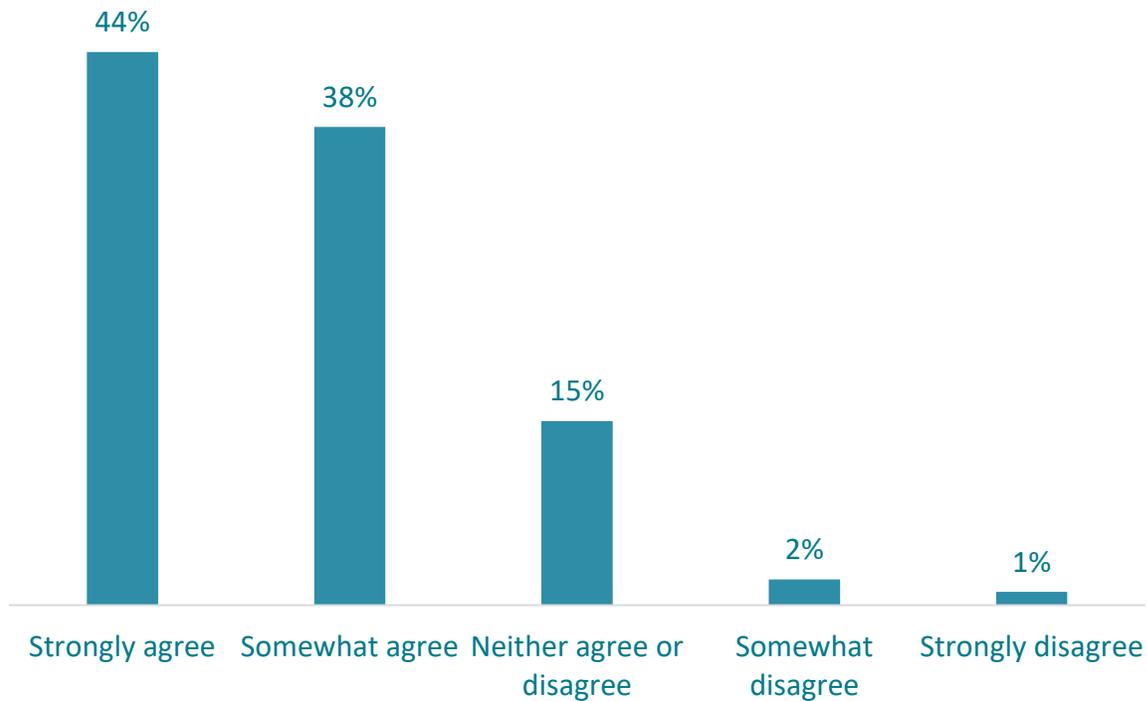
Base: Total sample (n=1002)



Polar bear *Status: vulnerable*

# Most (82%) believe that the diversity of wildlife in Canada is part of what makes the country special

The diversity of wildlife in Canada is part of what makes Canada special



Base: Total sample (n=1002)

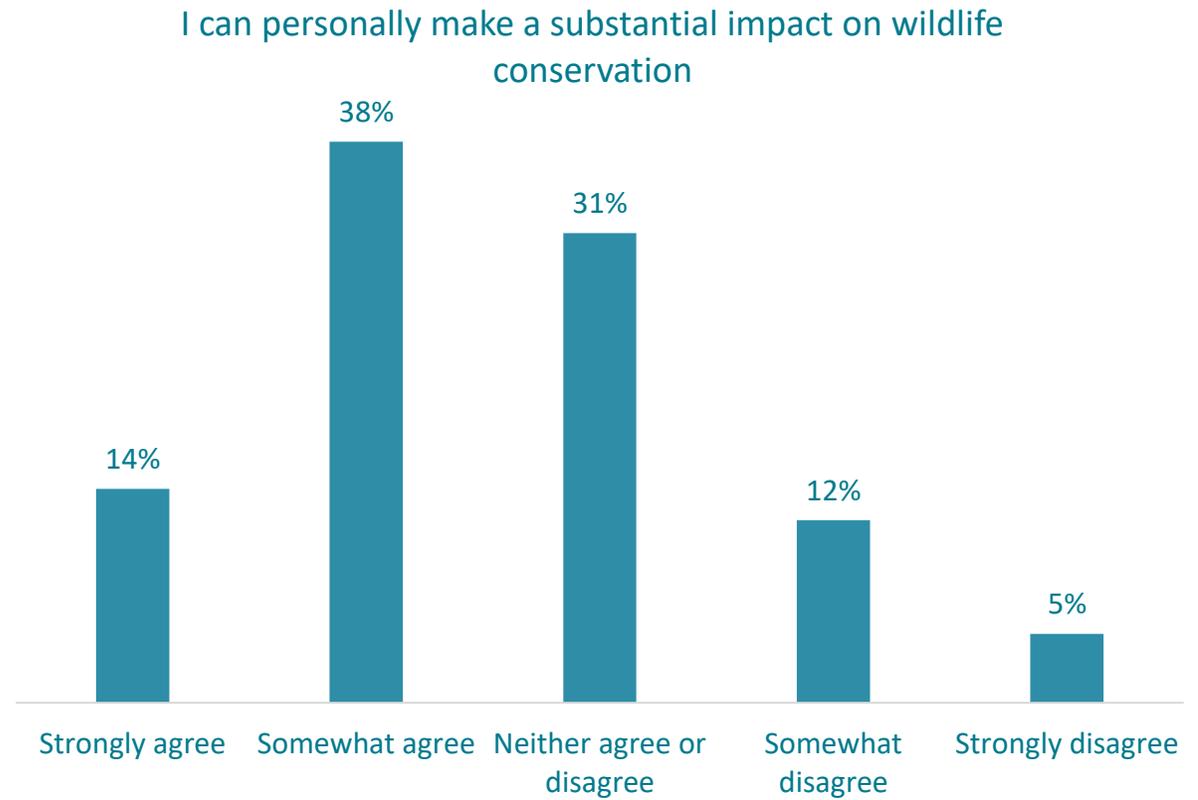


Snowy owl Status: vulnerable

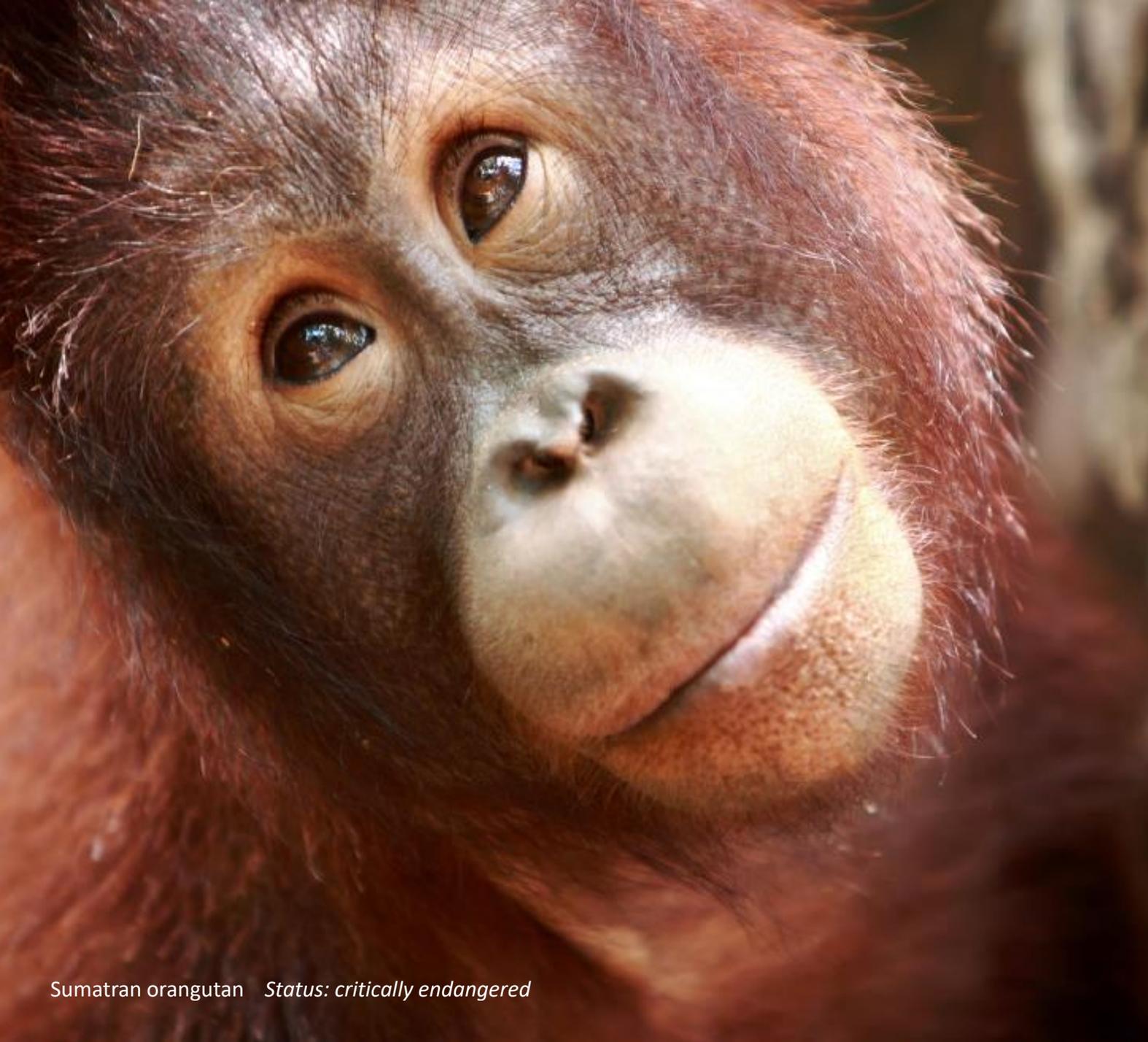
# But much fewer (52%) believe they personally can make a difference to wildlife conservation



Black-footed ferret *Status: endangered*



Base: Total sample (n=1002)



# Conservation Awareness

*The Sumatran rainforest  
will mostly disappear  
within 20 years*

The Guardian, May 2013

Sumatran orangutan *Status: critically endangered*

# We asked respondents about their awareness of six conservation issues

## Rare Earth Mineral Mining



Western Lowland Gorilla  
*Status: critically endangered*

## Deforestation



## Overfishing



Ngege  
*Status: extinct in the wild*

## Sustainable Palm Oil



Sumatran orangutan  
*Status: critically endangered*

## Polar Bear Habitat



Polar Bear  
*Status: vulnerable*

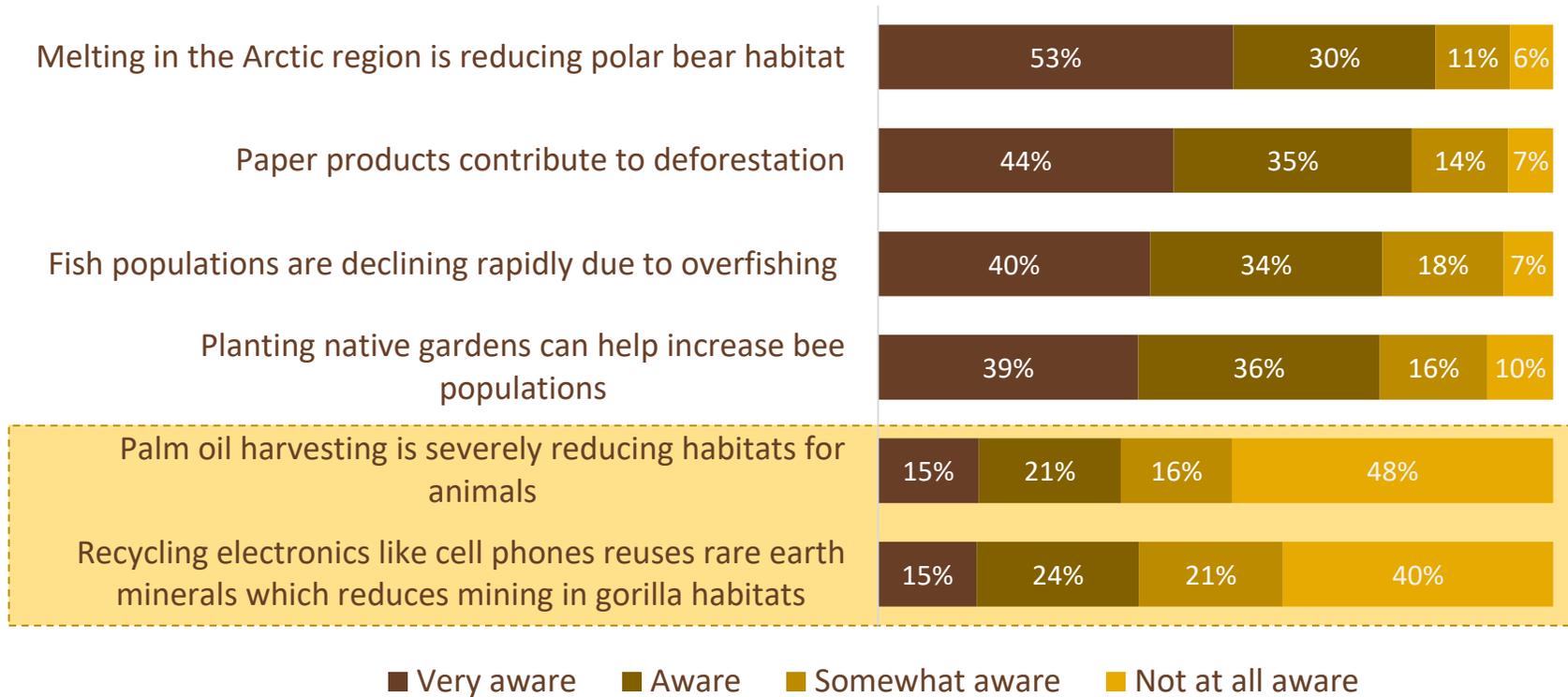
## Pollinators



Bees  
*Status: special concern*

# People are aware of many environmental issues, but are not aware of palm oil harvesting or rare earth mineral impacts on wildlife

Degree of awareness of environmental issues



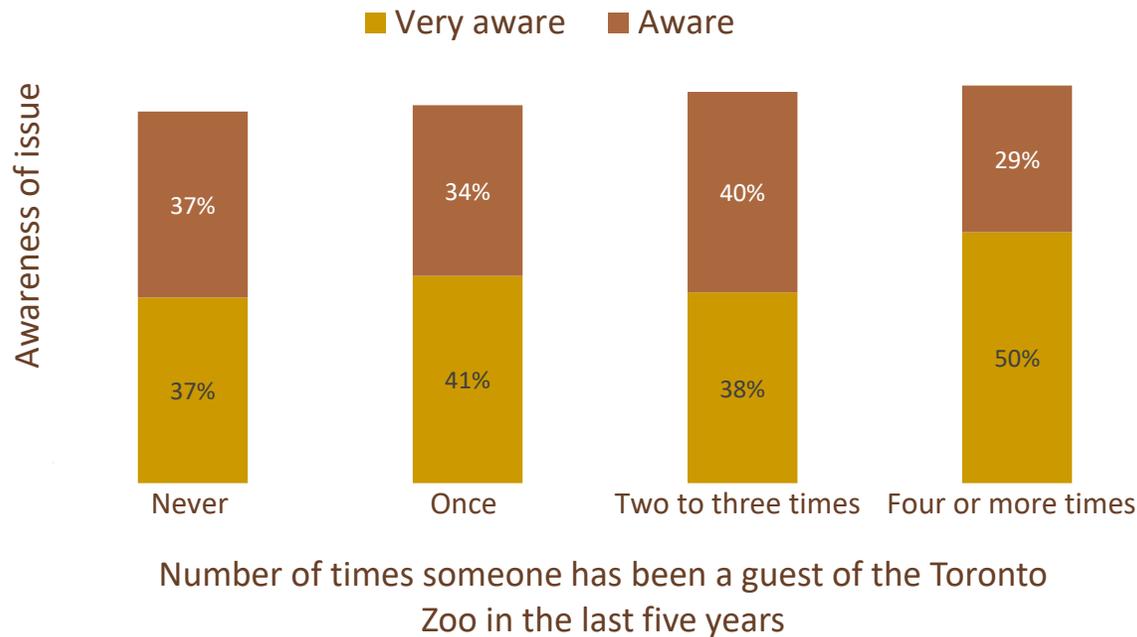
While more than 7 in 10 were aware or very aware of issues such as pollinator decline and deforestation,

less than 4 in 10 were similarly aware of issues around recycling electronics or palm oil harvesting.

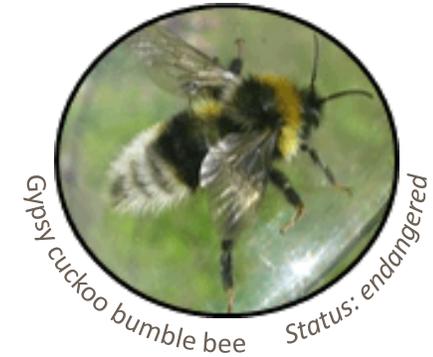
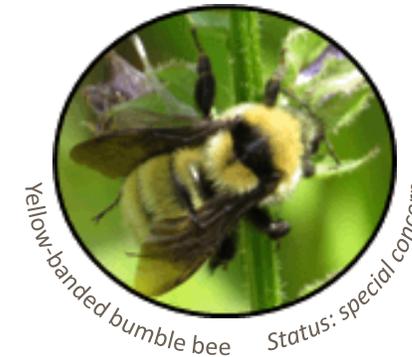
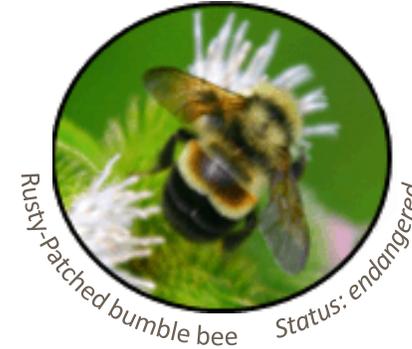
Base: Almost entire sample (n=992 to 1000)

# Frequent Toronto Zoo attendance has no relationship with awareness of issues around decline in bee populations...

Planting native gardens can help increase bee populations

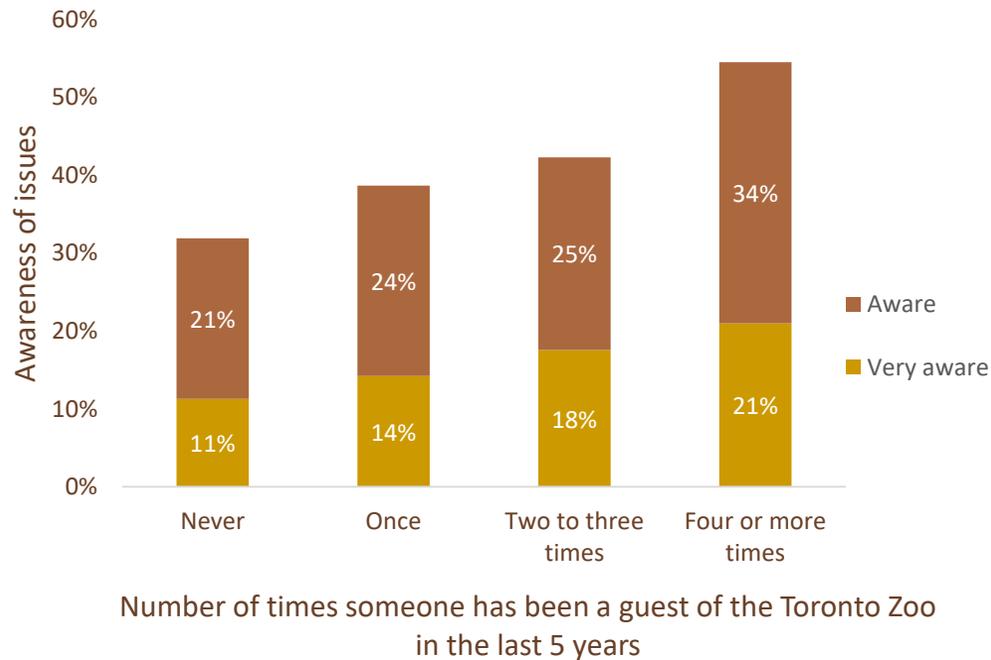


Base: Total sample (n=1002)



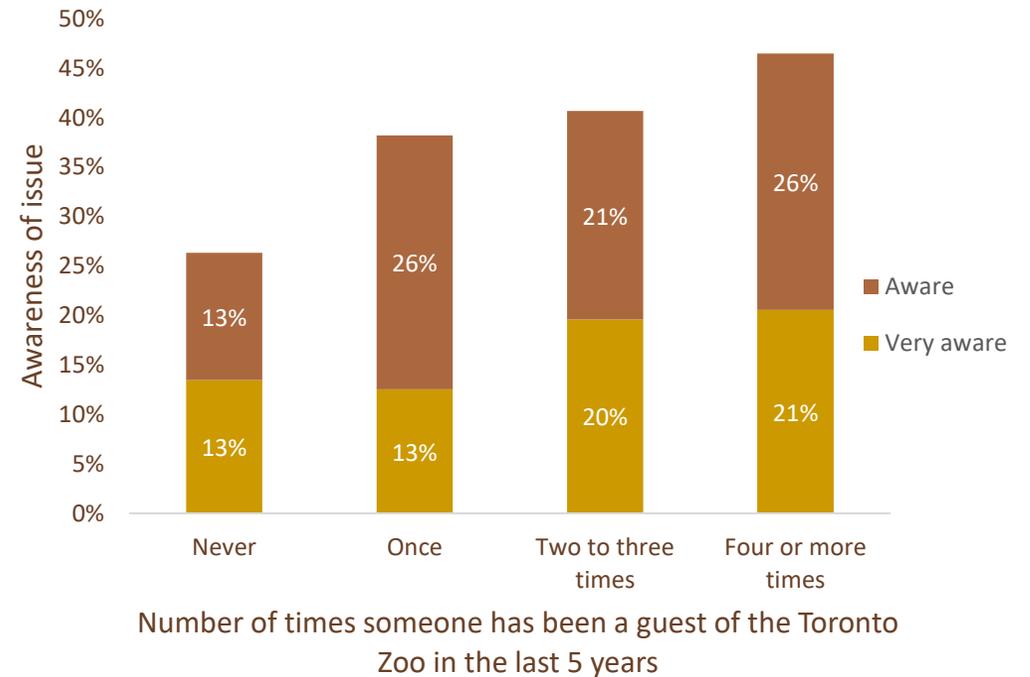
# But frequent Toronto Zoo attendance is correlated with more knowledge of electronic recycling and impacts of palm oil harvesting

Recycling electronics like cell phones reuses rare earth minerals which reduces mining in gorilla habitats



Base: Total sample (n=1002)

Palm oil harvesting is severely reducing habitats for animals



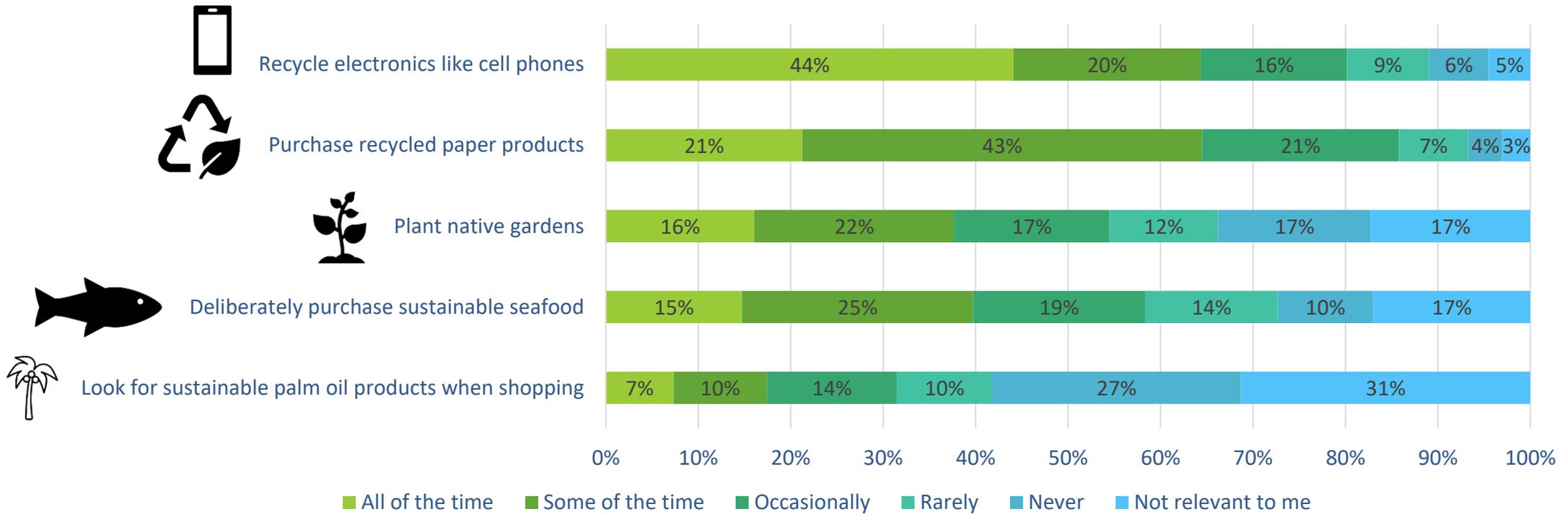
Base: Total sample (n=1002)



# Conservation Behaviours

# Most respondents recycle electronics, but few plant native gardens or purchase sustainable palm oil or seafood

How frequently do you engage in these behaviours?



Base: Total sample (n=995-1000)

# People who believe they can make a difference in wildlife conservation were engaging in more conservation activities

Average number of the following activities engaged in at least some of the time: *recycle cell phones, use recycled paper, plant native gardens, deliberately purchase sustainable sea food, deliberately select sustainable palm oil products*



Base: Total sample (n=1002)

The same patterns were shown for awareness: *People who were unaware of the conservation actions asked about, also felt they couldn't make a difference for wildlife conservation*



Sumatran orangutan  
Status: critically endangered



# Awareness of Wildlife and Ecosystem Decline

*Up to 1 million species are  
threatened with extinction,  
many within decades*

United Nations Biodiversity Report,  
May 2019



## Can respondents accurately estimate the pace of decline in ecosystems and animal life?

**Ecosystem declines:** *Worldwide, what is your best guess as to how much the average ecosystem size has declined due to human activities since 1970?*



**Threat of extinction:** *What is your best guess for the percentage of species in the world that are currently threatened with extinction?*



**Population declines\*:** *For animal species that are in decline today in Canada, for every 100 animals that were alive in 1970, what is your best guess as to the number of animals alive today?*

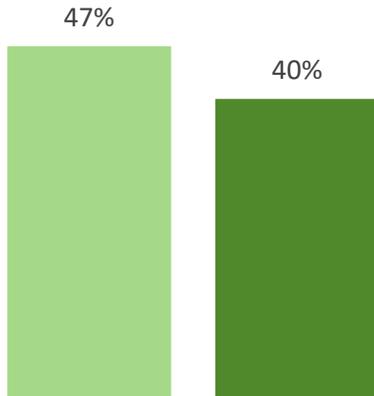
*Canadian species, clockwise from top left: Snowy owl (vulnerable), Vancouver Island marmot (critically endangered), Eastern Massasauga rattlesnake (threatened in USA, endangered in Canada), Loggerhead shrike (endangered in Ontario), Wood turtle (endangered)*

*\*Note: Results should be interpreted with caution as the wording of the question was more complex than other questions.*

# People are underestimating declines in ecosystems and the rate of decline of declining species, but slightly overestimated how many species are threatened with extinction

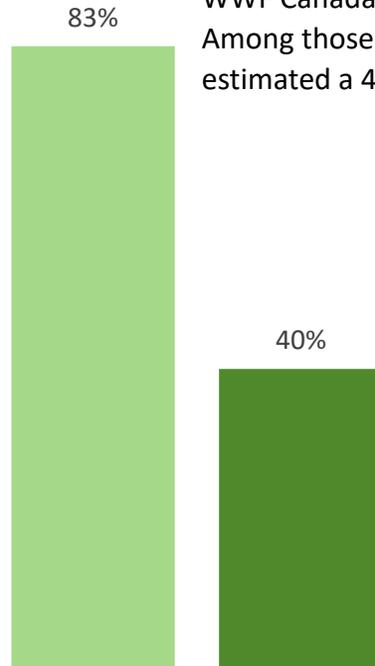
■ Actual ■ Median estimate from survey respondents

The median respondent estimated that ecosystems had declined by only 40% since 1970, while the UN estimates the decline at 47%.



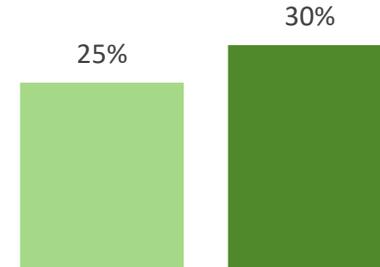
Average ecosystem decline since 1970

WWF Canada found that half of monitored wildlife species in Canada declined. Among those declining there was an 83% decline in abundance. Respondents estimated a 40% decline, less than half the actual rate of decline.



Average decline in population of species that are declining in Canada since 1970

Respondents slightly overestimated how many species were threatened with extinction, with the median respondent estimating 30% of species were threatened. This represents up to 1 million species threatened with extinction (including plants).

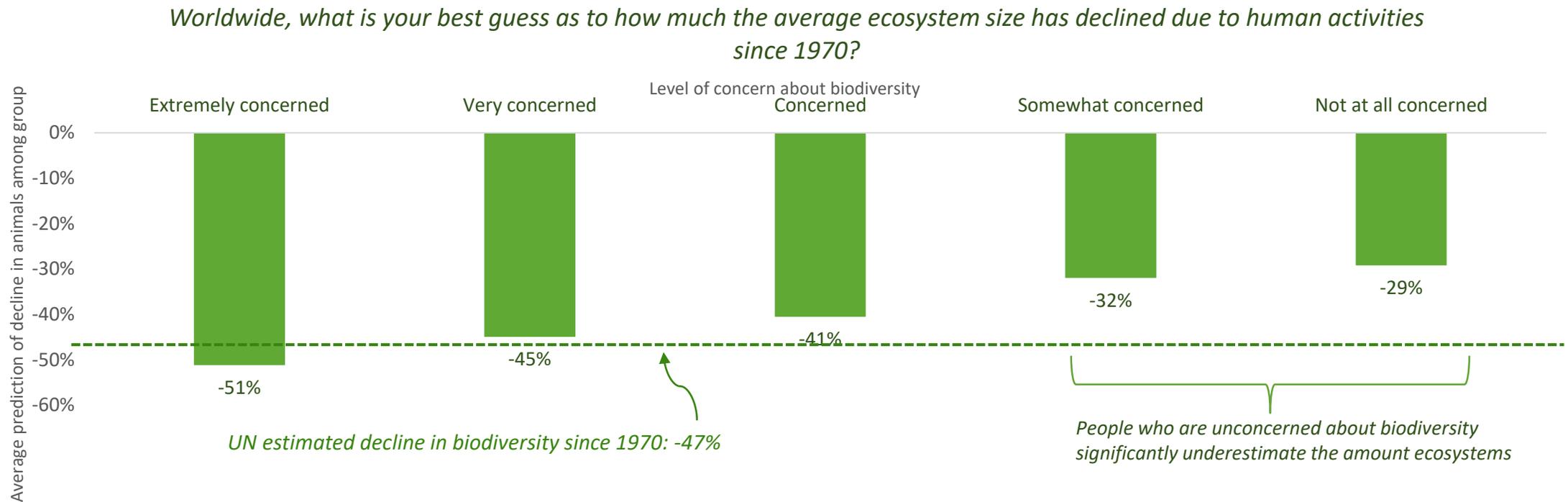


Percentage of wildlife species currently threatened with extinction

Base: Total sample (n=1002)

Sources: Average Ecosystem decline is from the UN's [The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#), as is the percentage of species threatened with extinction. The average decline in population of species that are declining in Canada is from [WWF Canada's Living Planet Report 2017](#). Note WWF Canada tracks this for monitored species, not all species and this was not reflected in the question text.

# People who are most concerned about biodiversity can accurately estimate ecosystem declines, while those less concerned are underestimating ecosystem declines

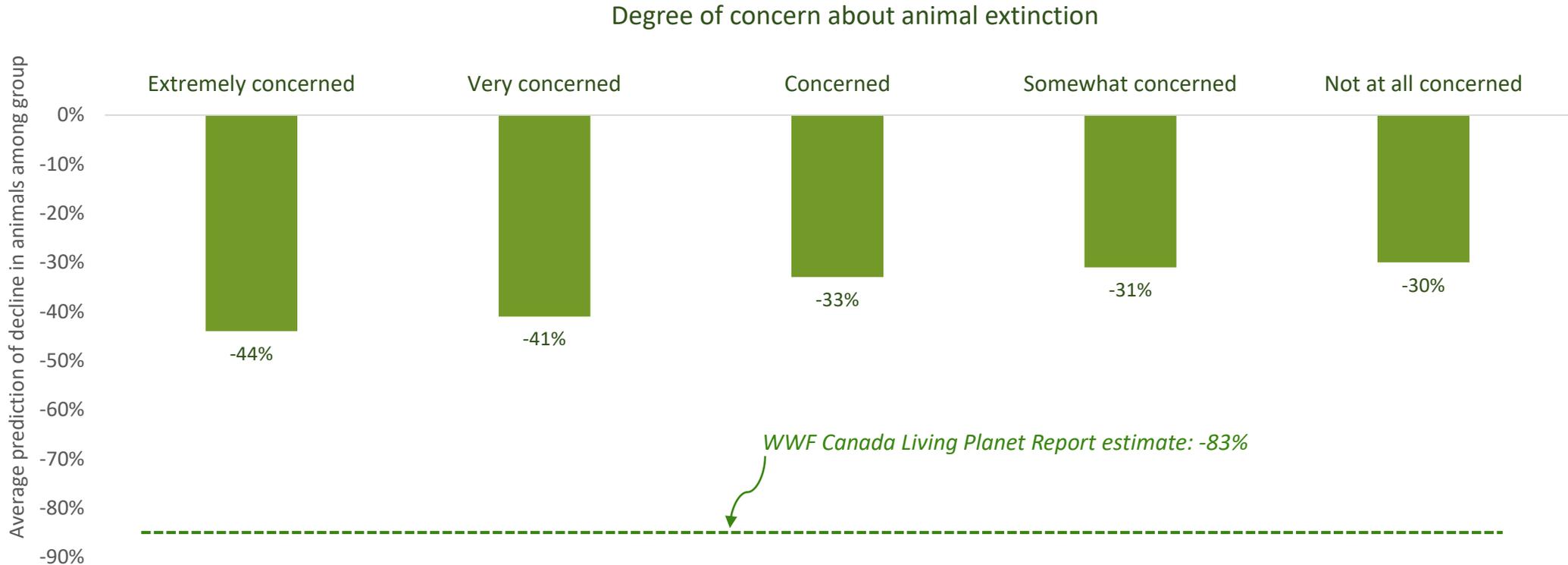


UN Estimate Source: [The Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services](#)

Base: Total sample (n=1002)

# All respondents underestimated the decrease in the number of animals alive in Canada since 1970 among species that are in decline

Question text: *For animal species that are in decline today in Canada, for every 100 animals that were alive in 1970, what is your best guess as to the number of animals alive today?*



Base: Total sample (n=1002)

Sumatran tiger *Status: critically endangered*



# Wildlife and the COVID-19 Pandemic

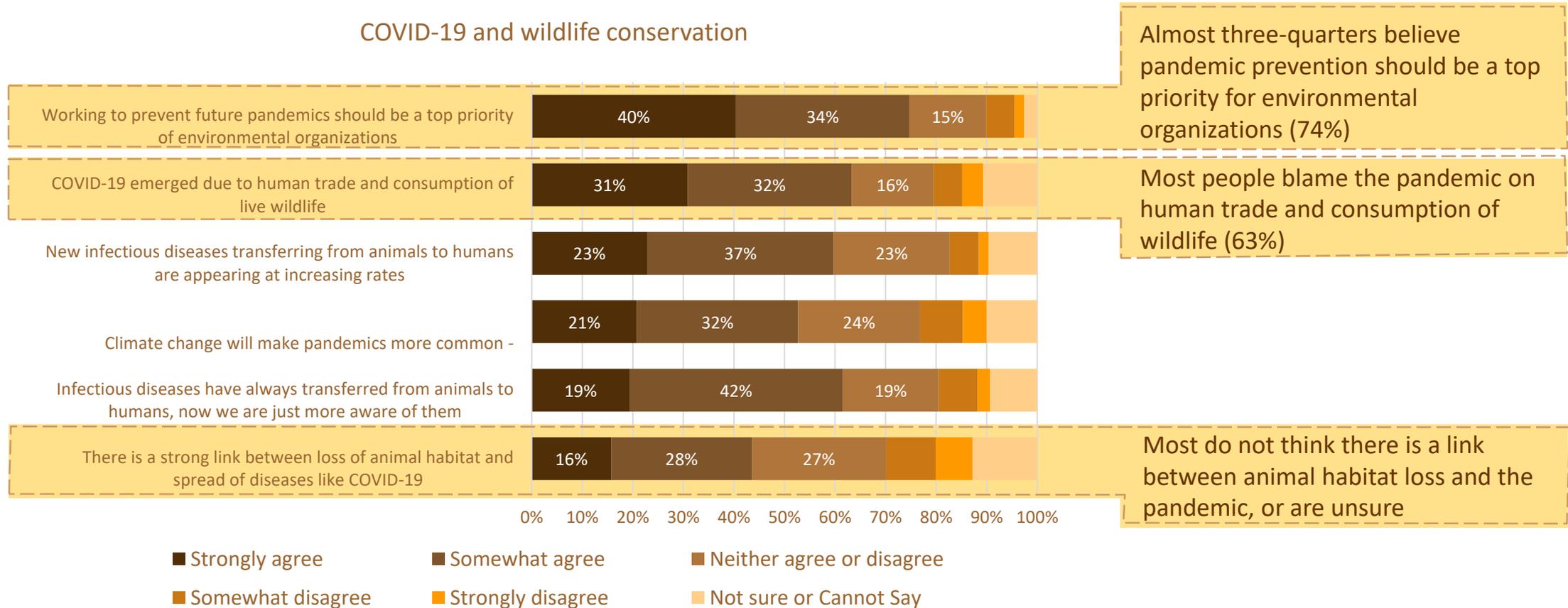
*Biodiversity loss and wildlife trade  
are making pandemics like COVID-19  
more likely, experts say*

CBC News, [https://www.cbc.ca/news/  
technology/pandemics-biodiversity-covid-19-1.5528063](https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/pandemics-biodiversity-covid-19-1.5528063)

# Most respondents agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic arose because of human trade in, and consumption of, wildlife

## INSIGHTS

### COVID-19 and wildlife conservation



Base: Total sample (n=1002)

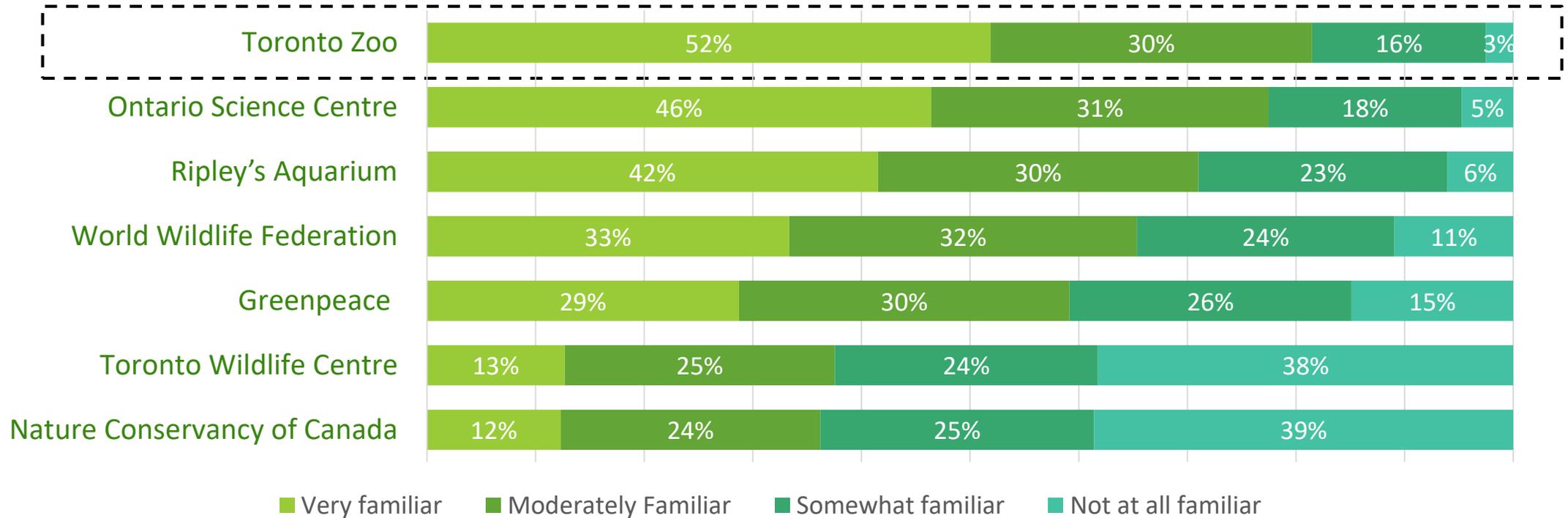


*Photo provided to the Toronto Zoo by Karl De Jage*

# Perceptions of the Toronto Zoo

# Respondents were more familiar with the Toronto Zoo than other organizations we asked about

To what extent are you familiar with the following organizations?



Base: Total sample (n=1002)

# The Toronto Zoo successfully provides information on conservation activities, but many are unconvinced the Zoo plays a key role in stopping wildlife extinction

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

■ Strongly agree 
 ■ Agree 
 ■ Neither agree or disagree 
 ■ Disagree 
 ■ Strongly disagree 
 ■ No opinion



## INSIGHTS

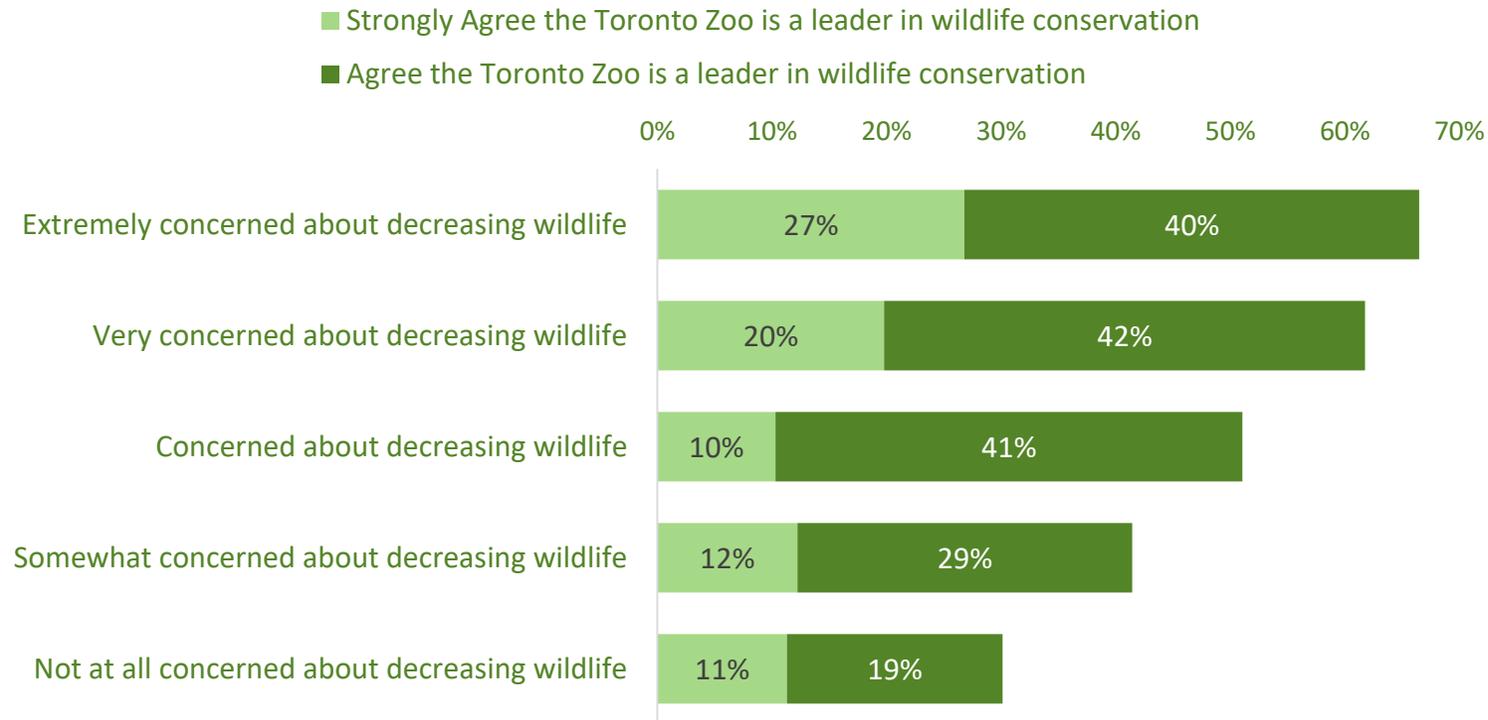
72% of respondents thought the Toronto Zoo was doing a good job providing information on animal conservation, and 29% of people strongly agreed

Almost half of respondents (49%) believed the Toronto Zoo is a Canadian leader in research around wildlife preservation, and 48% believed the Zoo plays a key role in stopping wildlife extinction

Base: Total sample (n=1002)

# The more concerned someone is about decreasing wildlife the more likely are to believe the Zoo is a leader in conservation

## Concern about decreasing wildlife versus agreement that the Toronto Zoo is a leader in wildlife conservation



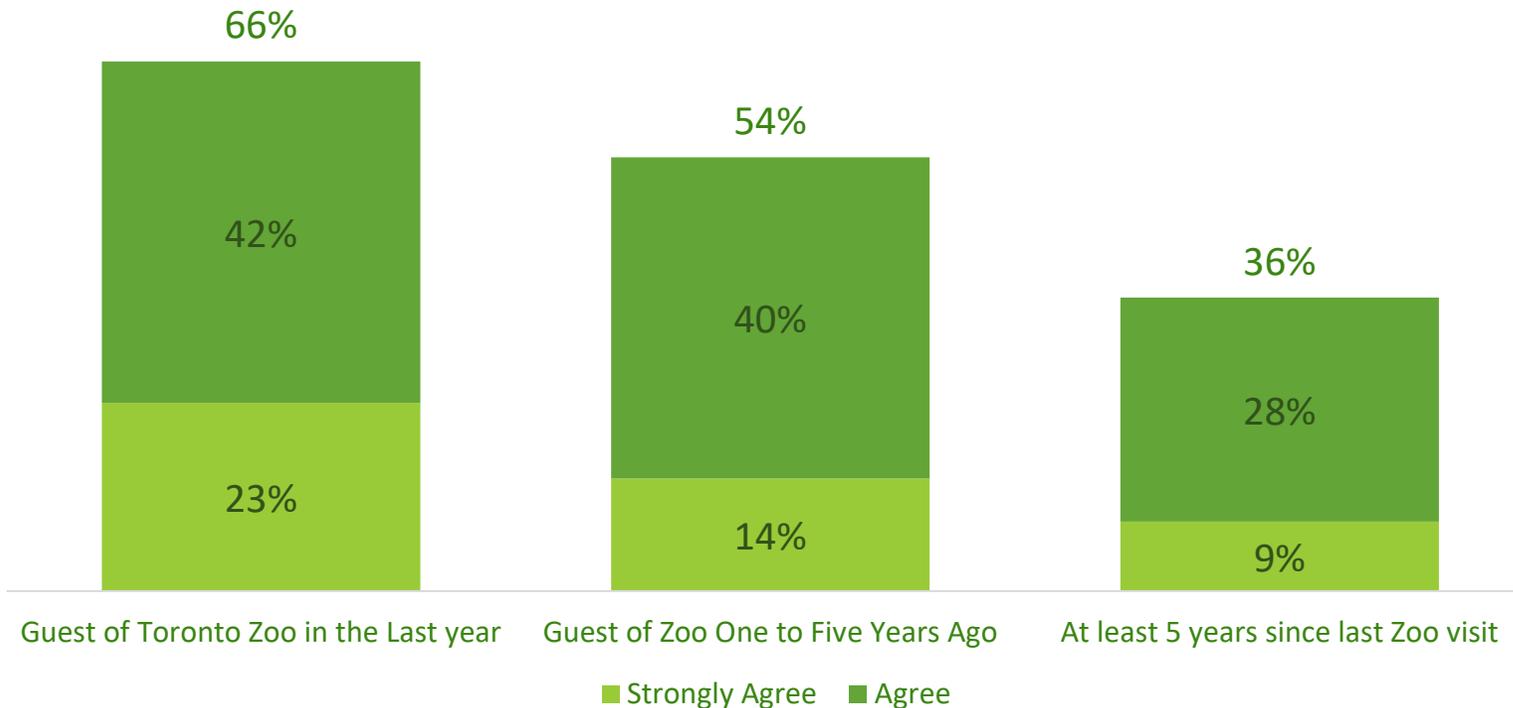
Base: Total sample (n=1002)



White rhinoceros Status: near threatened

# Recent guests at the Toronto Zoo are much more likely to agree that the Zoo is a national leader in wildlife preservation

The Toronto Zoo is a Canadian leader in research around wildlife preservation



More recent guests are more likely to perceive the Toronto Zoo as a national leader in wildlife preservation, providing some evidence that the Zoo has been doing well in communicating its activities in recent years

Base: This excludes 130 people who indicated they had never been to the Toronto Zoo. Note that this report only reports data for respondents who completed the entire survey, which tends to overestimate the percentage of the population who have visited the Zoo at some point.



# Awareness of Animal Extinction in the Greater Toronto Area

*“Not a single bee has ever sent you an invoice. And that is part of the problem – because most of what comes to us from nature is free, because it is not invoiced, because it is not priced, because it is not traded in markets, we tend to ignore it.”*

Pavan Sukhdev, United Nations report,  
The Economics of Ecosystems and  
Biodiversity, October 2010

Only 29% of respondents were aware that there were more than 10 endangered or threatened animals in the GTA

*What is your best guess as to the number of species that are native to the Greater Toronto Area that are threatened or at risk of extinction?*

Response	Percentage of respondents
None	6%
One or two	25%
Three to Ten	40%
More than Ten	29%

Base: Total sample (n=1002)

The following 20 species are at high risk in the GTA :

**Endangered**

1. Monarch
2. Redside Dace
3. Tri-colored Bat
4. Northern Myotis
5. Little Brown Myotis
6. Blanding’s Turtle (Great Lakes/St. Lawrence population)
7. Acadian Flycatcher
8. Cerulean Warbler
9. Red-headed Woodpecker
10. Yellow-breasted Chat virens subspecies

**Threatened**

1. Western Chorus Frog
2. Bank Swallow
3. Barn Swallow
4. Bobolink
5. Canada Warbler
6. Chimney Swift
7. Eastern Meadowlark
8. Eastern Whip-poor-will
9. Least Bittern
10. Wood Thrush

**Source** for at-risk animals in the GTA : Parks Canada, Rouge National Urban Park Action Plan; Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC)

# Which animals did respondents believe are threatened with extinction in the GTA?

**Birds: 73 respondents** There are at least 4 species of birds that are endangered and 9 that are threatened in the GTA

**Bees: 39 respondents** American and Yellow-banded bumble bee is classified of special concern; Rusty patched bumble bee is endangered

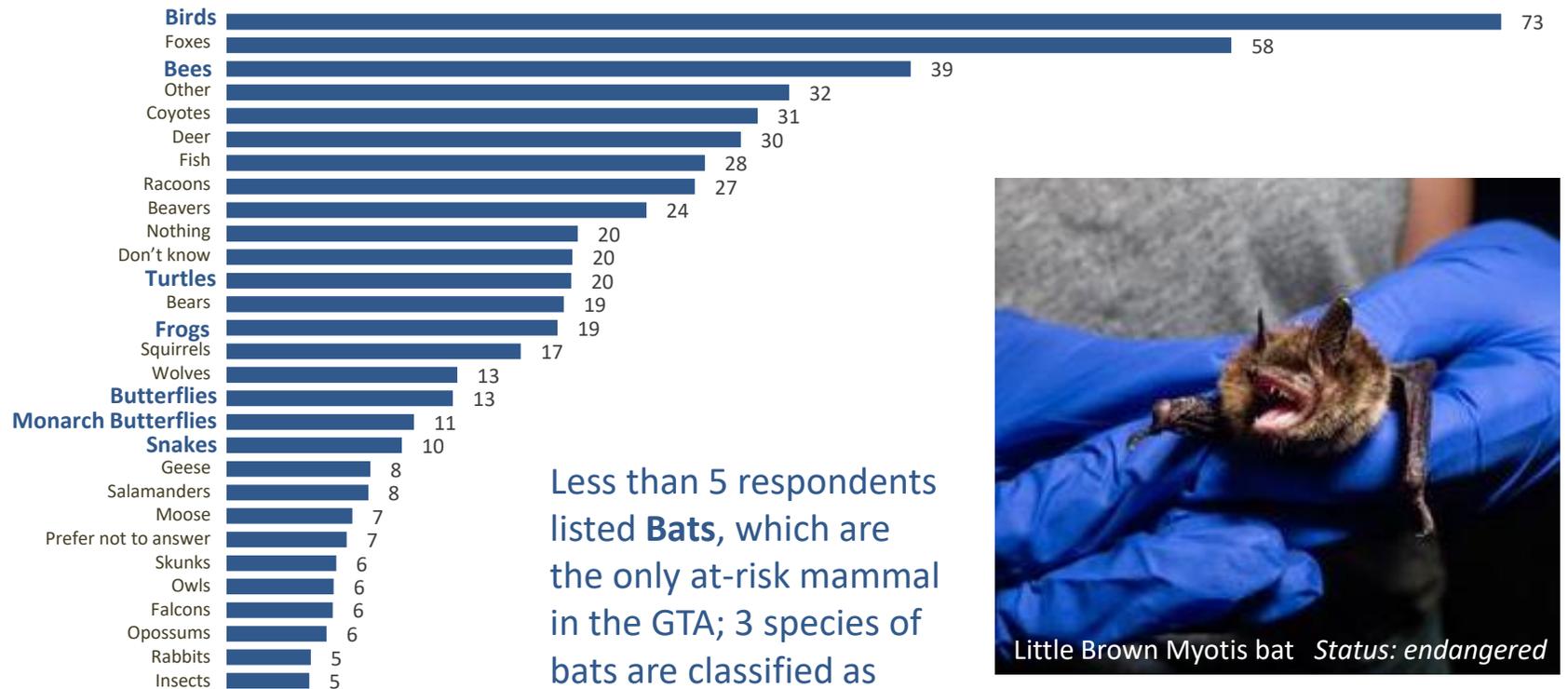
**Turtles: 20 respondents** The Blanding's turtle is endangered, while several other species are of special concern

**Frogs: 19 respondents** The Western Chorus Frog is threatened

**Butterflies / Monarch Butterflies: 13/11 respondents** The Monarch butterfly is Endangered

**Snakes: 10 respondents** The Eastern Milksnake and Eastern Ribbonsnake are both of special concern

Can you name any of the animals in the Greater Toronto Area that are at risk of extinction?



Less than 5 respondents listed **Bats**, which are the only at-risk mammal in the GTA; 3 species of bats are classified as Endangered



Little Brown Myotis bat Status: endangered

Many people left this question blank, though some entered up to 8 species. Answers were coded into categories based on the response; the chart reflects the number of times a species or animal group was mentioned.

For further information or questions, please contact:



Steven Ayer  
*President & Lead Consultant  
Common Good Strategies*

647-379-3252  
[steve@goodstrategy.ca](mailto:steve@goodstrategy.ca)



Beth Gilhespy  
*Executive Director  
Toronto Zoo Wildlife Conservancy*

416-392-5913  
[bjilhespy@torontozoo.ca](mailto:bjilhespy@torontozoo.ca)

*With thanks to the Toronto Zoo for supplying this report with pictures of the at-risk animals in their care*

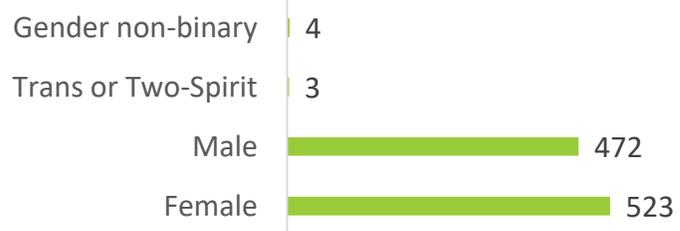
# Appendix

---

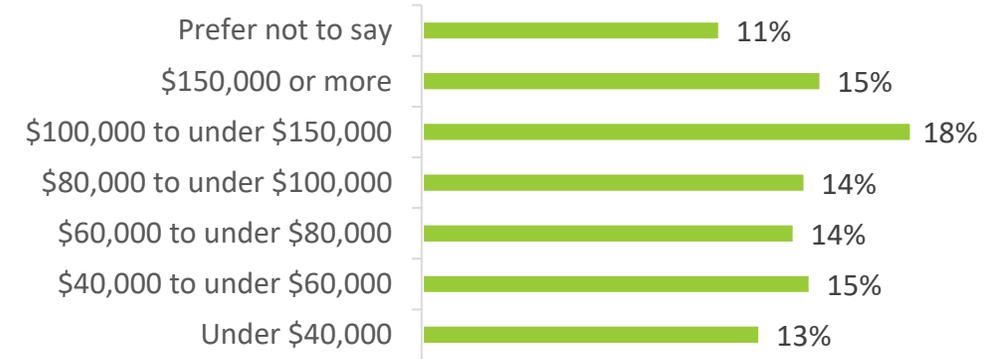
# Demographics



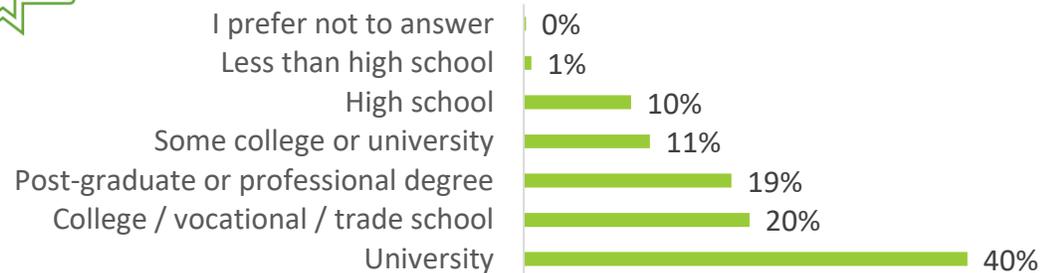
## Gender



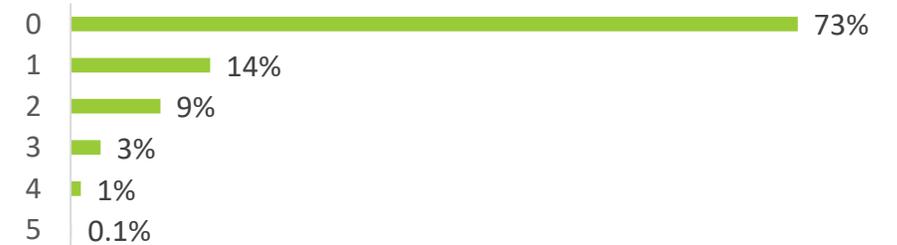
## Household income



## Highest level of education

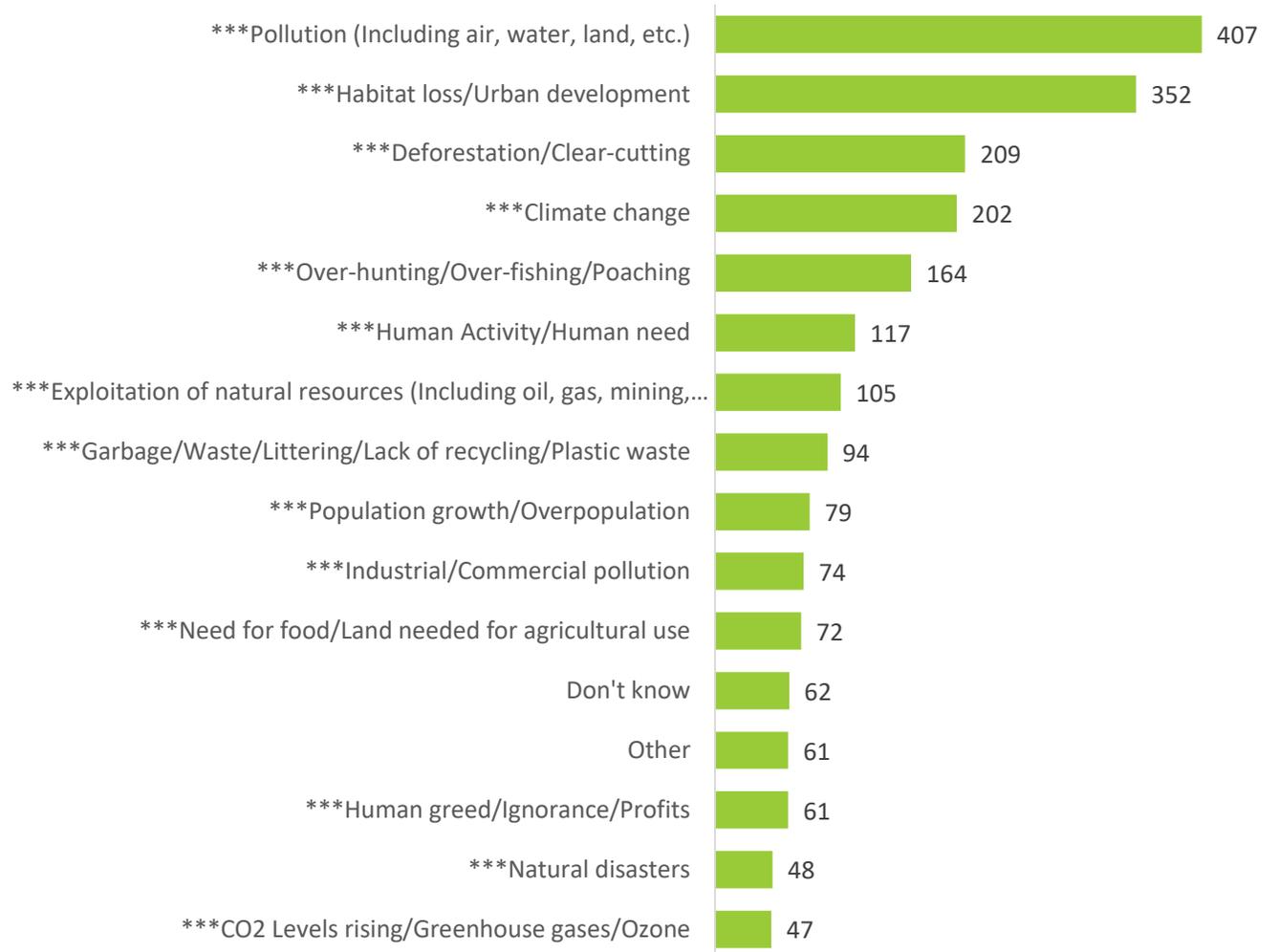


## Number of children under the age of 12



Respondents believed that pollution, habit loss, and deforestation were the leading causes of decline in global biodiversity and wildlife

To your knowledge, what are some of the things that are causing declines in global biodiversity and wildlife?



\*\*\* indicates that this text was coded into the closest bucket; it does not reflect the exact text that was entered into the box. People could provide multiple answers, and the counts indicate the number of times a category was mentioned.

Base: Total sample (n=1002)

*Which of these factors do you think contributes the most to losses of biodiversity and wildlife worldwide?*

Respondents believe habitat loss and degradation is the largest contributor to losses of biodiversity and wildlife worldwide

---

Habitat Loss and Degradation	38%
Overexploitation of animals and natural resources	22%
Climate Change	21%
Pollution	16%
Invasive species	4%

---

Base: Total sample (n=1002)