



National parks now take conservation of biological diversity as one of their highest missions. One of the most recognizable species of wildlife in North America, grizzly bears are protected in national parks — some of their last strongholds. Sow and cubs, Denali National Park and Preserve (Alaska).



Most of Earth's biodiversity is represented in species that are far less conspicuous than grizzly bears: (top left) Carolina satyr butterfly, Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area(Georgia); (top right) Banana slug consuming bear scat, North Cascades National Park (Washington); (bottom) The spiderlike Model Cave harvestman, currently known only from Great Basin National Park (Nevada).



Even the most seemingly barren environments, such as the lava flows at Lava Beds National Monument (California), are habitat for wild plants (here, an Indian paintbrush) and animals.



National park protection doesn't mean that species are insulated from change. When Virgin Islands National Park (USVI) was struck by two hurricanes in short succession in 2017, coral reefs, like this elkhorn coral along Hawksnest Point, were damaged by soil and sand run-off from the land.



Native biodiversity in national parks is threatened by invasive alien species. This Burmese python in Everglades National Park (Florida) may have imported as exotic pets but released into the wild by their owners. Populations of pythons in Everglades have exploded since the 1990s, doing great damage to the ecosystem.



An example of native biodiversity in the parks is this Island fox, one of a number of subspecies found only in California's Channel Islands, including several in Channel Islands National Park.



Diversity is not just measured at the species level. Two distinct desert ecosystems, the Mojave and the Colorado, meet in Joshua Tree National Park (California).



Olympic National Park (Washington) is noted for its temperate rainforest ecosystems and its seacoast (pictured here). Inland, the Park Service, in partnership with the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, has removed dams on the Elwha River flowing through the park in a bid to restore salmon runs and restore the park's native biodiversity.





In another high-profile program to re-establish a species that had disappeared from a park, the Park Service reintroduced elk (here fitted with a tracking collar) to the Catteloochee Valley in Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Tennessee / North Carolina).