



Wild Fish & Wilderness



Desert Pupfish © Melissa Amarello

May 16th marked [Endangered Species Day](#), when we celebrate and raise awareness about species in peril. Unfortunately, as is often the case, large mammals and birds received the most attention. Many species protected by the Endangered Species Act are often overlooked, even on their special day. Yet as critical elements of a complex and diverse ecosystem these less-charismatic species are equally deserving of our attention.

Arizona has a higher proportion of fish at risk of extinction than any other state, but you've probably never heard about them. We have already lost two native fish species, and of the 35 species remaining, 21 are state or federally listed. Water is scarce in our

desert environment and these fish have to compete with people and agriculture. Even when fish are managed for, most Arizona native fish have low priority, as they have little commercial value.

With the striking exception of the Desert Pupfish, many of our native fish aren't much to look at, but when you've found a healthy population of Arizona fish, you're in a special place.

Redfield and Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness areas are two such places, with thriving populations of eight native fish species that are difficult to find elsewhere. It's relatively easy to spot fish in the clear, shallow water, and the surrounding lush, riparian vegetation makes it an enjoyable environment, even during our hot summer. Healthy native fish populations signify a healthy watershed, so these wilderness areas are also great places to watch other wildlife, including many species of birds and snakes, lowland leopard frogs, and bighorn sheep.

So this father's day, why not try native fish watching as part of your outdoor adventure, and see if you can find these prized piscines?



Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness © Melissa Amarello

The Arizona Wilderness Coalition (AWC) is an organization of groups and individuals whose mission is to protect and restore wilderness lands and waters in Arizona.