

FOCUS

Wild Arizona

Key Words:

Endangered: a species with few individuals remaining; one the federal government has listed as being at risk of extinction

Herbivore: an animal that eats plants

Legislature: the government organization responsible for making the laws in a state

Reintroduction: the placement of an animal or plant back into an area where it used to live

Symbol: an item or object that stands for or represents another object

Threatened: a species the federal government has listed as being at risk of becoming endangered

What do the objects in these pictures have in common?



Did you guess all three are found in Arizona? Great. But there is something else. They are all state **symbols** — objects chosen to represent Arizona. The cactus wren, flag and palo verde are just three of the symbols that were selected to show how unique and special our state is.

Since Arizona was founded in February 1912, more than 15 symbols have been chosen. We have a state fossil (petrified wood), a state gemstone (turquoise) and even an official state neckwear (bolo tie).

On Feb. 14, 2012, Arizona will turn 100 years old! In honor of this momentous occasion, our next four editions of Focus Wild Arizona will focus on these symbols that help describe our extraordinary state.

Most of the state symbols were chosen by the **legislature**. In 1985, however, we tried something different. The Arizona Game and Fish Commission — the group that sets the rules for wildlife management and oversees the Arizona Game and Fish Department — felt it was important for people to become more aware of the wildlife of our great state. So, they decided to let schoolchildren from around Arizona vote on four new symbols: the amphibian, fish, mammal and reptile. Students

studied 800 different animal species to find the best representatives. Four were chosen in each category. Thousands of students voted. The amphibian, fish, mammal and reptile that received the most votes officially became state symbols in 1986.

Do you know which animals won? If not, that's OK. We'll tell you soon. Before we reveal the winners, we wondered if students today would pick the same animals. So, we thought we would hold a vote. This is not an official vote and will not result in a change to any state symbols. We just thought it might be fun to compare the results from 1985 with those of today!

Here are four fishes and four mammals — the same choices students had in 1985. Read the information. Look at the pictures. Which fish do you think would make the best representative of Arizona? Which mammal? What did you think of the choices? Would you have included other fishes or mammals?

Teachers: We want to hear from you. Send the results of your class votes to eproctor@azgfd.gov. Include your mailing address (must be in Arizona), and we'll send a free copy of our popular "State Symbols of Arizona" poster. All votes must be received by Nov. 15, 2011. We will tally the votes and publish the results in the March–April 2012 issue of Arizona Wildlife Views.

By Eric Proctor

Which mammal would you choose as Arizona's state symbol?



Coues' white-tailed deer; desert bighorn sheep; javelina; ringtail

Coues' White-tailed Deer: The white-tailed deer has a long tail that is white underneath. When alarmed, deer carry the tail high, "flagging" the white underside. In Arizona, the whitetail is found in the oak grasslands of the southeastern mountain ranges, the central Arizona chaparral, up to the edge of the Mogollon Rim and into the White Mountains.

Desert Bighorn Sheep: In Arizona, the desert bighorn sheep is found primarily in the Mohave and Sonoran deserts. After its numbers declined, the Arizona Game and Fish Department began **reintroductions** and the population numbers have improved.

Javelina: The javelina is named for its javelin-like front teeth. Although these teeth are sharp, the javelina is a **herbivore**, often using those teeth for digging and defense. Also called the "collared peccary" (for the band of white fur around its neck), the javelina is pig-like in appearance, but is not really a pig. It is found in the deserts, oak grasslands and chaparral of central and southern Arizona.

Ringtail: The ringtail is shy, and primarily active at night. Sometimes mistakenly called the "ringtail cat," it is related to the raccoon. It feeds on fruits and insects as well as small reptiles, birds and mammals. It is especially fond of white-throated wood rats ("packrats"), and will live in their dens after eating them. The ringtail is found throughout the state, preferring rough, rocky areas with caves and crevices.



Apache trout; desert pupfish, bonytail chub; Colorado pikeminnow (clockwise from top left)

PHOTOS BY GEORGE ANDREJKO

Which fish would you choose as Arizona's state symbol?

Colorado Pikeminnow: The Colorado pikeminnow is the largest minnow in North America. Once common, it lived in deep, fast-flowing, muddy waters and large pools. Dams blocked the fish's movements and cooled the water. Small, reintroduced populations of this **endangered** fish remain in a few places.

Apache Trout: The Apache trout is yellow with dark spots all over its body. It was common in the Salt, Little Colorado and other rivers. Today, it lives in smaller streams in the White Mountains and a few other locations. Although this fish is **threatened**, people are working to improve its habitat and chances for survival in Arizona.

Bonytail Chub: The bonytail chub once was found in the Colorado, Salt and Gila rivers, where its long, slender body helped it survive the floods common to these large rivers. Dams changed these rivers from warm desert waters to cold lakes, making it difficult for this chub to survive. Today the endangered fish is found primarily in Lake Mohave.

Desert Pupfish: The desert pupfish is small — under 1½ inches long — but colorful. During spring and early summer, breeding males become a beautiful blue, with yellow fins. The pupfish once was found throughout the marshes, springs and streams of the Gila and lower Colorado rivers. As shallow pools disappeared, the pupfish became endangered. It is being reintroduced. 🐟

■ This feature is part of the Arizona Game and Fish Department's Focus Wild Arizona program, a free

educational program for teachers, parents, students or anyone interested in learning about wildlife and

habitat. Visit our Web site, www.azgfd.gov/focuswild, to find exciting lessons and resources.