

## 20 Photos That Celebrate Our Natural World— And Show What's at Stake

*Johanna Read*

Updated: Jun. 03, 2020

Now more than ever, we're appreciating just how beautiful our world is and starting to understand why it's so important to keep it healthy—in every way.



MONICA BERTOLAZZI/GETTY IMAGES

## Nature's incredible beauty

Earth's natural spaces and the wildlife that live there are part of what makes our world exceptionally beautiful. While human encroachment, environmental disasters, climate change, and even the novel coronavirus are certainly taking their toll, the silver lining is that we're more aware than ever about the need to protect what we value in the world. By taking care of our environment, we can ensure that nature's wonders are there for us in the future. It might not even be as hard as we think—after the recent drop in travel from COVID-19, [nature is already starting to bounce back](#).



PAUL SOUDERS/GETTY IMAGES

## Mountain gorillas

You've probably seen gorillas in a zoo, but unless you've trekked in the rainforests of Uganda, Rwanda, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, you've never seen a mountain gorilla. Lowland gorillas can survive almost anywhere, but [mountain gorillas](#) live only in Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest and in the Virunga Mountains, which cover the border area of all three countries. Like much of the world's wildlife, they're at risk largely because of habitat loss. The last census, in 2019, counted just [1,063 mountain gorillas](#).

[National Geographic](#) explains that if their numbers get too low, the mountain gorilla population will become too inbred to survive. They might suffer the same fate as Tasmanian devils, for example, which are dying off because there's not enough genetic diversity for them to survive a

form of transmissible cancer. Like elephants, the care of mountain gorillas is at risk because of [the COVID-19-related drop in tourism](#).





JOEL SHARPE/GETTY IMAGES

## Volcanoes

While it may seem strange to protect things that are destructive, volcanoes [play an important part in our environment](#), in addition to being cool to look at. When a volcano spews ash, it makes the soil it lands on very fertile. We also use pumice, ash, and basalt in things like concrete, insulation, soap, and electroplating. Volcanoes are even responsible for creating new islands.

El Salvador's Santa Ana Volcano, pictured here, is a stratovolcano, and it's the highest point in the country. When it [erupted in 2005](#), it shot out boiling water and mud, as well as rocks the size of cars, and made the soil around it incredibly fertile. You can hike the volcano to see the unusual plants growing at its different elevations and admire the strange yellow-green lake that sits in its crater. Here are another [13 active volcanoes you can actually visit](#).