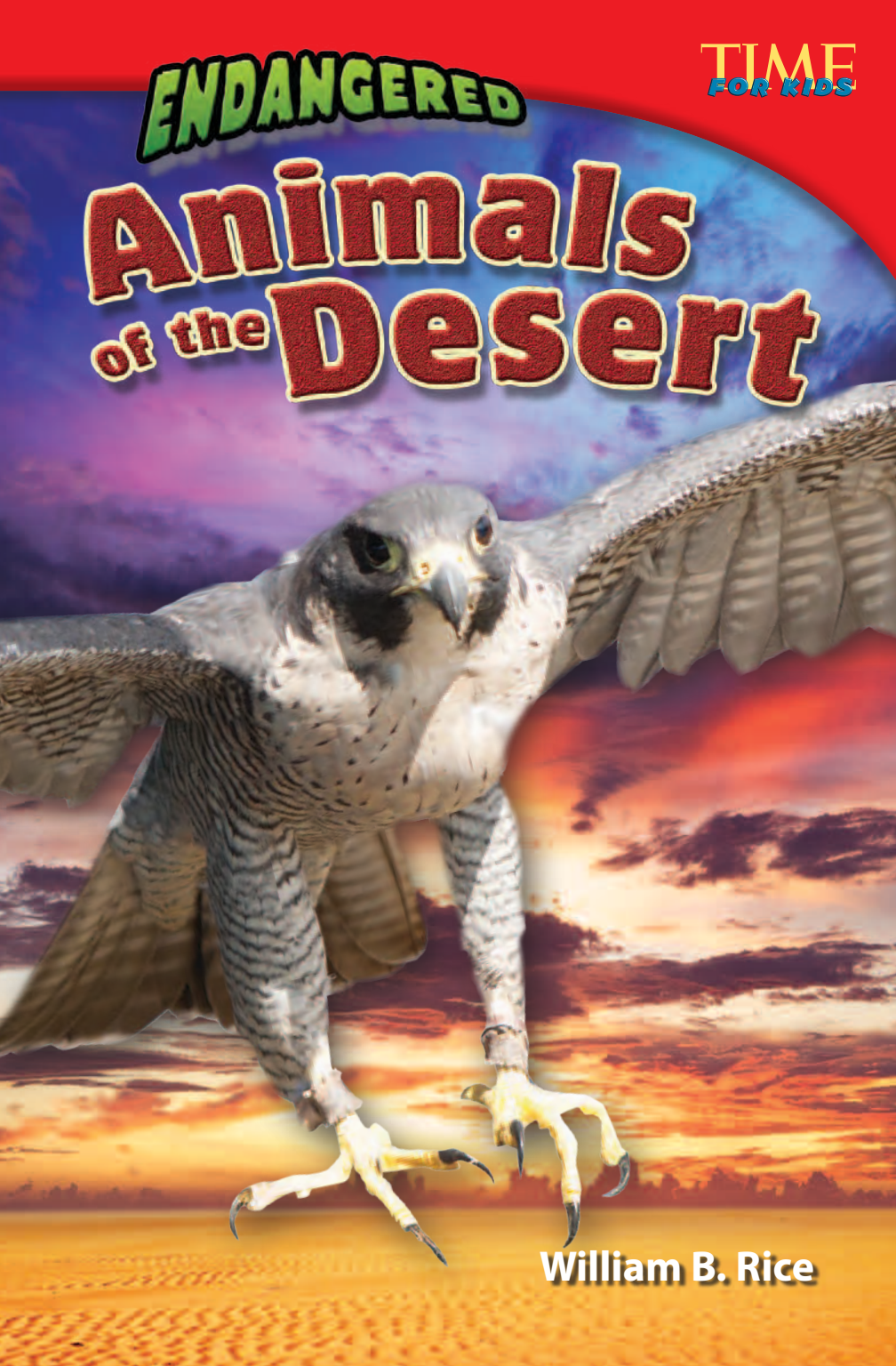
TIME FOR KIDS

ENDANGERED Animals of the Desert



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DESERTED

Just imagine it. It's a new school year. There are hundreds of kids in the halls and classrooms. Every desk is taken. Teachers stand in each room. The principal greets everyone at the door. The secretary sits in the office. The custodian mops up a spill, and the librarian places books on the shelves.

As time passes, you notice empty desks here and there. Then, strangely, more and more are deserted. Your favorite teacher is missing. The principal is nowhere to be found. The spill is left unattended. Books are stacked in piles everywhere. Outside on the streets, things are eerily quiet, too. Where did everyone go?

And then you realize the horrible truth. People are dying off. There are fewer and fewer human beings. Your **species** is horribly **endangered**. You are among the very last of your kind. Will your species survive? Where did everyone go? And then you realize the truth. There are fewer and fewer humans. Your species is endangered, and you are among the last of your kind.

Humans are lucky. This isn't really happening. But around the world, animals are threatened. They face this scenario every day.

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Life on the Planet

We live in a beautiful world filled with life in many forms. Plants, animals, insects, and **fungi** all coexist. They all depend on each other.

A species is a type of life form. Tigers, blue whales, and willow trees are all types of species. There have been millions of species on Earth throughout history. They have lived over many hundreds of millions of years. They flourish in different ways at different times.



Humans are just one of millions of species on Earth.



Siberian tiger

maple tree

A Whole Lotta Critters!

Scientists estimate there are more than 1,700,000 kinds of **organisms** on Earth! Among them are more than 300,000 different kinds of plants, more than 60,000 kinds of animals, more than 1,000,000 kinds of insects, and more than 50,000 kinds of fungi, lichens, and similar organisms.

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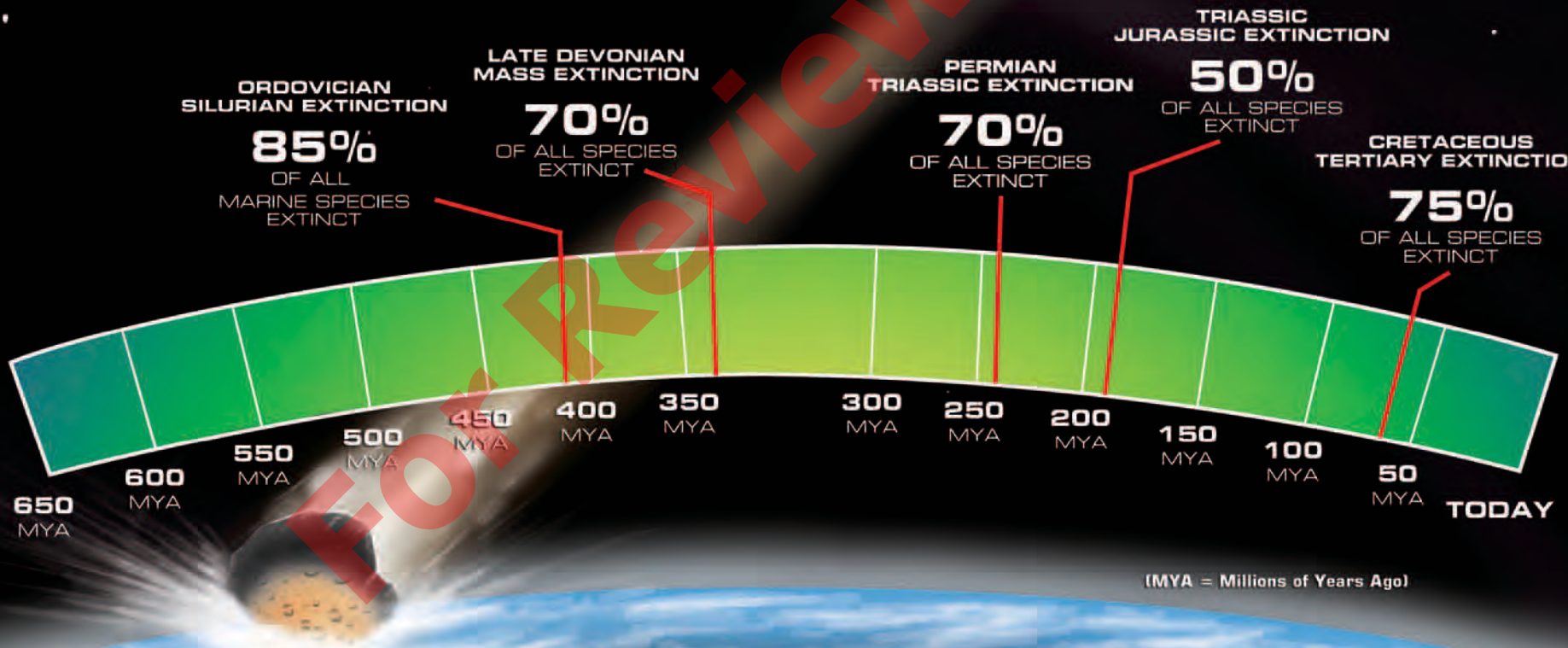
MASS EXTINCTIONS

Many big changes on Earth have caused a wide variety of life-forms to die off. Scientists think there have been at least five **mass extinctions** on Earth. Why did they happen? Some have been caused by a sudden worldwide **catastrophe**. For example, an asteroid may have struck Earth. Another cause may have been large, **sustained** volcanic eruptions around the world. Or there may have been a large fall in sea levels. Sustained global cooling or warming is also a likely cause.

Back from the Dead

Can a species come back from the dead? Not really, but sometimes people get it wrong and think a species is extinct when it really isn't. The giant coelacanth fish was thought to have become extinct 65 million years ago. But in 1938, a living coelacanth was found off the South African coast. It is one of a handful of species thought to be extinct that was later found living.





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