

Tropical rainforests

Tropical rainforests (found only near the equator) are the oldest ecosystems on Earth and they are home to millions of people, plants and animals. The enormous amount of rain and tropical heat means that the conditions in the rainforest are humid and damp. These rainforests only cover 6% of the surface of the Earth but scientists believe that about 50% of the plant and animal species in the world live in them.

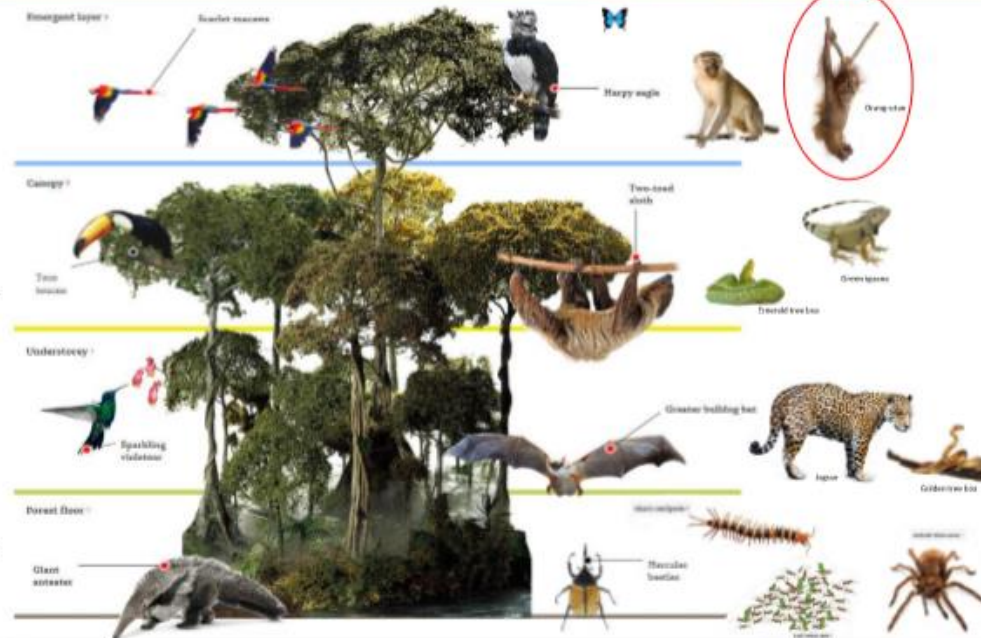


Emergent layer - tree tops that poke up above the canopy for plenty of sunlight. It is also windy & rainy.

Canopy - leaves of the trees provide a 'roof' over the forest, preventing sunlight from entering. There is a plentiful supply of nuts and fruit so many animals live here.















Understorey - warm and humid where young trees and shrubs are found. Many popular house plants (ferns) come from this layer.

Forest floor - very dark and hot. Decomposition takes place here with fungi & insects breaking down the plants.



Up to 28 000 species
are expected to become
extinct by 2250.

Key vocabulary

camouflage		The way an animal hides itself by blending in to its surroundings.	Equator		An imaginary circle around the Earth. It runs East & West in between the North and South Poles.
climate		The weather & temperature usually found in an area.	extinct		An animal or plant species that has completely died out.
colony		A group of the same kind of animal that live and work together.	habitat		The place where a living thing makes its home.
decomposition		When something breaks up and decays (rots).	indigenous		A living thing that belongs to an area naturally.
deforestation		The destruction of trees over a large area.	logging		Felling (cutting down individual) trees.
ecosystem		A community of plants & animals that depend on each other to survive.	threat		Something that can cause harm to a plant, animal or habitat.
environment		Everything in the world around us that can affect our lives.	vegetation		The plant life growing in a certain area.

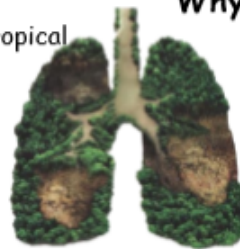
Why is the rainforest important?

Many medicines have been discovered in the tropical rainforest (ginger to treat nausea and quinine to treat malaria).

Many foods come from the rainforest (chocolate, coffee, bananas)

Other products include rubber and bamboo.

It is often called the lungs of the planet for its role in absorbing carbon dioxide (a greenhouse gas) and producing oxygen, upon which all animals depend for survival.



Why is the rainforest being destroyed?

- 1) To clear space for farming: growing crops (soya beans & palm oil) and grazing land for beef cattle.
- 2) Chopping down trees for wood.
- 3) To build roads to mine for metal, gold and diamonds.
- 4) To dig for oil.
- 5) To flood areas to make dams and generate electricity