

The Amazon Rainforest

Where Is the Amazon Rainforest?

The Amazon rainforest spans over eight countries in South America and is the world's largest rainforest. It covers an area of over six million square kilometres and it is over 24 times the size of the United Kingdom! Like other tropical rainforests, it is hot and humid throughout the year and generally has a large amount of rainfall.



What Is in the Amazon Rainforest?

The Amazon rainforest contains millions of different species; scientists state that it is the one of the most biologically diverse places on Earth. Additionally, it is thought that more than 30 million people live there. Most people who live there follow a lifestyle that incorporates the modern world. However, some people who live in the rainforest follow a more traditional lifestyle and rely on natural resources for food, clothing and medicine.

The Amazon river contains a vast range of fish, including piranhas. Most piranhas are carnivores which have sharp, triangular teeth. The pink river dolphin - which is one of the only freshwater dolphin species in the world - can also be found here.

The rainforest is made up of four layers: emergent, canopy, understory and forest floor. Different species dwell in each of these layers due to the contrasting conditions.

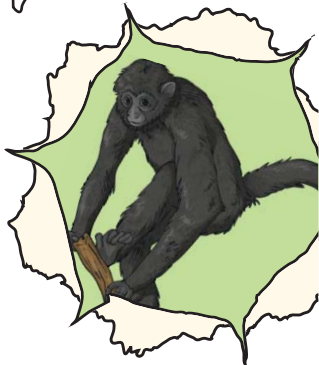
Emergent Layer

The emergent layer is the top layer of the rainforest. The Brazil nut tree, which can live for hundreds of years, is found here. Animals that glide or fly, such as birds, bats or butterflies, move between the towering trees.



Canopy

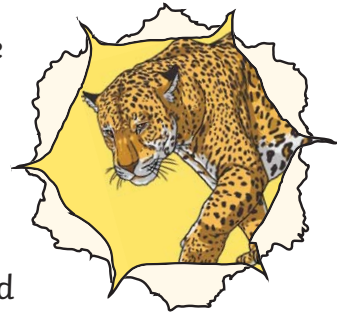
Beneath the emergent layer is the canopy. The trees are close together which forms a roof over the other two layers. As there is an abundance of food in this layer due to fruit trees, it is where most animals live in the rainforest. Spider monkeys, sloths and toucans are a few of the species that can be found here.





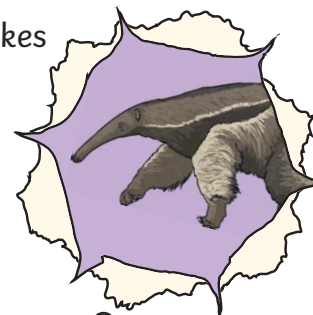
Understory

The understory (which is warm and dimly-lit) provides a perfect habitat for frogs, who thrive in the moist conditions. The dark environment and thick vegetation are a great source of camouflage for certain animals, such as the jaguar. Some plants grow large leaves in order to catch any of the rain that trickles down through the canopy and others have thick, tough leaves to deter predators. In addition, some plants in this layer are very brightly coloured or have a strong smell; these features of the plants attract animals in order to help pollination and new plants grow.



Forest Floor

The forest floor is very dark, which makes it extremely difficult for any plants to grow, and it is full of decaying matter. Animals, such as anteaters and wild pigs, feast on the different insects that can be found there.



What Are the Threats to the Amazon Rainforest?

The act of deforestation (when large areas of trees are cut down) is threatening the beauty and the future of the Amazon. Every minute, an area which is roughly the same size as five football pitches is cut down in the Amazon rainforest. There are many reasons for deforestation, such as fires, building and illegal gold mining; however, the leading cause for deforestation in the Amazon is the creation of grazing areas for cattle. Due to the rise in deforestation, certain species of animals, such as the hyacinth macaw, are at risk of becoming endangered.

The preservation of the Amazon rainforest is extremely important in helping reduce climate change. The rainforest covers a large area and plants remove carbon dioxide - which is harmful to the planet - from the air and release oxygen. Scientists fear that if deforestation in the Amazon rainforest continues to increase, global warming will continue to rise. While some measures have been implemented to try and protect the rainforests, many people believe that governments should impose stricter action. It is thought that this may help protect the natural environment, ensure the survival of different species and help prevent climate change.

Questions

1. What are some of the reasons for deforestation? Tick **two**.

- ☐ water pollution
- ☐ illegal gold mining
- ☐ melting ice caps
- ☐ creation of grazing areas for cattle

2. Draw **four** lines and match each term with its definition.

diverse

dwell

moist

impose

Slightly wet or damp.

Varied or different.

To establish or force something.

To live in.

3. Fill in the missing words.

These _____ of the plants attract animals in order to help
_____ and new plants grow.

4. Name **two** animals that you can find in the Amazon river.

- _____
- _____

5. Look at the section under the sub-heading **Canopy**.

Find and copy one word which means the same as 'a lot of'.

6. Why do you think the forest floor is full of decaying matter?

7. **Scientists fear that if deforestation in the Amazon rainforest continues to increase, global warming will continue to rise.**

Why do you think the author chose to include scientists' thoughts in the text?

8. Summarise what you have learnt about the understory of the Amazon rainforest in 30 words or fewer.

9. Predict the impact of teaching people about the threats that face the Amazon rainforest.

10. Compare the forest floor and the canopy in the Amazon rainforest.
