

10 interesting things about ecosystems

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A school of fish swims by coral on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia. Photo from: Rick Loomis/Los Angeles Times via Getty Images.

An ecosystem is like a busy little city. It is a community of living things. An ecosystem is made up of plants and animals. Their surroundings are part of it, too. Soil, plants and water are important in ecosystems.

In a healthy ecosystem, all the parts work together. The plants and animals rely on each other to survive. Some ecosystems are small. A backyard garden is one example. Others can be huge. A whole rainforest is one big ecosystem.

Let's learn more about ecosystems. Here are 10 facts about them.

Coral Reefs Are Beautiful And Delicate

Coral reefs are underwater ecosystems. Corals look like rocks. But they are really animals! Their rocky part is like a hard shell. It is similar to a clam shell.

Many animals live in coral reefs. Crabs, sea stars and sea turtles live in reefs. Lots of fish do, too. The reef is a busy place.

Half The World's Species Live In Tropical Rain Forests

Tropical rain forests are near the equator. This is an invisible line around our planet. It circles the middle of Earth.

Rain forests are warm and wet. This is good weather for plants. It helps them grow.

Half of the world's living things live in rain forests! Many are found only in rain forests. They could not live anywhere else on Earth. The rain forest is just right for them.



To Live In The Desert, You Have To Save Water

Deserts get very little rain. The land is very dry. So living things have to find and save water. They have to be creative.

The kangaroo mouse is one example. This mouse lives in the Nevada desert. It never needs to drink water. It gets the water it needs from seeds.

Grasslands Are All Around

Grasslands are one of the biggest ecosystems on Earth. These grassy areas get some rain, but not too much. They are home to many plants and animals. Some animals eat the grass. Others eat the grass-eaters.

You can find grasslands in the United States. Cows live on grasslands in the U.S.

You can also find grasslands in Africa. There, you would see lions and elephants!



Freshwater Ecosystems Have Rare Species

Not all plants and animals like to live in salty water. Freshwater is better for them. So they live in ponds, lakes and rivers. These are freshwater ecosystems.

Some incredible animals live in freshwater. One is the river dolphin. These dolphins are very rare. They live in freshwater in Asia and South America.

In The Tundra, Life Is Tough

The tundra is cold and windy. It always feels like winter. There is tundra near the north and south poles of our planet. It is also at the top of tall mountains.

The tundra is a hard place to live. Still, some plants and animals can. Short, scruffy shrubs live in the tundra. So do polar bears and penguins.

The Bottom Of The Ocean Has Thriving Communities

At the bottom of the sea there are small underwater volcanoes. They are called vents. The vents shoot out hot water and gas.

Would you want to live next door to a deep sea vent? Probably not! Yet some animals love it. Clams and shrimp live near vents. Also nearby are giant tube worms. These worms really are giant. They can be 6 feet long!

Wetlands Are Home To Baby Fish

Swamps, marshes and bogs are wetlands. They can have freshwater, salt water, or both.

Lots of animals lay eggs in wetlands. It is a great place for babies to grow. For creatures that eat bugs, it is a good place to snack, too. Insects are always zipping around.

Boreal Forests Are Home To Lots Of Trees

Many countries have boreal forests. These forests are not too hot and not too cold. Their trees are green all year. Animals like bears and eagles live there.

There Are Ecosystems Even In Big Cities

Ecosystems are not only found in wild places. Big cities have them, too. Many animals share cities with people. They learn to live near roads and buildings. Some city animals are raccoons, coyotes and birds. You can also find all sorts of bugs in cities.



Quiz

- 1 Read the sentences below. They are the first part of a summary of the article.
Plants, animals and the environment around them are an ecosystem. There are different ecosystems around the world.
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Which answer BEST fills in the blank to complete the summary?

- (A) People should take the time to learn more about each ecosystem.
- (B) The most important ecosystem is the rainforest, because it has so many plants.
- (C) Water and soil are also important parts of ecosystems around the world.
- (D) Some are land-based, like rainforests, and some are water-based, like oceans.
- 2 How are rain forests different from boreal forests?
- (A) Rain forests are warm and wet, but boreal forests are not too cold or too hot.
- (B) Rain forests have lots of different plants, but boreal forests only have big trees.
- (C) Rain forests are near the equator, but boreal forests are only in the United States.
- (D) Rain forests do not have good weather for plants, but boreal forests are green all year.
- 3 Read the section "In The Tundra, Life Is Tough." Which selection BEST explains why life is difficult in the tundra?
- (A) The tundra is cold and windy. It always feels like winter.
- (B) There is tundra near the north and south poles of our planet. It is also at the top of tall mountains.
- (C) The tundra is a hard place to live. Still, some plants and animals can.
- (D) Short, scruffy shrubs live in the tundra. So do polar bears and penguins.
- 4 Read the section "There Are Ecosystems Even In Big Cities." Which question is answered in this section?
- (A) Which wild places have ecosystems?
- (B) What animals are found in city ecosystems?
- (C) What do animals eat near roads and buildings?
- (D) What kinds of bugs can be found in cities?