

## RAINFORESTS

Beautiful blue butterflies fly from flower to flower, and birds fly in and out of the tall trees. Jaguars wait silently in the shadows, and above them monkeys play. And around you there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of different flowers, plants, and trees – coffee, oranges, bananas, rice, and others that we do not have names for yet. It is hot and wet – rain falls around you, and clouds hide the tops of the trees. Yes, the rainforest is a wonderful, strange place.

But it is a place in great danger too. Every day people cut down its great trees to make farms, roads, and towns. Come with us to the rainforest and meet its people, its animals, and its plants. Read about the people who want to protect the rainforest – and the people who want to sell it and destroy it.

Come with us to the rainforest – before it disappears for ever . . .

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## Rainforests

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# Rainforests



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# 1 Rainforests

Rainforests are perhaps the most important places on earth. And yet we destroy thousands of square kilometres of rainforest every year. In 1950, rainforests covered 15 per cent of the earth's land. Fifty years later we have destroyed more than half of these rainforests. Will there still be any rainforests in the year 2050? No one knows the answer to that question. We must learn about the rainforests and try to protect them. We can use the rainforests *and* save them, too.

Rainforests are home to about fifty million people and millions of species of animals, plants, and insects. In one square kilometre of rainforest there can be more than 75,000 different species of trees. In all of Britain there are only 1,443 different species of plants. So when we destroy the rainforests thousands of species of plants and animals disappear, and forest people lose their homes.

The leaves of rainforest trees make about 40 per cent of the earth's oxygen. Can the earth live without the oxygen of the rainforests? What will happen to us when there are no more rainforests? We do not know – and let's hope that we never find out the answer!

The weather in a rainforest is hot all the year round – usually between 20 °C and 28 °C every day. The weather is always wet, too: rainforests have more than 200 millimetres of rain in a month. In Belém, in Brazil, it rains on about

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243 days each year. And the rain is heavy! On a rainy day in a rainforest 20 millimetres of rain can fall. On a rainy day in London, about 5 millimetres of rain falls.

The largest rainforest in the world is the Amazon rainforest which grows in nine different countries in Latin America. The Amazon rainforest is about a hundred million years old, and has more species of animals and plants than any other place on earth. You can find 20 per cent of all the bird species in the world here. The great Amazon River, which runs through the Amazon rainforest, is the second longest river in the world. It runs 6,400 kilometres from the Andes Mountains to the Atlantic Ocean at Belém, in Brazil, where it is more than 300 kilometres across. There are more than 2,000 species of fish in the Amazon River, more than in all the Atlantic Ocean.

But this big rainforest is getting smaller. Between 1978 and 2004, more than half a million square kilometres of the Amazon rainforest disappeared.

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The second largest rainforest is in Central Africa, and the world's ninth longest river, the Congo River, runs through it. There are also some rainforests in West Africa.

One part of the Central African rainforest is in Madagascar, which was once part of Africa. About 160 million years ago it moved away from Africa, and since that time it has been an island. Its animals and plants have changed very little in those years, and most of them live in no other place on earth. About fifty different species of lemur live in Madagascar and scientists are still finding new species. In Andohahela, there are twelve species of lemurs living in 760 square kilometres. The sifaka, a lemur with very long legs, can jump from one tree to another and travel a long way without touching the ground.

The third great rainforest is in southeast Asia, in Burma, Malaysia, Borneo, and Indonesia, and also in some of the islands of the South Pacific.

Between 1950 and 1995, Indonesia lost half of its

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rainforest. It sells most of the wood from its forest to rich countries. The Rajah Brooke's birdwing butterfly lives in these forests. It is one of the world's largest butterflies, with wings about 15 centimetres across. But Indonesia is destroying the home of this beautiful insect.

Australia has rainforests too, but they are disappearing fast. In 1988, someone found a new species of kangaroo in the rainforest of Australia. This was the Bennett's tree kangaroo. Most kangaroos live on the ground, but the Bennett's tree kangaroo, which has strong arms and wide feet, lives in trees. When the forests disappear, how many new species, like this kangaroo, disappear too? We cannot know.

Most rainforests grow on flat land, but some grow high in the mountains and are called cloud forests. Some rainforests grow by the sea, usually at the mouths of great rivers, where big trees called mangroves grow in

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the water. The biggest mangrove forests are in India and Bangladesh.

There are temperate rainforests too, which are wet, but not as hot as the rainforests in places like the Amazon. The temperate rainforest in North America grows in north California, and goes north by the Pacific Ocean, through Canada to Alaska. Rainfall in this forest can be more than 200 millimetres a month, and some of the trees grow 48 metres tall. Temperate rainforests also grow in Tasmania, Australia.

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