

Rainforest Animals Worksheet

Ages 8-12 · Name: _____ · Date: _____

Reading Passage

Rainforests are defined less by their trees than by their climate: consistently warm temperatures and extremely heavy rainfall year-round, with no true dry season, found in a band circling the equator across the Amazon basin in South America, the Congo Basin in Central Africa, and the rainforests of Southeast Asia. Though rainforests cover only a small fraction of Earth's land surface, they are estimated to host more than half of the world's known plant and animal species, packed into a density found nowhere else on the planet.

A rainforest is structured in distinct vertical layers, each with its own climate and community of species. The emergent layer is made up of the tallest trees, poking through the canopy to catch full sun and strong wind. Below it, the canopy forms a dense, near-continuous ceiling of leaves and branches that captures most of the sunlight and hosts the greatest concentration of animal life in the entire rainforest. The understory, dim and still, receives only a fraction of the light that reaches the canopy. At the very bottom, the forest floor is nearly dark and covered in a thin layer of leaf litter that decomposes remarkably fast in the heat and humidity.

Despite supporting some of the densest vegetation and animal life on Earth, rainforest soil is often nutrient-poor. Fallen leaves and dead organic matter break down and get reabsorbed by shallow root systems almost as quickly as they hit the ground, rather than accumulating into a nutrient-rich topsoil. Many rainforest animals also rely on camouflage so precise it can be nearly impossible to spot a resting insect or frog against bark or leaf litter. Others take the reverse approach: bright, high-contrast coloration, like that of poison dart frogs, functions as a warning signal that an animal is toxic or dangerous to eat -- a strategy known as aposematism.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Name the four vertical layers of a rainforest, in order from the top down.

2. Which rainforest layer holds the greatest concentration of animal life?

3. Why is rainforest soil often nutrient-poor despite such dense plant growth?

4. What is it called when a brightly colored animal, like a poison dart frog, uses its coloring to warn predators it is dangerous to eat?

Answer Key

1. Emergent layer, canopy, understory, forest floor.
2. The canopy.
3. Dead leaves and organic matter decompose and get reabsorbed by shallow roots so quickly in the hot, humid climate that nutrients stay locked in living plants and animals instead of building up in the soil.
4. Aposematism.