

# Animals of the Tropical Rainforest

by ReadWorks



Where can you find more animal species than anywhere else in the world? It's not a zoo or the circus. It's a very special type of ecosystem called a rainforest, and most rainforests can be found in tropical climates in the Southern Hemisphere.

Why are rainforests only found in certain parts of the globe? Let's start with geography. A "hemisphere" is a half of the earth, so the Northern Hemisphere is the northern half and the Southern Hemisphere is the southern half of Earth. They are divided by a line called the equator. The Northern Hemisphere starts just above the equator and ends at the Arctic Circle. The Southern Hemisphere starts just below the equator and ends at the South Pole in Antarctica.

The two most common climates in the Southern Hemisphere, temperate and tropical, both have lots of precipitation. The difference is that temperate climates have warm summers and cold winters, while tropical climates are warm all year long.

Because there's lots of rain and the temperature stays at about 75-85 degrees Fahrenheit year round, rainforests in tropical climates have optimal conditions for many animal species. Rainforest animals don't have to worry about freezing during the winter or finding shade in the summer. Plus, because it rains almost every day, animals rarely have to search for water. This makes tropical rainforests a suitable home for many species.

In addition to their tropical climates, another reason why rainforests are home to so many different types of animals is because they are some of the oldest *ecosystems* on Earth. Scientists think that some

rainforests have been around since dinosaurs roamed the earth at least 100 million years ago.

One of the rainforests in the world is the Amazon rainforest in Brazil. Jaguars, toucans, parrots, and tarantulas all call it home. Yet this is only a small sample of rainforest animals. Many other rare and often endangered animals can be found in rainforests, like the okapi. This beautiful creature has striped hindquarters and front legs like a zebra. Okapis also have tall perky ears, like a giraffe, and they mostly live in the Ituri rainforest of Central Africa. In fact, there are so many different types of animals in tropical rainforests that we haven't been able to name all the species yet.

Rainforests are also home to some animals you might want to avoid, like flying snakes (although their name is actually a misnomer since they can only glide and not gain altitude) and spiders that eat birds. Other rainforest animals, like the coral snake and the poison arrow frog, produce a natural poison that protects them from harm. Get too close, and they could easily harm you with poison. Many of these species are *endemic* to tropical rainforests, meaning that rainforests are the only place they live on Earth.

Some species have had to adapt to their surroundings in the rainforest in order to survive. For example, toucans and parrots both have very large, strong beaks. These powerful beaks make it easy for them to crack open the tough shells of nuts that grow on many rainforest trees. Birds with small beaks, like robins and sparrows living in the Northern Hemisphere, probably would not be able to survive in the rainforest without being able to crack open hard nuts.

Another way animals adapt to life in the rainforest is by camouflaging themselves to hide from predators. An insect called the "walking stick" lives in the palm tree, and it blends in so well with it that it's practically unnoticeable unless it moves. When some butterflies close their wings, they look identical to leaves, which masks them from predators.

Despite the biodiversity in the rainforests of the Southern Hemisphere, many species are quickly becoming extinct, as people cut down trees and destroy natural habitats. Other threats to species of the rainforest include illegally trading monkeys to sell them as pets and killing jaguars for their highly-valued skins. Pollution from mining has killed many types of fish as well.

Because of the unique tropical climate in rainforests of the Southern Hemisphere, the animals within these ecosystems most likely cannot survive elsewhere if their habitats are destroyed. It's crucial to take care of our planet, especially the rainforests, so that these animals can continue to thrive.