

Environmental Threats

What Types of Environments Exist on Earth?

Wherever we look on Earth, the planet provides the most amazing habitats for its millions of species (types of living things): **the deepest oceans; the wettest rainforests; the driest deserts; the coldest ice floes; the highest mountains** and every other environment (the surroundings in which species live) in-between.



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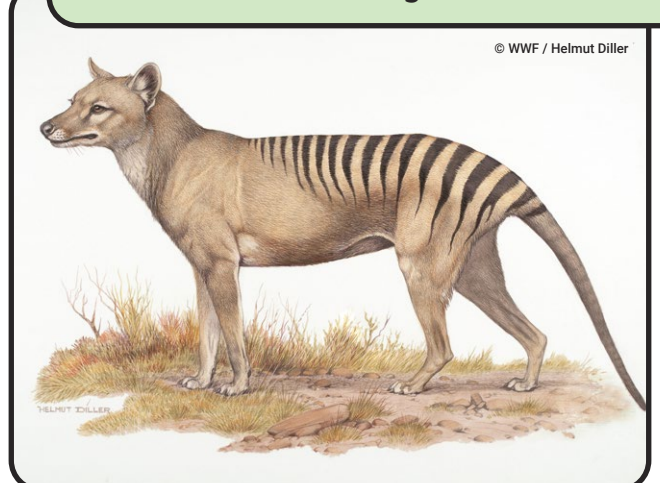
Each of these environments contains ecosystems: communities in which plants, animals and the environment all rely on each other. When an ecosystem faces a threat to its environment, the entire web of life is at risk, leading to a reduction in or even the extinction of some species.



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It is thought the Pyrenean ibex became extinct in 2000, mostly due to hunting by humans and disease.

The Tasmanian wolf became extinct in 1936, mostly due to hunting and habitat destruction by humans.



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Land Development



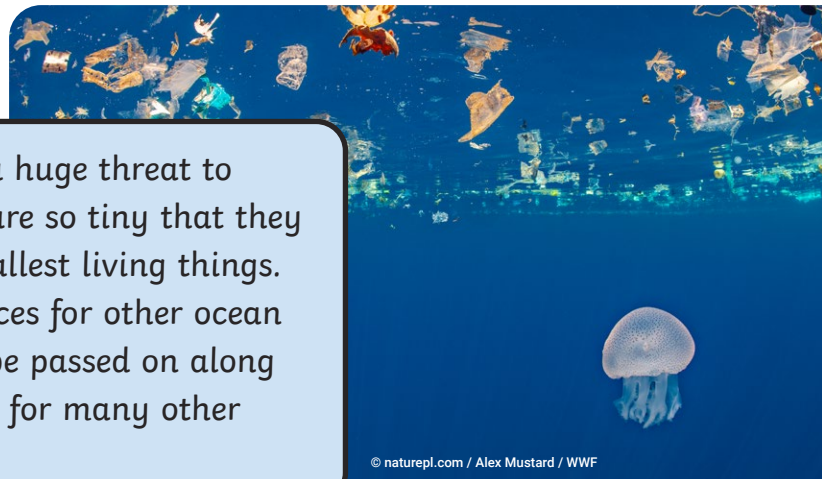
Much of the Earth's land is changing irreversibly. The huge demand for food due to human population growth means large amounts of land are cleared for farming. Forests, hedgerows and meadows are all important habitats for the world's wildlife but they are under threat as land is used for grazing livestock and growing crops.



Forests are home to 80% of plants and animals that live on land. They are important to the Earth because they provide oxygen and absorb a greenhouse gas called carbon dioxide. Deforestation is a huge threat to all the species that inhabit forests and to the local communities who rely on them. As well as cutting down trees to clear land for farming cattle, other reasons for the loss of forests include timber logging, fires, mining and human resettlement.

Ocean Struggles

Plastic pollution and other debris pose a huge threat to ocean and polar wildlife. Microplastics are so tiny that they can be eaten by some of the oceans' smallest living things. These creatures are important food sources for other ocean dwellers and these plastics might then be passed on along the food chain, causing health problems for many other animals, including humans.



The demand for fish as a healthy food source is increasing and many people rely on fishing as their source of income. Overfishing, which is when some species of fish are caught more quickly than they can replenish themselves, can create a lack of food for a range of marine life. Many fish are also caught accidentally and are thrown away unnecessarily.



More carbon dioxide is entering the Earth's atmosphere because of deforestation and the use of fossil fuels. This carbon dioxide enters the oceans and mixes with seawater to create a mild acid, which can damage some wildlife, including shellfish and corals.

Climate Change

Climate change due to global warming (the gradual increase in the overall temperature of the Earth's atmosphere due to human activity) poses a huge threat to the world's species. Warmer temperatures are melting polar ice caps, causing rising sea levels. Longer and more severe periods of drought or flooding threaten wildlife, fresh water and crops in deserts, wetlands and grasslands. Warmer, wetter, drier or colder seasons in different parts of the world could also be damaging to the habitats and food sources of many of the Earth's living things.



Fascinating Facts

- Over 150 different chemicals have been found in bee pollen across the world, often because of pesticides used on crops.
- 17% of the Amazon rainforest has disappeared in 50 years.
- 2.6 billion people worldwide rely on fish as a healthy food source in their diet.
- It can take over 400 years for plastic to break down in the ocean.
- 70% of the Earth's surface is covered in water; however, **only** 1% of this is fresh water that can be accessed easily.

Only as humans working together can we attempt to reduce the effects of our actions on the planet's land, oceans and climates in order to protect the world for all of its living things.