

OUR JUNGLES

Key Takeaways:

- Jungles, otherwise known as rain forests or tropical forests, have numerous benefits to people and animals—they store carbon, which helps regulate climate and cool the planet, and provide food, habitat, and medicine. They also play a huge role in purifying our air and water.
- Destroying or degrading these forests harms us all—people lose homes, security, and income, while animals face extinction and the entire planet becomes more vulnerable to climate change.
- The biggest cause of deforestation in rain forests is the clearing of land for agriculture use or to create roads, railways, and other infrastructure. Forest degradation mainly occurs as a result of illegal logging.
- Time has made Borneo's rain forests rich and diverse; they are the oldest rain forests in the world. In the past 50 years, Borneo has lost more than half of its rain forests, leaving a questionable future for its unique variety of species.
- Rain forests are naturally resilient. Areas cleared of trees can spring back to life if given the time and space to do so.
- Orangutans are critically endangered because they are losing their habitat. Their rain forest homes are being transformed into oil palm plantations and other forms of agriculture. However, there is a responsible, sustainable way of harvesting palm oil that if implemented would ensure that we benefit from forests without destroying them.
- Populations of many rain forest species like gorillas and elephants are threatened by poaching. Poachers kill about 20,000 African elephants every year (or one every 25 minutes) for their tusks, which will be traded and sold illegally as decorative pieces.

A Sumatran Orangutan.



GUIDED DISCUSSION PROMPTS

Use these prompts to generate a class or small-group discussion based on the Our Jungles episode or on videos on ourplanet.com.

1 An endemic species is a plant or animal that can be found in only one particular area. This type of isolation can cause species to develop unique traits and behaviors, along with relationships with other wildlife. Why do you think these species never spread to other geographic locations? What kind of effects would this geographic exclusivity have on a species' chances for survival?

Examples from the episode:

In New Guinea, more than half of the plants and animals are found nowhere else due to the fact that they were separated from other areas by rock formations. The animals here are very unusual, such as the black sicklebill bird that can morph into different shapes and the birds of paradise that perform elaborate dances to attract mates. If these plants or animals were to lose their rain forest homes, their species would have no chance of surviving because they are not found anywhere else.

There are over 39 species of pitcher plants in Borneo, most of which aren't found anywhere else in the world. These plants rely on their animal neighbors, such as mountain tree shrews (also endemic to Borneo), to help them survive. The shrews eat the sugar out of pitcher plants' lids, then defecate along the outside of the plant. Once the rain washes the waste into the plant, the pitchers get those extra nutrients that they need. Since these species rely on each other and are found nowhere else in the world, if something were to happen to either of them, it would jeopardize the future of the other.

2 Poaching for illegal wildlife trade is the leading cause of wildlife loss in the Congo Basin, driven by an ever increasing demand. With the region's human population expanding, the rich resources found in this area are being depleted for people's livelihoods. This includes the trade of bushmeat, or wild game, which a lot of communities look to for sustenance or income. In the Congo alone, over a million tons of bushmeat are consumed each year. What impact does this unsustainable wildlife hunting have, not only on the rain forest ecosystem but also on the people involved? Are there beneficial alternatives?

Example from the episode:

Families of lowland gorillas in the Congo rely on the silverback male to provide for and protect the family, primarily from poachers. Poaching for bushmeat has significantly harmed gorilla populations, so this lead male has to continuously be aware of the family's surroundings. This trade for bushmeat has helped spread the Ebola virus, which is deadly to both animals and humans. In order to protect gorillas and stop the spreading of disease, new protected areas are being designated for gorilla populations, and alternative sources of income, such as ecotourism, are being introduced to communities in order to protect gorillas while helping local people.



GUIDED DISCUSSION PROMPTS

3 Deforestation, fragmentation of habitats, and degradation are occurring in forests all over the world as a result of agriculture, illegal logging, and infrastructure. Discuss what happens to a forest when it is cleared, fragmented, or degraded. Would those activities affect the ecosystems or species the same way or differently? Name species from the episode that are affected by deforestation or forest fragmentation, and explain how they are affected.

Examples from the episode:

Ninety percent of the primary rain forest in the Philippines is gone; what's left is the last refuge for the Philippine eagle. Its survival depends on finding territory with large stretches of rain forest; fragmented forests don't leave room for prey to support these animals.

In addition to being home to half of the planet's remaining rain forests, the Amazon is also the home of black spider monkeys. These monkeys spend most of their time in trees, coming down only to retrieve nutrients from salt lakes. They prefer mature rain forests and seldom venture into disturbed habitats, so they are especially vulnerable to the effects of forest fragmentation.

In the Amazon, deforestation displaces countless rain forest species, from top predators like jaguars down to the thousands of varieties of frogs.

4 We have replaced countless acres of rain forest with oil palm trees, pushing many animals out of their homes and close to extinction. However, there are ways to sustainably harvest palm oil without depleting the habitats of animals. Discuss possible solutions for continuing to utilize and profit from this natural resource while minimizing the impact on the environment.

Example from the episode:

We lose 100 orangutans every week because of human activity, primarily due to rain forest conversion for oil palm agriculture. In the past 20 years, orangutan rain forest has declined 80%. With better management practices, the palm oil industry could continue to benefit without depleting these forests of the habitats so many depend on. By implementing stronger protection of these forests while monitoring palm oil production to ensure it's being done sustainably, both people and nature will benefit.

5 Consider all of the ways rain forests have touched your life today. What have you used that came from a rain forest resource? Try to generate as many ideas as possible, including furniture, building materials for floors or walls, doors and window frames, fruits, paper, tissues, toilet paper, clean air, pencils, rulers, toys, musical instruments, medicine, shampoo, soap, pizza dough, cookies, chocolate, bicycle tires, soccer balls, etc.

6 What can we do to help rain forests and the species that depend on them? What small changes could we make in our everyday routines that could greatly impact the future of rain forests?



ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY IDEA	SUBJECTS
Create a public service announcement that will raise awareness about wildlife crime and how to speak up for animals that have no voice.— Be the Voice	Language arts
Perform an audit in your school or classroom to discover just how many everyday products come from forests, and sign the FSC pledge.— Trees and Tigers	Social studies
Create a mosaic or collage in the shape of an elephant or orangutan using labels of products made from palm oil.— Watch Your Noodles for Elephants Sake	Arts
Many of the animals in this episode are seen strategically using tools to obtain what they need (orangutans using sticks to dig out ants; elephants mining for salty plants underwater using their trunks). Provide students with a commonly used tool and challenge them to be creative in marketing it for a different use than what it's most known for.	STEM

What We Can Do:

- Spread the word—talk to your friends and family about the importance of rain forests and all of the benefits they provide.
- Encourage smart shopping—be sure to look for the FSC logo on wood and paper products to help keep forests healthy for the betterment of all of us (animals, humans, oxygen, climate). Also, try to make a conscious effort when purchasing items containing palm oil to look for a label indicating it was produced sustainably.
- Plant trees—start an effort within your school or community.
- Be aware of illegal wildlife trade—poaching is a major threat to rain forest animals; never buy products that come from elephants, tigers, gorillas, or other endangered species.
- Enjoy the forests—spend time in forests and appreciate the health benefits they have to offer, but always remember to leave them how you found them!

Additional Resources:

- [Which everyday products contain palm oil](#)—get familiar with the labels on your groceries
- [Orangutans and palm oil](#)—how palm oil plantations and illegal logging are driving habitat loss
- [Endangered species threatened by unsustainable palm oil](#)—five of the most impacted rain forest species
- [Thirty Hills](#)—WWF's 60-year challenge to save Sumatra's rain forest
- [Gorilla facts](#)—FAQs on one of the rain forests' most influential residents
- [Orangutan species webpage](#)—outlines the threats facing these critically endangered species
- [Gorilla species webpage](#)—why this close cousin of humans is in need of protection
- [Amazon habitat webpage](#)—facts about this rich diverse ecoregion
- [Congo rain forest and basin webpage](#)—exploring the world's second-largest tropical rain forest
- [What's a boreal forest? And the three other types of forests around the world](#)—explains the difference between boreal, tropical, subtropical, and temperate forests
- [Our Planet official webpage](#)

