

Special Feature

Biodiversity – the Web of Life

Biological Diversity is the difference between all living things on earth.

Look around you at the natural world; you will find that very few things are EXACTLY alike.

Take for example the species *Homo Sapiens*, the scientific name for human beings – look around at your family, your friends, your teachers, and your neighbours. Are any of them the same? No they aren't.



Look at these pictures. All of these animals are frogs... but they are all different from one another!

Another thing that is diverse (or different) in the natural world, is the way different animals and plants work with their surroundings.

Biodiversity is also the difference in ECOSYSTEMS. Ecosystems are like nature families. In each ecosystem, plants and animals depend on the weather, the type of earth, the amount of water and on other living things around them. They need each other to survive. These pictures show only a few ecosystems:



There are many different types of ecosystems - some are very big, such as deserts, forests and mountains. Others are not so big, such as ponds and gardens. Every large ecosystem will have many smaller ecosystems within it.

Text from "Biodiversity - the Web of Life" and "Why is biological diversity so important?" is courtesy of "Biodiversity for Kids" from the Convention of Biological Diversity at <http://kids.biodiv.org>.

2010 International Year of Biodiversity

The United Nations have declared the year 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity. Lots of organisations around the world will be encouraging us to protect the biodiversity (or biological diversity), particularly in our own locality. Notice Nature (www.noticenature.ie) is Ireland's public awareness campaign on biodiversity. The National Biodiversity Data Centre in Ireland has the job of collecting, managing and looking at information on our country's biological diversity (www.biodiversityireland.ie). The "Biodiversity for Kids" website from the Convention of Biological Diversity (<http://kids.biodiv.org>) also has more information on biodiversity for children, as well as some fun games.

Why is biological diversity so important?

So far, only about 1.5 million species have been identified, out of the 13 million or so thought currently to exist. Some estimates of the overall number are closer to 30 million.

What about the animals and plant species we don't know about?

Animals that come out only at night in tangled forests, or that live deep in the ocean, where no humans can see them?

Having many kinds of plants and animals on this planet is good for many reasons:

- Some of the species we don't know about yet could be important medicine, or food that we have not yet discovered.
- Some animals and plants are in charge of clean up! They turn dead plants and animals into earth. That way new things can grow and live.
- Some plants need to be pollinated by another plant. Since plants can't walk, they need to get a ride from animals that do. And if these animals are gone... the plants will quickly die too.
- If there was only one kind of corn, for example, then one kind of disease could wipe out all of the corn on earth! But thanks to biodiversity, there is more than one kind of corn, with protection from different diseases.

Can you think of what would happen if there were no biodiversity? How would that affect us and our world?