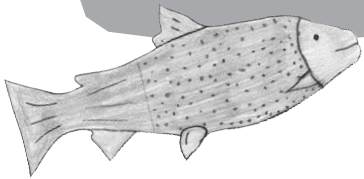




TEMPERATE RAINFOREST ECOLOGY Questions and Answers



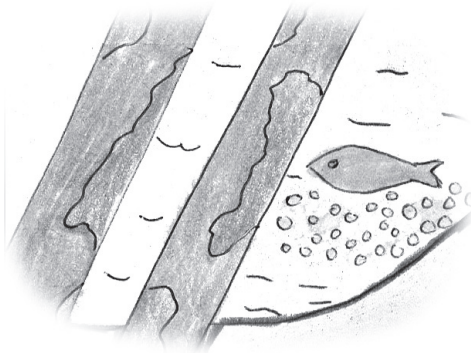
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Question What is a temperate rainforest?

Answer A temperate rainforest is a very rare forest found in only a few places in the world. They are forests that grow in the ‘temperate’ zone (temperate meaning having a moderate climate – neither too hot nor too cold). They are home to some of the biggest and oldest trees in the world, with some measuring over 95 metres tall, 22 metres around or 7 metres thick! Generally, temperate rainforests grow in mountainous coastal areas that have a lot of rain (2-3 meters per year). They are home to thousands of different types of plants and animals.

Q What is an old-growth forest?

A In the book *Saving Our Ancient Forests* Seth Zuckerman characterizes old-growth (also called ancient) forests as follows: “It takes more than just old, living trees to make a forest ancient...the five factors are 1.) At least two tree species, with a range of ages and sizes including several large, living coniferous trees that are at least 200 years old or greater than 32 inches in diameter; 2.) A forest canopy of many layers; 3.) Several large, standing dead trees (called ‘snags’); 4.) Large logs on the forest floor; and 5.) Large logs in streams.”



Q Where is the temperate rainforest found?

A Once they flourished on every continent, except for Africa and Antarctica. In North America alone, it thrived along the entire Pacific coastline, ranging from southern Oregon to the Pacific rim of Alaska. Today, they survive only in fragments along the mountainous coastal areas of North America, (Alaska, Canada, Washington and Oregon), Chile, New Zealand, Tasmania, and Norway. Within these countries, the temperate rainforest’s range is confined to narrow bands along the coast, and is only found growing in valley floors and on the lowest mountain slopes. To date, almost half of the original temperate rainforest in the world has been lost to development and logging.

Q How much temperate rainforest is in BC?

A BC is home to almost 25% (that’s one quarter) of the world’s remaining temperate rainforests. Within BC, they cover a small area roughly the size of Switzerland, and is limited to the Mainland coast, Haida Gwaii/ Queen Charlotte Islands and western Vancouver Island.

Q How is a temperate rainforest different from a tropical rainforest?

A Temperate rainforests grow in cool climates and tropical rainforests grow in areas that are much hotter. Because of the difference in climate, temperate rainforests have different plants and animals than tropical rainforests have. For example, toucans, jaguars and monkeys live in tropical rainforests whereas grizzly bears, bald eagles and salmon live in temperate rainforests. Here’s a rainforest hint: look at the countries near the equator of the map – those countries

have tropical rainforests! The countries further north and south of the equator have more “temperate” climates and this is where you would find temperate rainforests.

Q Why are temperate rainforests important?

A They are endangered ecosystems – only 0.1% of the earth’s entire land surface is covered by temperate rainforest. Although small, they play many critical roles. They are a source of potential medicinal cures for everything from cancer to the common cold. They provide critical habitat for thousands of species of plants and animals, including endangered and threatened species such as the Northern goshawk and the grizzly bear. They perform an important role as ‘lungs of the earth’, helping to absorb carbon dioxide and slowing global warming. They provide important jobs for people, helping to support communities; and they have been traditional territory for First Nations peoples for thousands of years. And these are just a few reasons! Scientists began studying these ecosystems only 15 years ago., and there’s still so many things that we do not know about them.

Q Who lives in the temperate rainforest?

A They are home to at least 68 species of animals, 350 species of birds, 25 species of trees, and countless species of insects, fungi, bacteria, plants and lichens. Grizzly bears, black bears and Kermode bears (a special white version of the black bear) rely on the temperate rainforest for critical habitat, as do wolves, wolverines, mountain goats, black-tailed deer and Roosevelt elk. Smaller animals such as squirrels, pine marten, mice, bats and river otters are also found here. Also birds such as the bald eagle, great blue heron, woodpecker, Marbled Murrelet, Spotted owl and Northern goshawk. And five species of salmon and one species of steelhead are also found here. Another resident is us! For example, First Nations people have relied on the temperate rainforest for thousands of years for food, medicine, and tools. Temperate rainforests provide critical habitat for both humans and animals alike!

Q What would happen if the temperate rainforest were to disappear?

A Good question, because it is disappearing! Many people are worried about destroying them – forever. In losing the rainforest, we are also losing critical habitat for countless plants and animals, including many that haven’t been identified yet. Medical cures that haven’t yet been discovered could be lost. Endangered species could go extinct. People and the communities they live in would suffer as jobs disappeared. Global warming would accelerate. First Nations peoples would lose traditional territories that are critical to their culture. And these are just a few of the potential problems.

The good news is that it’s not too late. BC still has large, intact areas of temperate rainforest. If we all work together to conserve these areas, then we can help to avoid losing them forever – and all of the species, habitats and jobs that go along with it.

Q What can we do to help save the temperate rainforest?

A Lots! Many people have carried out events or projects that helped the temperate rainforest. You can write letters to the newspaper editor that share your ideas and views on the temperate rainforest; educate others by giving a speech to other classes at your school about the temperate rainforest; start a letter-writing campaign to the government, asking them to conserve the temperate rainforest; collect money to be donated to an appropriate group that works to protect the temperate rainforest; start a recycling program in your school; plant trees and other native plants in your community, and so on! Remember, it doesn’t have to be big and elaborate to be effective – small efforts such as re-using paper or turning off the tap are important too!

