



Tropical Factsheets

Rainforest Glossary

Aerial feeders: plants that live in trees and obtain nutrients from the air.

Algae: several groups of plants that are all food makers.

Ambush: the act of attacking unexpectedly from a concealed position.

Amensalism: a relationship between two species where the first causes harm to the second, but the first is not affected by the second.

Antennae: feelers on the heads of insects.

Anti-coagulant: a substance which prevents blood-clotting.

Aril: a brightly coloured seed-covering which attracts animals to eat it.

Arthropod: an animal with a segmented body and jointed limbs, such as an insect, spider or crab.

Bacteria: single-celled organisms that are often parasites or saprophytes and lack nuclei.

Biodiversity: a term that describes species richness, ecosystem complexity and genetic variation.

Buttresses: root structures that help support tall trees.

Canopy: continuous layer of leaves and branches which form a roof over the forest.

Carnivore: an animal-eater.

Commensalism: a relationship between two species where one benefits and the other is neither harmed nor benefits by existing together.

Consumer: plants or animals that eat other plants or animals.

Crustacean: an animal with jointed legs and a shell-like skeleton on the outside, such as a crab.

Cryptozoa: animals that live in the leaf litter.

Decompose: to rot or decay.

Decomposer: plants or animals that break down dead plants or animals.

Detritivores: animals which feed on decaying matter.

Digestive system: organs which prepare food for absorption into the body.

Drip-tips: special shape of rainforest leaves that help distribute the water falling on the forest floor.

Echolocation: measuring distances from objects by sound.

Ecosystem: A community of organisms interacting with one another and with the environment in which they live.

Edge Effects: the impacts occurring at the boundary of an ecosystem and another ecosystem.



Elaiosome: a nutrient parcel attached to a seed which insects eat.

Elkhorn fern: a type of epiphyte that grows on rainforest trees.

Emergents: trees which emerge from the rainforest canopy.

Endangered: species in danger of extinction and unlikely to survive unless threats are removed.

Endemic: a plant or animal which has evolved in and is confined to an area.

Environment: includes all the things and forces that surround the individual at any given time.

Evaporation: the movement of water from a liquid to a vapour eg. from the leaf surface to the atmosphere (transpiration).

Evolution: the process by which new species are formed from pre-existing species over a period of time.

Epiphyte: a plant that grows on another plant, but does not harm it, or take nutrients from it.

Erosion: the wearing away of land areas by natural processes.

Fauna: animal life.

Feral Animal: an animal other than native wildlife.

Fern: a type of plant that grows on the forest floor. It has spore cases under its fronds.

Fig: a tree in rainforests that produces large fruit (eg. Strangler Fig has roots that strangle the tree it's living on.)

Fire regime: the history (including pattern, frequency and intensity) of previous fires within an area.

Flora: plant life.

Foliage: name given to all the leaves on a tree.

Foothills: the base of a hill.

Fragmentation: the isolation of patches of rainforest, usually due to the impacts of human settlement.

Fungi: a group of plants that help decompose dead plant material eg. Bracken fungi, Mushrooms.

Genus: (plural – genera) group of closely related species.

Girth: the distance around the trunk of a tree.

Gastropod: means “stomach-footed” such as snails and slugs.

Geomorphology: study of characteristics, origin and development of land forms.

Gondwana: an ancient super-continent of the southern hemisphere from which South America, Africa, India, Australia and Antarctica are derived.

Gymnosperm: Plants in which the seeds are carried naked on a cone (eg. Hoop Pine *Araucaria cunninghamii*).

Habitat: the native environment where a plant or animal naturally lives or grows.



Herbivore: a plant eater.

Host: a plant or animal that supports a parasite.

Humidity: the ratio of the weight of water vapour in a given quantity of air, to the total weight of water vapour that quantity of air is capable of holding at the temperature in question, expressed as a percentage.

Humus: the black material on top of the soil resulting from the decay of dead material.

Impact: having an effect on the integrity of the area.

Infrastructure: developments such as roads, buildings, water and power supplies, and visitor facilities which support human use of an area.

Insect: an animal with six legs.

Insectivorous: an animal which feeds on insects.

Integrity: the extent to which the natural heritage values of an area are in their natural ecological, physical and aesthetic condition and are capable of sustaining themselves in the long term.

Invertebrate: an animal without a back-bone such as an insect, worm or snail.

Lawyer cane palm: a palm that grows up the trunks of trees.

Leaf litter: the layer of leaves that covers the forest floor.

Leaf mould: a type of fungus that grows on dead leaves.

Lenticels: breathing pores on the trunks of rainforest trees. They look like little lips on the tree trunk.

Liana: a woody vine that grows in the forest ie. on trees and the forest floor.

Lichen: a type of plant growth that consists of an algae and a fungus that live together. It is usually a dull green colour and is rather stringy and coarse.

Life cycle: the course of life of a plant or animal which usually includes periods of youth, maturity and old age.

Lithophytic: plants which can grow on rocks.

Mandible: jaw.

Mesophyll: rainforest tree leaf-size category of 125 – 250 mm in length.

Microphyll: rainforest tree leaf-size category of 25 - 75 mm in length.

Mimic: one which imitates another.

Monotypic: a plant or animal family or genus containing only one living species.

Moss: a type of plant that grows on the trunks of trees, dead logs and most places where it is moist and shady; usually a light green colour.

Mucus: a slimy substance.

Mutualism: a relationship where two living things of different species benefit from living together and are unable to live apart.



Native plant: includes plants and fungi that were not originally introduced to Australia by human intervention, and which occur naturally in an area.

Natural processes: the processes responsible for the origins, survival and evolution of species and communities.

Natural resources: the natural and physical features of an area, including animals, plants, soil, water, minerals and air.

Navigate: the art of directing one's course.

Nocturnal: an organism which is active at night.

Notophyll: rainforest tree leaf-size category of 75 -125 mm in length.

Omnivore: an animal and plant eater.

Orchid: an epiphyte that produces very colourful flowers.

Organism: any plant or animal.

Parasite: an organism that obtains its food from another living organism, and lives at the expense of another.

Predator: an organism that actively catches animals for food, and lives by eating others.

Predigest: to prepare food for absorption into the body before eating.

Prehensile: able to grasp or hold objects.

Primitive angiosperms: flowering plants preserving characteristics of an ancestral stage.

Producer: an organism that produces its own food.

Radiating: spreading like rays from a central position.

Rare: species that are not at present endangered or vulnerable but are at risk because of small population size.

Refugia: areas which provided protection for rainforest vegetation during the dry ice ages.

Rehabilitation: action taken to restore natural processes on disturbed land in an area.

Relict: organisms that have survived while other related ones have become extinct, or a species which previously had a much wider distribution and survived locally through periods of unfavourable conditions.

Restricted: living or occurring in only a few limited areas.

Riparian vegetation: vegetation occurring along the banks of a river or natural watercourse.

Quandongs: a type of rainforest tree that produces small blue fruit.

Saprophyte: an organism that feeds on another organism because it doesn't produce its own food.

Sclerophyll: refers to plants such as Eucalypts and Melaleucas which have hard leaves to reduce moisture loss.

Solitary: an organism which lives alone.



Species: a group of plants or animals with genetic attributes and characteristics in common, which do not generally interbreed with other groups and/or produce fertile offspring.

Sperm: male sex cells which are very small organisms that have flagella or tails to move.

Stamen: the male organ of a flower which produces pollen at the end of a stalk.

Stigma: the female organ of a flower which receives the pollen.

Submerged: covered with water.

Symbiosis: the living together of two different species with benefits or negative effects for one of the species.

Taxon (plural – taxa): a scientific grouping of animals or plants.

Threatened: species which due to natural or other processes, may be in danger of extinction. This includes species of endangered, vulnerable and poorly known status.

Tropical rainforest: closed canopy forests growing in wet tropical areas (excluding mangroves).

Ultrasonic sound: sound waves with high frequencies which cannot be heard.

Understorey vegetation: plants that are not mature canopy trees or lianas.

Undisturbed: an area in its natural state which has not been altered by human activity.

Unpalatable: describing something which tastes bad.

Values: the special attributes of an area.

Vascular plant: one of the higher plants with well-differentiated vascular tissues.

Vulnerable: species likely to become endangered in the near future unless threatening factors are removed.

Weeds: introduced plant species which tend to displace local plant species.

Wet Tropics Area: The Wet Tropics Of Queensland World Heritage Area. It is a high rainfall area of north-eastern Queensland between Townsville and Cooktown.

World Heritage Area: an area recognised as having international significance and outstanding universal value and registered on the World Heritage list.

World Heritage values: natural (and cultural) heritage that is of outstanding universal value and which enables an area to meet the requirements under the guidelines for listing as a World Heritage site.

Xerophytics: plants which can grow in extremely dry conditions.