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.