

What is an Ecosystem?

An **ecosystem** is a community of plants, animals and smaller organisms that live, feed, reproduce and interact in the same area or **environment**. Some ecosystems are very large. For example, many bird species nest in one place and feed in a completely different area. On the other hand, some ecosystems may be small, such as you would find in a meadow at the edge of a forest, or in a coral reef in the ocean. Now you may think, how does everything fit together in a forest ecosystem versus a meadow ecosystem? While some **species** may be found naturally in both areas, the species that live in the forest ecosystem are usually very different from those that inhabit the meadow, even though the two environments are right next to each other. In other words, if we protect existing natural habitats, we will help to maintain **biodiversity** (biodiversity is the variety of life in all its forms, levels and combinations). Unfortunately, natural habitats and their ecosystems are more and more endangered because of the damaging environmental effects of growing human populations everywhere.



As mentioned above, Ecosystems vary greatly in size and the elements that make them up, but each part is a functioning unit of nature. Everything that lives in the ecosystem is dependent on the other species and elements that are also part of ecological community. If one part of the eco-system is damage or is disappeared, it has an impact on everything else.

When an ecosystem is healthy, scientists say that it is sustainable. This means that all the elements which make up that particular ecosystem are in balance and are capable of reproducing themselves. There is usually biodiversity meaning that there are a variety of living organisms and species in that environment.

So we conclude that an **ecosystem** is a community of **living organisms** (plants, animals and microbes) living in conjunction with the **nonliving components** of their environment (things like air, water and mineral soil), interacting as a system. As ecosystems are defined by the network of interactions among organisms, and between organisms and their environment, they can come in any size but usually encompass specific, limited spaces (although some scientists say that the entire planet is an ecosystem).



What is an Ecosystem? Writing Activity

1. Define Biodiversity.

2. What is an Eco-system?

3. Is it possible that all elements of an Eco-system stay in balance with each other? If YES, what do we call such an Eco-System?

4. Give one example of an Eco-system from your surroundings.

