

## CHAPTER 06

# Habitat

### Tree as a habitat:

A habitat is a place where a living thing can obtain everything it needs to survive. This includes:

- Food
- Water
- Shelter
- Protection from predators
- A place to find a mate, reproduce and rear its young

A tree habitat is exactly what it says - A tree that provide these things to an organism.

In a tree habitat, animals can obtain everything they need to survive. From their leafy branches to their tangled roots, trees provide a habitat for a host of plants and animals.

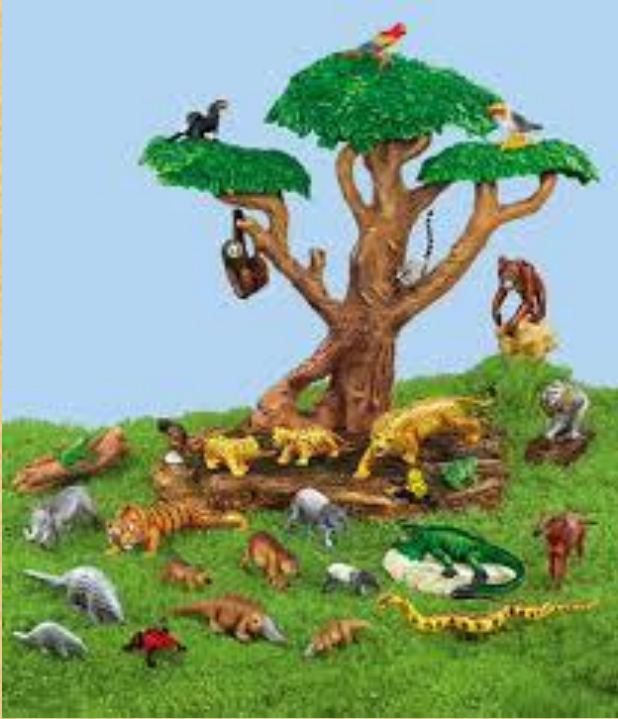
A habitat is the place where a plant or animal can get all the things it needs to survive.

The next time you pass by a tree, think of it as a habitat or living space. Then observe:

- What are some plants and animals that depend on trees?
- What do trees provide for these plants and animals?
- Can you see signs of life on the trunk, branches, roots, and leaves?
- How a tree is affected by the plants and animals that live on it? ( Do they benefit, harm or be neutral to the tree?)

A tree may serve as a part of an organism's habitat or it may be the organism's entire habitat.

An oak tree may provide food for squirrels and nest sites for crows. But lichens and moss get everything they need right there on the tree.



Snags (standing dead trees) provide habitat for a number of different species. Tree frogs and bark beetles live under the bark. Woodpeckers and other birds feed on the insects that live in snags. Squirrels store food in the holes created by woodpeckers.

A tree's life cycle moves from seed to seedling to tree to snag to decaying to dirt. Along the pathway, wildlife and other plants are depending on the tree.

## Living Trees

Trees support the lives of many large organisms. Trees are used for food, shelter and sites for reproduction. Many animals also use trees for resting, nesting and for places from which to hunt or capture prey.

When the trees mature, animals are able to enjoy delicious fruits and foraging opportunities. During times of extreme heat or precipitation, animals can seek shade and shelter under the trees without being away from their food source.

Young trees can provide food for animals. There are different types of trees in our surroundings. Tree is a place where different types of animals live. Birds, squirrels, ants, spiders and also some very small plants also grow on the barks of trees (you may have seen certain areas of the barks having green velvety growth especially in the rainy season). Trees are thus habitat for different organisms. Birds and squirrels come and go from a tree yet the tree is a habitat for them.

## Snags

Standing dead and dying trees are called "snags" that are important for wildlife which occur as a result of disease,

lightning, fire, animal damage, too much shade, drought, root competition, as well as old age.



Birds, small mammals and other wildlife use snags for nests, nurseries, as storage areas etc. Live trees with snag-like features, such as hollow trunks, excavated cavities and dead branches can provide similar wildlife value. Snags occurring along streams and shorelines eventually may fall into the water, adding important woody debris to aquatic habitat.

Dead branches are often used as perches; snags that have larger cavities for shelter and nesting. Snags enhance local natural areas by attracting wildlife species that may not otherwise be found there.

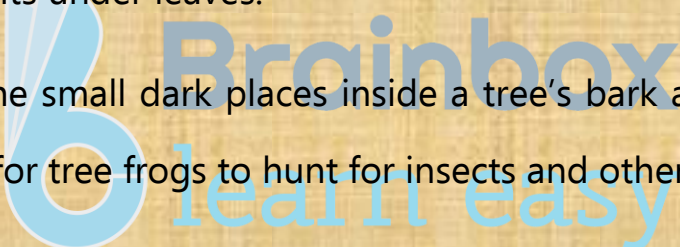
Woodpeckers are best known for the tapping sound they make that rings out across woodlands. This tapping sound is created when they tap away at dead trees or branches while they are creating themselves a comfortable and safe nesting site.

They also tap their beaks against trees to get food. By knocking on the bark of a tree, insects are encouraged to the surface where a hungry woodpecker is waiting.

Tree frogs and other amphibians love the dark damp conditions that can be found in the cracks and snags of a tree's bark or its under leaves.

The small dark places inside a tree's bark are also perfect spaces for tree frogs to hunt for insects and other invertebrates.

We can observe different organisms at different places of a tree.



<b>At the base of the tree</b>	<b>Ants, mosses</b>
<b>On the trunk</b>	Woodpecker, Barbet bird, tree frogs etc
<b>Between the branches</b>	Monkeys, koalas, squirrels etc
<b>On or within leaves</b>	Butterflies, beetles, parrots etc

Koalas eat the leaves from Eucalyptus trees and have therefore made these trees their home. They can eat over a pound of leaves in a day, but strangely the leaves are actually toxic.

This is why Koalas often spend most of their day sleeping while their digestive systems work to remove these toxins.

## Decaying Trees

Decaying trees retain moisture and nutrients that aid in new plant growth and support wildlife such as soil organisms (earthworms, beetles and other insects). They store energy and fix nitrogen. Furthermore, dead wood serves as a ground cover, lessening soil erosion and preventing animals such as deer from over-browsing plant seedlings.



Wildlife trees become softer as fungi, bacteria and wood boring insects can eat and break down the wood.

Flowers, fruits, leaves, buds and woody parts of trees are used by many different species. Bacteria and fungi contained in tree parts cause decay, which makes nesting easier for some

birds and increases soil fertility and structure for furrowing by other land animals.

### **Tree habitats under threat:**

Unfortunately, tree habitats and animals are under threat.

Deforestation in forests all over the world obviously poses a huge problem to animals who have made trees their home.

As the trees fall, animals lose their shelter and protection making them more vulnerable to predators or extreme weather.

They lose their food supply which means they can starve or they are forced into areas which they are not adapted for. Because of these conditions, their survival rates reduce and the species population gets smaller and smaller.

