

Trouble in the Amazon



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Macaws live in the tallest trees.

Why is this rain forest shrinking so quickly?

Bright-colored birds fly through the air. Monkeys leap from tree to tree. Jaguars creep on the ground below. Those are just a few of the thousands of animals that live in the Amazon rain forest.

The Amazon in South America is the largest **tropical rain forest** in the world. A tropical rain forest is a thick forest in a warm region with heavy rainfall.

People are destroying the Amazon. Each year, farmers and **loggers**¹ cut down rain forest trees to make room for farms, homes, and roads. Scientists have recently discovered that the Amazon is shrinking twice as quickly as they once thought.

Cause for Concern

The Amazon rain forest is one of the richest areas of the world in animal and plant **diversity**, or variety. Many of the foods, spices, and medicines people need come from the Amazon.

¹ **loggers:** people who cut down trees to use or sell the wood

The Amazon rain forest also helps recycle Earth's air. The trees give off oxygen for people to breathe. Trees also clean the air by taking in carbon dioxide. Too much carbon dioxide in the air is harmful to humans.

Fixing the Problem

Stopping people from destroying the rain forest is not an easy task. "Almost 2 million people make the forest their home," scientist Jim Bowyer told *Weekly Reader*. "All these people need land for farming and wood for heat and cooking. They are looking for a way to survive. Solutions need to involve the very people who destroy the forest."

Did You Know?

- Rain forest trees stay green all year long.
- The tallest trees may grow up to 200 feet!
- When leaves and branches fall, they break down and release **nutrients**² into the soil.

² **nutrients**: substances that plants and animals need to live and grow