

LIVING CATHEDRALS

Each separate kind of animal and plant is called a species. A species is a whole, a unit of nature. Animals and plants of the same species breed with each other to make more of the same type. There may be thirty million species in the world, that's 30,000,000! When scientists find them, they give them a name in Latin: For example, elephant is called *Loxodonta africana* and lion – *Panthera leo*. This one special name helps everybody, whatever their home language, to understand exactly which creature we mean when we talk about an animal or plant or a fungi or single-celled microbe.

Each species within a habitat has a special way of living, a particular niche. For example, a lion is a predator, eating other species. Removing the lion from its natural habitat will cause its prey species to increase in numbers. Grazing and browsing animals may then eat too much grass and vegetation, and eventually destroy the ecosystem on which they depend. Elephants are another example of how animals within an ecosystem have many jobs and roles to play. Elephants are architects, breaking up the impenetrable forest, creating savannah, digging water holes in dry riverbeds and making mini-ponds in their footprints. They disperse seeds in their faeces, which are then buried by dung beetles to provide nutrients for the soil. Their paths are firebreaks and channels for rain water.

Ecosystems consist of many, many species all living in one place, working together, creating a living whole. Each species is like a piece inside a machine working to make it function correctly. Each species is like a reed in a basket. Remove one and the rest may fall apart.

Look closer at the creatures that form the ecosystems upon which we depend: robot-makers will tell you that the most sophisticated and clever robot or computer is nowhere near as complex as an ant!





Pollinators: silent, secret and absolutely essential

Pollinators carry pollen between flowers. They help the flowers to make love! Without insects, flowering plants could not have babies! Insects, mammals and birds, even reptiles perform this crucial dating service. It is a natural service which goes on unseen and unknown but is absolutely crucial. One third of every mouthful of our food is pollinated by animals. If we lose pollinating animals, ecosystems and farming systems can fall apart. Fruit Bats pollinate the majority of Night Blooming Flowers including the African Sausage Tree and the Baobab. Removing Fruit Bats may even cause famine. Some countries that have attempted to exterminate their Fruit Bats and have had entire crops destroyed as a result. This is because Fruit Bats mainly eat over ripe fruit. Once the "Over-Ripe Fruit" started to accumulate, so did the fruit flies and other crop damaging insects. Fruit bats – not just a pretty face.