

Glossary

BIOMES

A

altitude the height of an object above a reference point, such as sea level or the Earth's surface

B

biome a large region characterized by a specific type of climate and certain types of plant and animal communities

C

canopy the layers of treetops that shade the forest floor

chaparral a type of vegetation that includes broadleafed evergreen shrubs and that is located in areas with hot, dry summers and mild, wet winters

climate the average weather conditions in an area over a long period of time

D

desert a region that has little or no vegetation, long periods without rain, and extreme temperatures; usually found in warm climates

E

emergent layer the top foliage layer in a forest where the trees extend above surrounding trees

epiphyte a plant that uses another plant for support, but not for nourishment

L

latitude the distance north or south from the equator; expressed in degrees

P

permafrost in arctic regions, the permanently frozen layer of soil or subsoil

S

savanna a plain full of grasses and scattered trees and shrubs; found in tropical and subtropical habitats and mainly in regions with a dry climate, such as East Africa

T

taiga a region of evergreen, coniferous forest below the arctic and subarctic tundra regions

temperate deciduous forest a forest (or biome) that is characterized by trees that shed their leaves in the fall

temperate grassland a community (or biome) that is dominated by grasses, has few trees, and is characterized by cold winters and rainfall that is intermediate between that of a forest and a desert

temperate rain forest a forest community (or biome), characterized by cool, humid weather and abundant rainfall, where tree branches are draped with mosses, tree trunks are covered with lichens, and the forest floor is covered with ferns

tropical rain forest a forest or jungle near the equator that is characterized by large amounts of rain and little variation in temperature and that contains the greatest known diversity of organisms on Earth

tundra a treeless plain that is located in the Arctic or Antarctic and that is characterized by very low winter temperatures; short, cool summers; and vegetation that consists of grasses, lichens, and perennial herbs

U

understory a foliage layer that is beneath and shaded by the main canopy of a forest