



## biodiversity

**Ecosystem - a specific community of plants and animals whose composition depends on its soil, the local climate, and its history of natural and human influences**



river cuts through  
the Peruvian rain forest

**Forest destruction is the most important reason for species extinction**

Forests and woodlands are among the most important ecosystems in the world. In the tropical and sub-tropical countries, there are many different types including the rainforests of the Amazon Basin, the dry forests of South Asia, the cloud forests of Central America, and the open woodlands of East and Southern Africa. Each one is very different, providing a home for its own family of plants and animals.

Tropical forests are the earth's richest ecosystems, home to about 20 million plant and animal species! This richness is called biological diversity or *biodiversity*.

The greatest threat to biodiversity is deforestation - cutting down the forests to use the land for other uses. As the forests are destroyed, plant and animal species are lost. It is important to conserve biodiversity because once a species becomes extinct it is gone forever. It is not known how quickly species are becoming extinct but some estimates say we are losing 10,000 species per year. The main cause is tropical deforestation