

Stop 146 Kid's Tour – Biodiversity & Extinction, Palm House

Just look around the Palm House and you'll see there are lots and lots of different kinds of plants. Biodiversity may sound like a big word but if you break it down, it becomes easy to understand. "Bio" comes from the Greek word "bios" which means *life*. And *diversity* means things that are different from each other. There are an amazing variety of plants and animals sharing life on the planet earth. Add soil, water and air, and you have an ecosystem.

The biodiversity of the tropical rainforest's ecosystem is truly incredible. Even though rainforests only cover about 6% of the earth's surface, they are home to more than 50% of all the plant and animal species in the world – some of which can't be found anywhere else! Did you know that the Amazon rainforest in South America is home to more than 1600 species of birds and about a million different kinds of insects? Or that one-fourth of all the medicines we use to keep us healthy came from a rainforest plant? And that if you walk around *one* acre of a tropical rainforest you might find over *300 different kinds of trees*. But visit a typical forest in the northern U.S., and you'll probably only be able to find just 5 to 12 different species growing on the *same* amount of land!

In each ecosystem around the world, the plants and animals depend on each other for survival. In the case of the rainforest, human beings haven't been doing their part to help keep the balance of nature in place. We forget that you can't keep taking, without putting back. Thousands of animals are illegally captured and sold for pets. More than a million acres of rainforest are cut down every year, while only one tree is replanted for every 10 cut. This means fewer and fewer places for plants, insects, animals and even native peoples to call home. So how can you help? You may not be able to go plant trees in South America right now, but you can tell your friends and family what you've learned about the rainforests and ask them to join you in finding other ways to help save them.