

Write one important fact from each paragraph in this space.

Science Shorts -7

What Lives in an Ecosystem?

Every ecosystem on Earth has movement in it. Think about a forest ecosystem. A tree grows. A mouse runs across the forest floor. An eagle soars through the sky. All of this movement means that there is energy in the ecosystem. Living things get their energy in different ways.

Plants use sunlight to make their own food. They use this food to get energy to live and grow. Because they make food, they are called producers. Producers are living things in an ecosystem that make food.

Unlike plants, animals in an ecosystem cannot make their own food. They have to eat other living things for food. There are three kinds of consumers. Consumers that eat only plants are called herbivores. Consumers that eat only animals are called carnivores. Consumers that eat both plants and animals are called omnivores. Some carnivores are scavengers. A scavenger is a carnivore that feeds on the bodies of dead organisms. Scavengers include catfish and vultures.

There are also decomposers in an ecosystem. Decomposers are tiny living things such as bacteria and fungi that get their energy by eating dead plants and animals.

Another important consumer in all ecosystems is the detritus feeder, or detritivore. These organisms, which are sometimes classified as decomposers, are similar to scavengers in that they feed on the remains of dead animals. Like decomposers, they also consume dead plants, leaf litter, animal wastes and other organic matter. Detritus feeders such as snails, crabs and clams are plentiful in aquatic ecosystems. Detritus feeders on land include land snails, beetles, millipedes and earthworms. Along with decomposers, detritus feeders break down dead organisms and wastes.

Producers, consumers and decomposers all work together in an ecosystem. A plant gets energy by making food. A mouse gets energy by eating the plant. An eagle gets energy by eating the mouse. A decomposer gets energy by eating the eagle after it dies. This movement of energy through an ecosystem is called the food chain. The food chain shows that all of the living things in an ecosystem need one another.

A food chain is one possible path along which energy can move through an ecosystem. Most producers and consumers are part of many food chains. A more realistic way to show the flow of energy through an ecosystem is a food web. A food web consists of the many overlapping food chains in an ecosystem.

A.

Write the word or words that best complete each sentence.

consumers

decomposers

food chain

producers

1. Living things in an ecosystem that make their own food are called _____.
2. Living things in an ecosystem that eat other living things are called _____.
3. Living things in an ecosystem that eat dead plants and animals are called _____.
4. The movement of energy as food through an ecosystem is called the _____.

B.

Look at the picture of the forest ecosystem. Use it to complete each list.

Producers in a Forest Ecosystem

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Consumers in a Forest Ecosystem

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

**C.**

Look at the picture of the ecosystem above. Use it to answer the question.

The bird is a carnivore that eats animals to live. But it needs plants to live, too. How do you explain this?
