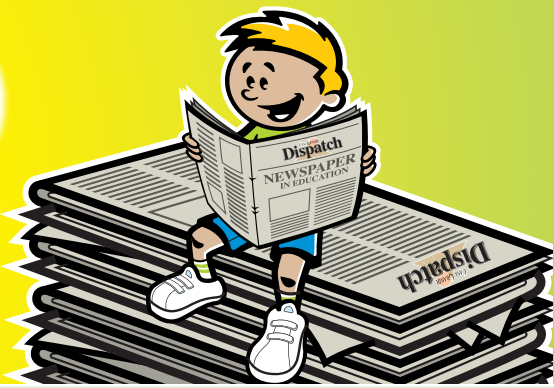


# KEEPING STUDENTS WELL INFORMED AT HOME DURING SUMMER VACATION



## PART FOUR

## WORLD OF WONDER

Exploring the realms of history, science, nature and technology

Malachite butterfly



# THE AMAZON

## THE FLOOR & RIVER

### On the ground

The forest floor is the darkest part of the rainforest. Only a few plants and saplings manage to grow in small spots where sunlight breaks through the upper layers of the forest.

Rivers create airy, sunny threads through the forest. Riverbanks get lots of sunlight and are nutrient-rich with silt from receding floodwaters. The edges are lush with foliage.

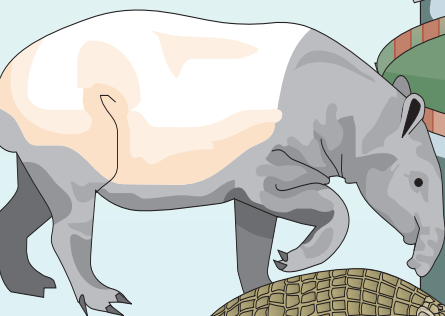
### Life and decay

Organic matter decomposes quickly here. The heat and moisture allow leaves to disintegrate very quickly, often in less than six weeks.

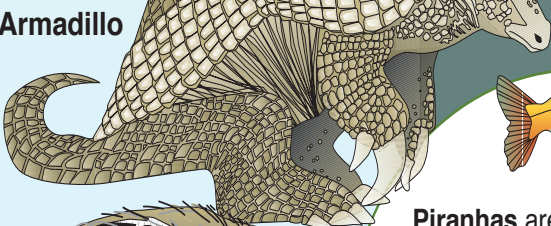
Termites, slugs, scorpions, worms and fungi help the decomposition process and also serve as food for many animals.

The forest floor is covered in several inches of rotting vegetation, which turns into the nutrients that feed the roots of plants and trees.

Tapirs, armadillos and anteaters forage in the decomposing brush for tasty insects, roots and tubers.



Tapir



Armadillo



Anteater

Very little sunlight reaches the forest floor. This dark, humid layer of the rainforest is covered with decaying fallen leaves. The mighty Amazon River — which carries more water than any other river — stretches 4,000 miles (6,400 km) and can swell to more than 120 miles (190 km) wide. It has many freshwater tributaries that nurture the ecosystems of the rainforest.

### At the root

Many of the largest trees, such as the giant **sumameira** have thick, above-ground supports called **buttress roots**. These distinctive roots are often found on the floodplains of rivers, and they help to prevent erosion by holding the soil and silt around the tree in place.

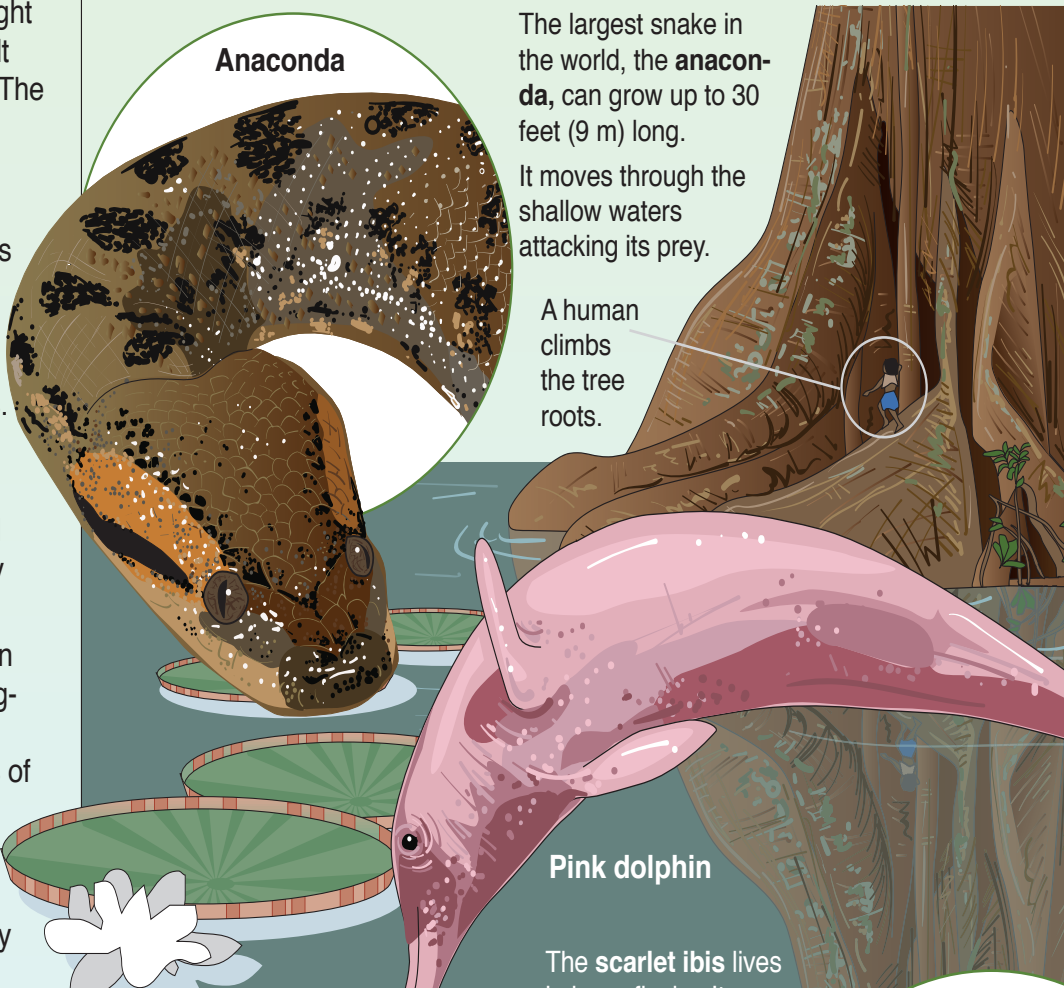
Although the root systems are shallow, they are wide-reaching. By storing and slowly releasing water, these roots help regulate the water levels of the rivers.

Small rodents, such as rats and lowland pacas, use these huge roots to hide from predators.

### In the river

The Amazon River is home to more than 3,000 species of fish and more than 400 amphibians, with more species being discovered.

There are several varieties of river dolphins living in the Amazon River. The rarest is the **pink river dolphin**.



Anaconda

The largest snake in the world, the **anaconda**, can grow up to 30 feet (9 m) long.

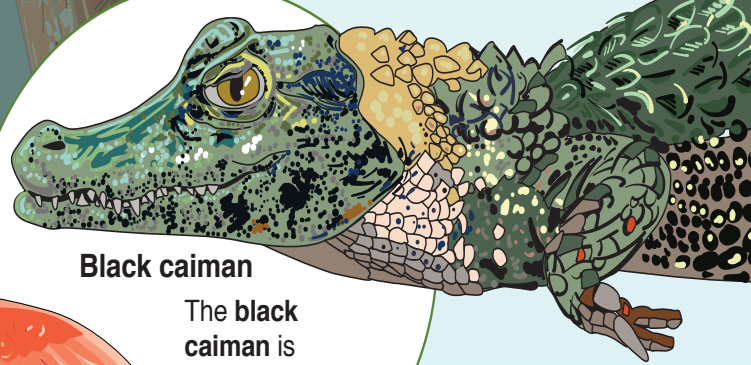
It moves through the shallow waters attacking its prey.

A human climbs the tree roots.

Pink dolphin

The **scarlet ibis** lives in large flocks. Its bright color comes from the carotene found in the crustaceans that it eats.

Scarlet ibis



Black caiman

The **black caiman** is endangered due to hunting.

The largest of all species of alligator, this caiman is one of the most feared predators in the forest. It grows up to 17 feet (5.2 m) long.

**Piranhas** are small but vicious. They have razor-sharp teeth and usually attack prey in groups.

Piranha

Arapaima

Catfish

**Arapaima** are not as well known as the piranha, but these huge fish can be far more dangerous. Growing up to 9 feet (3 m) long, they have teeth on the roof of their mouth and tongue.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://sciencing.com>; <https://tropical-rainforest-facts.com>; <https://www.worldatlas.com>; Smithsonian's National Zoo

Chat with the author and like us on Facebook — [www.facebook.com/worldofwonder2014](http://www.facebook.com/worldofwonder2014)

LEARN ABOUT LLAMAS AND ALPACAS IN THE NEXT INSTALLMENT OF WORLD OF WONDER

CASA GRANDE  
**Dispatch**  
Pinal County's Daily Newspaper

Newspapers  
in Education

OUR WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS IN EDUCATION  
PAGE CAN BE A FUN LEARNING TOOL  
FOR YOUR KIDS. CHECK BACK EACH  
THURSDAY FOR A NEW, EXCITING TOPIC!

CASA GRANDE  
**Dispatch** TO SUBSCRIBE:  
(520) 423-8685

