



# TROPICAL RAINFOREST STRATA

## LAYERS OF LIFE

‘Strata’ means layers. Scientists divide rainforests into different strata (or layers) for easy reference. Each of these layers is a very different environment and supports different life forms.

These strata differ in many ways, including temperature, the amount of sunlight that they receive, the wetness of the environment, and the amount and types of life forms living in it.

### EMERGENTS

**The emergents** consist of the tops of the tallest trees, which are much higher than the average canopy height (ranging up to 81 m). It houses many birds (like the scarlet macaw), insects, and more.

### CANOPY

**The canopy** is the name given to the upper parts of the trees (about 20 to 40 m tall). This leafy environment is full of life: insects, arachnids, many birds (like the keel-billed toucan, the scarlet macaw, the cuckoo, and the hornbill), mammals (like the howler monkey, which is the second-loudest animal in the world, and the orangutan), reptiles (like snakes and lizards), and others. Plants in the canopy include thick, snake-like vines and epiphytes (or air plants) like mosses, lichens, and orchids (which grow on trees).

### UNDERSTORY

**The understory** is a dark, cool environment that is under the leaves but over the ground. Most of the understory of a rainforest has so little light that plant growth is limited. There are short, leafy, mostly non-flowering shrubs, small trees, ferns, and vines (lianas) that have adapted to filtered light and poor soil. Some of these plants include ferns, palms, philodendrons, and heliconias. Animals in the understory include insects (like beetles and bees), arachnids, snakes, lizards, and small mammals (like the kinkajou) that live on and in tree bark. Some birds (like antbirds) live and nest within tree recesses and eat the abundant insects. Some larger animals, like jaguars, spend a lot of time on branches in the understory, surveying the area, looking for prey.

### FOREST FLOOR

**The floor of the forest** is teeming with animal life, especially insects and arachnids (like tarantulas). The largest animals in the rainforest generally live here, including gorillas, anteaters, wild boars, tapirs, jaguars, and people.