

Ecosystem Exploration

Ages 5 – 10 Compare your ecosystem with your favorite animal's ecosystem.

Prep Time: 5 minutes ▪ **Activity Time:** 20 minutes or longer

Materials:

- 2 pieces of blank paper
- Colored pencils, markers, or crayons

- 1** What do you think of when you hear the word “ecosystem?” Does it include living things? What about nonliving things?

An **ecosystem** includes an animal's habitat (where it lives), other living things (animals, plants, etc.), and the environmental factors in the area (weather, air, water, etc.).

Imagine a deer's habitat. Nonliving things in its ecosystem might include soil and rocks on the ground; and clouds, rain, and wind in the air. Birds, squirrels, coyotes—even humans walking on a hike—are a few examples of the living things that often share the forest with deer. While trees, grass, and bushes can't run around, they can also live in a deer's ecosystem.

- 2** Draw your own ecosystem on a sheet of paper, including all the living and nonliving things around you.



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- 3 On a second piece of paper, draw your favorite animal in its natural ecosystem.

Research your favorite animal's natural habitat online using websites like World Wildlife Fund, National Geographic, Animal Diversity Web, Encyclopedia of Life, or other reliable sources.

- 4 Think more deeply about your ecosystem and your favorite animal's ecosystem. Use the following questions as a guide:

Compare and Contrast

- What is similar between the two ecosystems? What is different?
- Could you survive and be happy in your favorite animal's ecosystem? Why?
- Could your favorite animal survive in your ecosystem? Why?

Consider Climate

- What do you think makes an ecosystem "healthy?" (*Components of a healthy natural ecosystem might include many species of living things, a clean environment, and limited disturbance by humans.*)
- How might the Earth's changing climate impact your favorite animal's ecosystem? How might it change your ecosystem? Do you think the changes will make it easier or harder for you and your favorite animal to survive?
- What can you do to make sure that your favorite animal has a "healthy" ecosystem?

- 5 Take a walk outside and see what you can observe. What organisms consider your backyard or the nearby park as a part of their ecosystem? Is their ecosystem "healthy?"

