

Ecological Terms

Abiotic – Nonliving, as in abiotic factor, which is a nonliving physical and chemical attribute of a system, for example light, temperature, wind patterns, rocks, soil, pH, pressure, etc. in an **environment**.

Autotroph – any organism capable of self-nourishment by using inorganic materials as a source of nutrients and using **photosynthesis** or chemosynthesis as a source of energy, as most plants and certain bacteria and protists

Adaptation – changes in an organism's physiological structure or function or habits that allow it to survive in new surroundings. For example, forests develop only where soil types, moisture and sunlight are balanced to the proper degree. Desert plants have made adjustments so as to be able to live under intense sunlight, on poor quality soils, and with reduced water supply

Biomimicry – the copying or imitation of a natural phenomenon's or environment's efficiency and survival mechanisms in manufacturing processes or in applied case-based reasoning

Biotic –Of, pertaining to, or produced by life or living organisms (of an **ecosystem**)

Carnivore – a meat eater

Commensalism – a **symbiotic** relationship between two species in which one species benefits and the other neither benefits or harms. Often, the host species provides a home and/or transportation for the other species. Commensalism is much more difficult to demonstrate than mutualism. For true commensalism, the second species must be unaffected by the presence of the first, but commonly a detailed study of the relationship will show some affect on the second species

Community – an association of organisms – plant and animal – each occupying a certain position or ecological **niche**, inhabiting a common environment and interacting with each other: all the plants and animals in a particular habitat that are bound together by food chains and other interrelations

Competition – when two or more organisms have the potential for using the same resource. May be inter- or intra-specific

Crepuscular- appearing or active in the twilight

Decomposition – the breakdown of dead and decaying organic matter into nutrients and soil material

Diurnal – active by daylight; the opposite of nocturnal

Diversity – variety

Ecology- the study of home (earth and the interconnections of organisms)

Ecosystems – a natural unit that includes living and non-living parts interacting to produce a stable system in which the exchange of materials between the living and nonliving parts follows closed paths; all living things and their environment in an area of any size with all linked together by energy and nutrient flow

Environment – the total of all of the surroundings – air, water, vegetation, human element, wildlife – that has influence on you and your existence, including physical, biological and all other factors; the surroundings of a plant or animal including other plants and animals, climate and location

Exotic – in conservation language, this refers to a foreign plant or animal – one that has been introduced into a new area

Herbivore – a plant eater

Hibernation – the act of passing the winter, or a portion of it, in a state of sleep: a torpid or resting state

Inhabitable: a place that can support the life and growth of an organism

Interdependence – the interrelationships of wildlife with one another and with the various elements of their **environment**

Mutualism– a relationship between two species of organisms in which both benefit from the association-a type of **symbiosis**

Niche – the position or function of an organism in a community of plants and animals

Nocturnal – active by night; the opposite of diurnal

Omnivore – an animal that eats both plant and animal materials

Organism – a living thing; a form of life composed of mutually dependent parts that maintains various vital processes

Parasitism – is a type of symbiotic relationship between organisms of different species where one organism, the parasite, benefits at the expense of the host

Photosynthesis – the process by which green plants produce their food (carbohydrates) from water, carbon dioxide, and minerals, using the sun's energy

Predator – an animal that kills and eats other animals

Prey – animals that are killed and eaten by other animals

Productive/photic zone: a region (depth) of the ocean that is exposed to sufficient sunlight for photosynthesis to occur

Saprophyte – an organism living on dead organic matter; neither parasitic nor making its own food

Symbiosis – A close, prolonged association between two or more different organisms of different species that may, but does not necessarily, benefit each member