



# Queensland News

Rainforest Live

October 20, 1997

Volume 2, Number 5

LINKING CLASSROOMS AROUND THE WORLD TO RESEARCH SITES AROUND THE WORLD

## Balance Exists in Rainforest...



**Jeremy Clark**  
**Penn State Univ.**  
**October 9, 1997**  
**The Rainforest Community**

The tropical rainforest that we live in here at the Center for Rainforest Studies can be considered both a biome and an ecosystem. Biomes are characterized by the types of plants that are most abundant in a specific area. Other biomes include coniferous forests like the redwood forests of California and deserts such as the Sahara in Africa and the deserts of the southwest United States. Ecosystems are both the living things (plants and animals) and non-living things (like elements and minerals). An ecosystem includes all the organisms in an area and the environment in which they live.

The rainforest biome is made up of a lot of different types of

broad leafed evergreen trees and lots of vines. It contains more types of living things than all of the other biomes. This is partly because there is never a shortage of water and there are not hot and cold extremes in temperature.

The rainforest ecosystem contains all the living things and all the elements that continually cycle between being used and renewed.



There are many different feeding levels in ecosystems. There are always autotrophs (plants that make energy from sunlight), and primary consumers (herbivores that eat the autotrophs). If there are enough primary consumers, then there can be secondary consumers (carnivores) which eat the primary consumers.

Everything exists in a balance in the rainforest. All the nutrients are recycled by parts of the environ-

### QUOTABLE QUOTE

*“Living nature... shall plan my ways and rule my heart.”*

**John Henry Cardinal Newman**  
*Nature and Art, 1868*

ment. The nutrients are taken up by the plants, and are recycled when the leaves and branches fall to the ground and decompose. The animals eat the plants to get the nutrients, and are sometimes eaten by other animals. When the animals die, the nutrients get released back into the ground for plants to use again. This is how the rainforest is sustainable; new things are always growing and using the nutrients from things that die, sustaining the community from one generation to the next.

## EXTRA! EXTRA!

- 10/10** Lectures in the morning. Sports and warrowork in the afternoon.
- 10/11** Planting maintenance field exercise in the afternoon. Australian movie, a double feature, tonight!
- 10/12** Students day off! Some students pick strawberries while others swim at Lake Eacham.
- 10/13** Fireside chat tonight with two aborigines on traditional world views towards the environment.
- 10/14** Students, staff and four local volunteers plant trees with WTTPS (Wet Tropics Tree Planting Scheme). They hope to plant 700 trees.
- 10/15** DR day—one group will test water in eight different places at the Tinaroo Watershed area.

### Inside this Issue...

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by Sarah Hatfield

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by Sarah Picard

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**Sarah Hatfield**  
**Wells College**  
**October 8, 1997**  
**Night Time**

Night in the rainforest can be kind of scary. When I was a little kid I used to be afraid of the dark. I'm not really afraid of it anymore but sometimes things that go bump in the night frighten me. When I got here, I would never walk around without a flashlight, and the creatures that were awake during the night rustled in the bushes and I found it all a bit unnerving. I noticed someone walking around without a flashlight at night and I thought they were crazy. Then I realized that the best way to overcome a fear is to face it. So the next night I tried to walk part of the way back to my cabin without a flashlight. That night I didn't make it very far.

For my first step to overcoming my fear, I started sitting out on the steps of our cabin at night, listening to the sounds around me, getting familiar with the rainforest at night. There are completely dif-

ferent animals out at night than there are during the day and it seems like a different forest altogether. As I got more familiar with the noises outside, I got up enough nerve to try to walk back to the cabin without a flashlight again. Actually I left my flashlight in the cabin so I didn't have a choice, but I made it, and it was an incredible experience. In the dark, I had to rely more on my senses of hearing and touch instead of sight. I found that if I let myself adjust to the darkness, it wasn't really so dark after all. The stars are brilliant and when the moon is out there is more than enough light to see by. Now I walk back without a flashlight regularly, and when I do have a light, it seems to ruin the peacefulness and intrigue of the nighttime rainforest. Nothing can match the rainforest at night. There is nothing like it in the world. It is so alive and yet the life out there is so untouchable at night that it seems almost like a dream. And I am not scared of the dark anymore, in fact, I look forward to it.



**Marc Hiller**  
**Emory University**  
**October 12, 1997**  
**Group Relations**

If you've ever had fights with your sisters and brothers, you know that living with your family can sometimes be wonderful and at other times difficult and frustrating. Sometimes families have fights over petty things like who gets to

sit in the front of the car or over which television show to watch. Occasionally we have the same kinds of problems here in the rainforest. In many ways we function as one large family. Thirty two students share the same bathrooms, one phone, and we eat, sleep and go to school together. At night we all must share one building (the only one with lights) to study, read, and have fun. Most days, teachers and students spend from seven in the morning until ten at night together.

When people spend so much time together, fights are bound to happen. But going to school and living in the rainforest is difficult enough without fighting. We try to limit our fighting by communicating our feelings with each other. Every Wednesday night, students meet to discuss and fix problems before they become unmanageable. Often after discussions, we realize that fighting over seats in class or who gets more dessert are unproductive silly and avoidable. We also avoid fighting by giving everyone some personal space and time alone. Some time alone to relax or think often helps students cope with living in such close proximity with one another. Although we have disagreements, practicing communication and giving personal space helps to create a fun and productive place for learning.



# Q&A

## Q. What do you do in your free time, if there is any? This applies to the students.

*April R., Rome, GA, USA*

A. Since most of our time here is spent in class lectures or field trips we have very little free time.

There is really no place to go except on special nights when we go out to the movies which happens once a week or so. We spend our free time reading and playing cards. Running is also a popular past



time. Many hours are spent listening to our Walkmans and writing letters. Finding new ways to decorate our cabins and make things more homey is always fun. Of course, we spend a lot of time talking and getting to know each other. We are all from different schools and backgrounds and the opportunities to talk and discover new things about each other is invaluable.

One thing that has been a major free time consumer is a Ping-Pong tournament between everyone here at the Center. I lost in the first round but I think being a spectator is even better. With everyone at the Center participat-

ing, it has been a good bonding experience for all. In the next tournament we will play doubles and it will be twice the fun.

At the main center building we have been working on a bench. We want to put it up on the west ridge where we go to watch the sunset. Today, we are taking the bench up to that spot. That's where I expect to spend most of my future free time.

Hikes around the center and to the cathedral fig a few kilometers away are also fun and there is so much to discover. There is a creek just below the center that is always fun to hike along. I take a lot of pictures and can't wait to share them with all my friends and family back in the United States.

*by Katie Reefe*

## Q. Are there any plants or animals that you have to avoid?

*Mark D., Montreal, Quebec, Canada*

A. If you are not careful many things in the rainforest can be harmful to your body. One such plant is the stinging tree. It is a pioneer species that grows in recently disturbed areas of the forest. It is distinguishable by its large heart shaped leaves with tiny hairs all over. If the leaves come in contact with your skin the hairs penetrate and can cause pain for up to a year if not removed. Wax strips do a good of removing them, as a few people here have discovered.

Another dangerous plant is the lawyer vine (or wait-a-while). This vine has small hook like

spines which latch onto your clothes or skin. They will tear whatever it is attached to if not removed properly.

When walking through thick undergrowth you have to be careful to check yourself for ticks and scrub itch mites. The mites cause a rash that can be very itchy. March or biting flies are also a nuisance. Their bite is not painful but they are very annoying. Leeches are another annoying yet harmless creature. You should always check for them when walking through the rainforest.



Cassowaries and feral pigs are large animals that you need to be aware of. If you come into contact with them you should put a large object between yourself and the animal, or just climb the nearest tree.

This time of year snakes are showing up everywhere. They usually choose to avoid human contact, but there is always the slight chance you will have a run-in with one. We have all been instructed on how to take care of snakebites if someone is unlucky enough to get bitten by one.

Although there are some dangerous things in the rainforest, they can all be easily avoided if you are smart. If you know what to look out for, then you can have a safe and happy trek through the rainforest.

*by Beth Fenstermacher*

Want to send a question?

Email us at

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**Sarah Picard**  
**Bates College**  
**October 13, 1997**  
**Bromfield Swamp**

Last Monday we went on a field trip to Bromfield Swamp to talk to Marc Heaton. Marc is a member of TREAT, a community-based land care group on the Atherton Tablelands. TREAT's main purpose is to establish and plant reforestation plots. They do this to increase biodiversity and decrease erosion. Most of their plots are on private land owned by farmers. We went to visit Bromfield Swamp because it is a source of water for the Johnstone River which supplies water to Malanda, a town on the tablelands. The Johnstone river has been largely deforested, and this decreases the quality of the water supply for Malanda. One of TREATS main projects is to replant rainforest along the river in order to improve the river. Marc told us about the things TREAT does in order to establish the plots and take care of them. He also discussed different reasons that TREAT uses to convince farmers to let them reforest their land. These include shade and wind protection for cows, better drinking water for the cows, and the decreased possibility that a cow will get stuck in the mud in the river.

While we were with Marc we went down to the edge of some plantings. He showed us how erosion on the steep banks had already hurt some of the trees and also pointed out some areas that were doing particularly well.

This wasn't the first time that I'd been to the swamp. Earlier in the week my DR group visited the swamp in order to see where we would be working. The directed research project I am doing involves comparing different site preparation and maintenance techniques in rainforest reforestation plots. The areas we will be surveying are the TREAT plots along the river.

### Home Connection: A Little Recycling of Your Own

Try recycling at home by making creative cards with used paper, old cards, magazine clippings and used postage stamps. Collect these items and keep them handy in an old shoe box. Create cards and envelopes from construction paper or a decorative paper of your choice. Decorate by cutting and pasting different pieces of the items you have collected. Give your creation a special touch by using scissors with decorative edges and colored markers.

### Glossary:

**autotroph:** living organism capable of making its own energy resources, (i.e. plants that make energy from sunlight)

**biome:** communities coexisting in an environment

**ecosystem:** communities of organisms that coexist and are self-sustaining

**primary consumer:** an organism that eats autotrophs, a herbivore

**secondary consumer:** an organism that eats primary consumers, a carnivore



1. What are the different feeding levels that exist in the rainforest?
2. If students see a feral pig or other large animal in the rainforest what should they do?
3. What steps do students take to avoid fighting with each other?
4. How do you and your classmates work together without fighting?

## Site's Log

### 10/15/97

**TIME:** 9:30 a.m. AEST  
 (Australian Eastern Standard Time)

**AIR TEMP:** 21° C

**RAINFALL:** 0 mm

**WX:** sunny and warm

#### KEY:

°C=degrees Celsius  
 mm=millimeter

- ### Answers to Quiz
1. Autotrophs, primary consumers, and secondary consumers.
  2. Put an object between themselves and the animal or climb the nearest tree.
  3. The students communicate their concerns to each other and give each other some "personal" space.
  4. Answers will vary.



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### Send us your questions!

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