

# Animals of the Amazon River and Rainforest

- The Amazon River is 6000km long and the Amazon rainforest is 5.5 million square kilometres
- One tenth of the world's species of animals live in the Amazon River and rainforest.
- The Amazon River basin is half the size of Australia.
- The Amazon rainforest is known as the “Lungs of the planet” as the oxygen emitted from the trees helps the population of the planet to breathe. If the rate of deforestation continues then the health of the planet is going to continue to decline.
- At the end of December, 3 metres of rain can fall in a few months so creatures must adapt or drown.
- 200 billion metric tonnes of water come from the Andes Mountains at the source of the river.
- Every year the river overflows and floods an area the size of the UK as the river grows in width by 5 times or more.
- The trees of the Amazon have evolved to stand in 8 metres or more of water as the forest floor can stay flooded for 7 months or more.
- In the Amazon rainforest there are over 1,000 species of frogs and 1,500 species of birds
- Ants make up 30% of the total weight of animals in the forest.
- 20% of the rainforests has been cleared not only threatening the lives of the animals in their natural habitat but all of life on earth.
- This major destruction of the rainforests contributes to global environmental changes and affects all the world and not just South America.
- It is estimated that there are still millions of plant and animal species still to be discovered in the Amazon which could be the cure for many major diseases such as cancers which will never be found if the destruction continues.
- At least 380 new species of plants or animals are found every year in the Amazon – that is just over one new species every day!

Below are some of the species of animals that you will find in the Amazon.

## The Jaguar

- The jaguar is the 3rd biggest cat in the world.
- It can grow to 160 kilograms and up to 2 metres long.
- The name jaguar is native Indian for “He who kills with one leap”
- With his powerful jaws and long canine the jaguar can pierce the skull of its prey.



- It is well adapted to swimming (no other species of cats likes to swim like the jaguar).
- It has to be cautious in the water because of giant anacondas that are the only other predator besides man who could kill it.
- The jaguar has keen eyesight and a brilliant sense of hearing. Jaguars are unique creatures with smooth black spots on a rich golden back ground but there are also jaguars that are completely black.
- Each jaguar's markings are unique which makes it a target for the human fur trade.
- In the 1960's, 15,000 jaguars were killed every year so there was a serious decline in the population to dangerous levels. Even though it is illegal to kill jaguars, poachers still threaten them and the Amazon is the last refuge for them.
- A jaguar typically roams around at least 300 square kilometres so if logging and mining persist then their habitat and homes will be threatened and so will their existence.

## Bandtail Manakins

- The male birds dance on tree branches to attract the females. This dance shows the females that the males are agile and strong and would be perfect father's and their offspring will be strong like they are. The females choose the makes with the most dazzling feathers.
- Males are bright yellow with black wings and back, red cap, and a variable red wash on their breasts; males also have a white tail band, which is most visible in flight. Females are dull yellow-olive with a slightly brighter yellow belly and they have a white eye.



## Long Nosed Armadillo

- It lives on dry land in underground burrows and is nocturnal so only usually ventures out at night.
- When the rains come they are forced out of their burrows and could sink under their heavy shells if they do not reach dry land quickly.
- They have adapted so when they swallow air which inflates their stomach like a temporary life jacket so they can swim to safety. However they must watch out for the Black Cayman who will attack it.
- Armadillo is a Spanish word meaning "little armoured one" and refers to the bony plates that cover the back, head, legs, and tail of most of these odd looking creatures. Armadillos are the only living mammals that wear such shells. Closely related to anteaters and sloths, armadillos



generally have a pointy or shovel-shaped snout and small eyes.

- They sleep up to 16 hours per day, foraging in the early morning and evening for beetles, ants, termites, and other insects. They have very poor eyesight, and utilize their keen sense of smell to hunt. Strong legs and huge front claws are used for digging, and long, sticky tongues for extracting ants and termites from their tunnels. In addition to bugs, armadillos eat small vertebrates, plants, and some fruit.

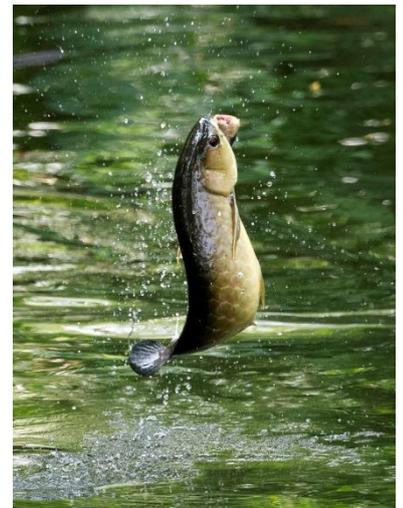
## Amazonian Manatee

- This is the smallest manatee in the world and it is the only one which lives exclusively in fresh water.
- It has a slow metabolic rate so it can stay underwater for 20 minutes before it needs air.
- They eat floating grasses and water hyacinths. It can eat 15% of its body weight per day.
- It is a mammal and gives birth to live young. It can produce plenty of milk for her baby. It takes a year to wean a baby manatee and another year for a youngster to learn all about survival skills before they leave their mother.



## Silver Arowana Fish

- The silver Arowana is also known as the 'water monkey'
- It hunts out of the water and below it. It loiters in shallow waters listening for movement. If it hears any prey then it launches itself out of the water to catch it.
- It can leap up to 2 metres out of the water.
- Although specimens have been found with the remains of birds, bats and snakes in their stomachs, its main diet consists of crustaceans, insects, smaller fish, and other animals that float on the water surface, which its drawbridge-like mouth is exclusively adapted for feeding on.



## Red Piranha

- The red piranha has razor sharp teeth and can rip its prey apart in seconds. Sound and movement attract their attention but blood attracts them more.
- These fish are covered in scales, breathe with gills, and hatch from eggs. They are also cold-blooded.

- These fish are one of the oldest species of fish left on the planet. They have been around with very few changes for millions of years.
- They are a small fish. Piranhas have a round body and large head. They can grow to be 20 – 40 cm in length.
- A group of piranhas is called a shoal. Even the largest shoals only have about 20 fish in them. Though they do feed together as a group that is not the reason that **piranhas swim in groups**. They actually like to group together for protection from predators.
- Piranhas are eaten by a variety of other animals, including piranhas themselves. Herons, caimans, snakes, and turtles have been known to eat piranhas as well.



- There are lots of different kinds of piranhas, though the most common variety is known as the red-bellied piranhas, which is named because of its red belly.
- The most famous, or infamous, a feature of a piranha is its teeth. The teeth are very sharp and are triangular.
- This helps them to tear meat away from their prey. They also have a very powerful bite, which has been measured to have about 72 pounds of force.
- Since they are such active chompers, a piranha has to replace its teeth all of the time. Their teeth, luckily, grow in four sets. These sets are replaced about every 100 days or so.
- Even though they are thought to be merciless eating machines, piranhas are actually omnivores so they will eat both plants and meat. They mostly eat smaller fish, insects, snails, and some aquatic plants. They will also go after larger animals if the opportunity presents itself. The only time that this occurs, however, is if the larger animals fall into the water and are injured or in some form of distress.
- Feeding frenzies will occasionally occur when the situation is right. If there hasn't been any food for a while and there is blood in the water, then piranhas will become frenzied and bite everything and anything to get a full belly.
- These fish are only found in freshwater streams and rivers. They are mostly found in the Amazon Basin in South America. Piranhas prefer water that is swiftly moving. The water that they live in is usually 75-85 degrees Fahrenheit, which is nice and warm.
- While piranha attacks on humans do happen, they are exceedingly rare. The only way that these fish would go after humans is because they feel threatened or they are especially hungry.



## Blue Poison Dart Frog (Wakari Dart Frog)

- The Blue Poison Dart Frog is a small frog with bright blue colouring. Its back and top of the head are a lighter-coloured sky blue, while its belly and legs are a darker blue colour. Dark blue and black spots cover the frog's body, primarily its back and

head. The sexes are similar in appearance, with females being slightly larger than males.

- These frogs have chemicals in their skin so they would taste bitter to a predator. The colour of their skin is also a deterrent to other animals so they do not eat them.
- The female lays her eggs on leaves then she leaves the father to guard them until they hatch into tadpoles. He needs to protect them until they change into frogs as the tadpoles are not poisonous and predators will try to eat them. When they are big enough, the father will take the tadpoles on his back to a high place in the forest canopy where it is safe. They travel on his back in a mucus sack which covers them and stops them falling.
- They travel to the bromeliad plants which grow up high. Inside the bromeliad are pools of water, just like a small pond in the sky.
- A Blue Poison Dart Frog measures 2.5-3.8 centimetres long and weighs about three tenths of an ounce (8.5 grams)
- Blue Poison Dart Frogs eat primarily insects, including caterpillars, ants, beetles, flies and mites. They will also consume spiders and other arthropods.
- Each Blue Poison Dart Frog has a unique pattern of spots, much like humans' individual fingerprints.
- The toxic compounds in the skin of a Poison Dart Frog come from its prey, especially the ants it eats. The compounds are absorbed into the frog's skin when it consumes its prey.
- Poison Dart Frogs have no webbing between the toes on their feet, so they are poor swimmers and are not often found in the water.
- The toxins by Poison Dart Frogs are applied to the darts and arrows used by some South American Indians for hunting. The poison helps to quickly kill the animals being hunted.
- Because the area it lives in is so remote, the Blue Poison Dart Frog was not discovered until 1969



## Giant Otters

- The endangered wild otter will grow to 2m in length and can weigh up to 165 kg..
- These huge members of the weasel family swim by propelling themselves with their powerful tails and flexing their long bodies. They also have webbed feet, water-repellent fur to keep them dry and warm, and nostrils and ears that close in the water
- Fish make up most of the giant otter's diet. They hunt alone or in groups, sometimes using coordinated efforts, and must be successful often to meet their daily intake quota. Each animal may eat six to nine pounds of food per day. Fish are supplemented by crustaceans, snakes, and other river creatures.
- Giant otters live in family groups which include parents



and the offspring from several breeding seasons. They den by burrowing into banks or under fallen logs, and establish a home territory that they will aggressively defend.

- Like most other otter species, giant otters come ashore to give birth. Females retreat to their underground dens and deliver litters of one to six young. Young otters remain in the den for a month but grow up quickly. After nine or ten months, it is difficult to tell mother from child.
- Giant otters have been hunted extensively and wild populations are at-risk. They thrive in clean and healthy water but their survival is being threatened by pollution from logging and mining in the Amazon rainforest.

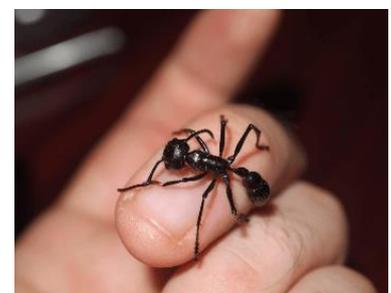
## Pink River Dolphins

- The colour of the adult individuals varies and they are usually mottled pink. The body of this dolphin is flexible and powerfully built. It can turn its head to 90 degrees. It has wide triangle-shaped flukes (lobes of the tail), paddle-shaped pectoral fins and very long dorsal fin.
- The body colour of the juveniles is dark grey but the blackness disappears with time. Unlike males, the female pink river dolphin is a lighter shade of pink colour. On either side of its jaws, there are up to 28 pairs of teeth with a long snout.
- Unlike other aquatic mammals, the male of this dolphin species is about 16 percent longer than the females.
- A male pink river dolphin can grow up to a length of 2.5 metres and weighs up to 185 kg while the females are up to 2 metres long and weigh up to 150 kg.
- A female dolphin gives birth to a newborn in May or June. A calf is around 75 cm long and it is suckled by its mother for a long period of time.
- They are found in the natural habitats of river canals, side streams and inland seas.
- The pink river dolphin has the most diverse diet among all species of toothed whales. On its menu, there may be more than 53 different fish species. Among others, the diet consists of piranhas, catfishes, drums, tetras, turtles and freshwater crabs. In order to spot its prey, the dolphin uses echolocation in murky waters.
- These dolphins do not have any fear of different objects like oars, boats and logs. They tend to rub their skin and play around with these objects.



## Bullet Ants

- Ants make up 30% of the weight of all the creatures in the Amazon rainforest.
- The most deadly of the Amazon ants and the largest ant in the world is the Bullet Ant which is almost 4cm in length and only a few of them are needed to take down a grown human being. The Bullet Ant is called such,



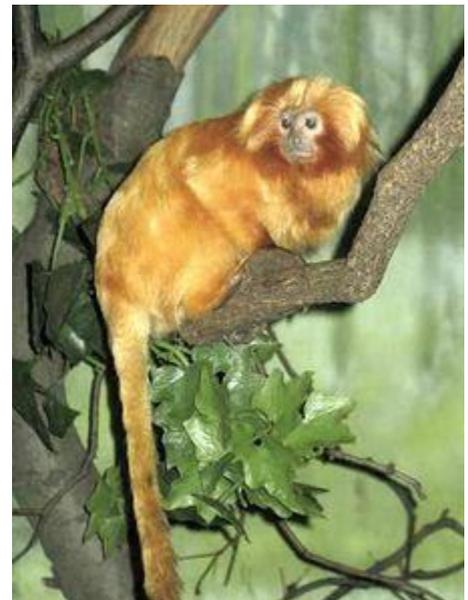
because its sting is equal to being shot according to some victims.

- Known as one of the most painful stings of any insect, the Bullet Ant sting contains a neurotoxin. The stinger is located on the ant's abdomen and is 1-3 mm long. A single sting from one of these pests can leave a person in agony for up to 8 hours. The pain is described as an intense and lasting burning sensation.
- The indigenous tribe, The **Satere-Mawe** located in the Amazon Rainforest, use the Bullet Ant as an initiation ritual. For a boy to become a warrior, he must use the bullet ant stings intentionally. The tribe carries out this initiation by weaving hundreds of Bullet Ants, stingers facing in, into a glove made out of leaves. The boy then places the glove over his hand and completes his ritual by enduring 10 full minutes. The initiation is only complete when the boy goes through a total of 20 rituals.
- They nest in trees, shrubs and in the ground.
- Unlike other species of ants, the queen of a bullet ant colony is usually not much larger than the workers. A colony of bullet ants will on average have several hundred ants.



## Golden Lion Tamarin Monkeys

- GLTs are one of four species of lion tamarins, all native to Brazil and all endangered. Habitat destruction has been the driver behind their endangered status.
- There are only about 1,500 GLTs left in the wild. More than 400 animals have been reintroduced into Brazil since 1984 from zoo breeding programmes.
- In the wild, GLTs live in groups of two to nine animals, usually consisting of a male and female of breeding age and several younger animals. Adult GLT's breed for life.
- Females usually give birth to twins. All the members of her group will help her to take care of the babies, but the dad helps the most.
- GLTs are omnivores and will eat fruit, insects and small lizards.
- They will share their meals with others in the group, either offering bits to other GLTs (active sharing) or letting others steal from them (passive sharing).
- About 40 percent of GLTs die before their first birthday usually because of being food for larger predators like jaguars, large lizards, caymen and snakes. GLTs that survive past age one will live about eight years, on average.
- When a GLT in the wild spots a predator, it will give an alarm call. That call will alert the family troop to run and fly for cover.



## Red Uakari Monkeys

- These are often called the English monkey because they have a red face which natives said looked like sunburnt foreigners who explored the jungles.

- The brighter the colour of their face then the healthier the monkeys are.
- These monkeys forage in the upper canopy layer of the trees.
- They have strong lower jaws to open the shells of fruit. They also have a shorter tail than other primates.
- They groom each other to establish bonds and group security.
- They play together and have mock fights to help to develop skills for survival up in the canopy.



## Harpy Eagle

- The Harpy Eagle is capable of taking a monkey or a sloth off a branch with its talons which are as large as a grizzly bear's talons.
- It nests in the tallest hardwood trees of the forest which are 50 metres from the forest floor.
- It has a wing span of 2metres and is the deadliest predator in the upper canopy and emergent layer of the rainforest.
- The female will bring fresh green twigs to her nest daily and replenish the old nesting materials to keep parasites and disease carrying flies away as they are the biggest threat to the survival of her young.
- The other major threat to the Harpy Eagle is man. Loggers are cutting down the trees she calls home because the hardwood is a valuable commodity to the logging companies.
- As it takes a year to raise a Harpy Eagle chick and the loss of their nesting trees is having a detrimental effect on the population with many birds losing their nesting sites and baby chicks time and time again to the logging and forest fires.

