



## Conservation In The Rainforest

The South American rainforest biome is one of the most varied and significant ecosystems on our planet. Teeming with over half of the world's wildlife, it yields ingredients for medicines and is important to maintaining the world's oxygen / carbon dioxide balance. It is therefore vital to the survival of many species, including ours.

However, the rainforest is under threat. Conservationists (people who aim to protect and preserve the rainforest) such as David Attenborough, Jane Goodall and Greta Thunberg work alongside global organisations such as the WWF to raise awareness of the threats faced by the rainforests.

### Threats

The main threat to the rainforest areas is human activity. Farmers wish to make use of the rich, fertile soils, so deforestation has occurred on a massive scale: acres of rainforest have been cut down and burnt to release the nutrients back into the soil. Large scale monoculture plantation agriculture, such as sugar palm or cattle ranching, has taken over. Species have found their nesting sites destroyed and interdependent food webs have been shattered, reducing the area's biodiversity. Along with development of hydro-electric schemes along the rivers, this has resulted in catastrophic loss of habitat and the endangerment of many native species.

At the same time, the trapping of 'exotic' animals for their fur, feathers, medicinal qualities or to be kept as pets by private collectors, has seen a huge drop in the numbers of many species in the wild. Consequently, an increasing number of rainforest plants and wildlife have been added to the Endangered Species List.



## Case Study: The Macaw Parrots

One such group is the Macaw parrot. Over 1/3 of all 145 species of parrot are classed as endangered and are at serious risk of global extinction. This was highlighted in the movie Rio, where Blu – who believes he is the last remaining Spix macaw – sets out to try and find another member of his species. Sadly, in October 2020, the Spix Macaw was declared as ‘extinct in the wild’, joining many other species who only exist in captivity. This means they live as part of conservation breeding programmes or in the homes of private collectors. It is estimated there are only around 160 Spix macaws left, as these birds have proved difficult to breed in captivity due to their diet – only truly accessible in their natural environment. Only 1 in 10 eggs ever hatches and many young birds do not survive.

### Conservation: The Hyacinth Macaw Project in Mato Grosso do Sul (Brazil)

This project in Brazil works with local farmers to encourage the maintenance of local habitat: leaving tall (nesting site) trees in place and replanting and fencing off new saplings from grazing cattle. Many farmers have also agreed to keep trappers off their land to prevent the capture of Macaws for illegal transportation or the use for their feathers, which are prized for headdresses and decoration. Macaws bred in the project can then be released back into this protected habitat. Perhaps in the future, we will see Spix Macaws return to thrive in the wild.

It is clear that action must be taken to conserve rainforests and ensure our activities do not damage the vital ecosystem on which so much of our planet’s life depends.



**Spix Macaw: now regarded as “extinct in the wild”**



**Hyacinth Macaw – part of local conservation projects in Brazil**

## RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. What is the main threat to the rainforest?
2. Explain what deforestation is using the text to help you.
3. Why are blue macaws endangered?
4. Why is it difficult to breed macaws in captivity?
5. How do conservation projects help species such as the macaw?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**V**

What does the word conservation mean?

**I**

How has the change in land use created problems for the species of animals that live there?

**S**

Summarise the main threats to the rainforest.

**E**

In the text, the author describes what is happening in the rainforest as “resulting in catastrophic loss”, what do they mean by this and what does it show about how the author feels about what is happening?

**P**

What more do you think could be done to protect the rainforest and its animal life?