



# Rain Forest Plants and Animals: Understory

The trees in the understory are much shorter than the trees in the other layers of the rain forest. The understory trees grow up to 20 feet tall. There is not much sunlight that reaches this layer. The trees in the layers above block out all the sunlight. Trees need to have light to live and grow. The leaves of the trees in this layer are very large because they need to be able to catch as much sunlight as possible.

## BANANA TREE

The bananas that we eat grow on trees in the rain forest. This tree has very large leaves. This is so the leaves can capture as much sunlight as possible. A banana tree can grow up to 15 feet tall. That is as tall as a two-story house. Many animals in the rain forest eat bananas upside down.

## TOUCAN

The toucan is a bird with a strange looking beak. The toucan's beak is very big and has many colors. The toucan's beak may look silly, but it is actually a very helpful adaptation. Its beak helps the toucan get its food. Toucans eat fruits and berries. They also like to eat bananas. A toucan does not eat a banana the way we do, though. The toucan's beak is very sharp and can slice open a banana. His beak is also helpful for picking the fruit. When the toucan is finished with his meal, he flies back up to his home in the canopy.

## CACAO TREE

Another special tree in the understory is the cacao tree. This tree has large pods growing on the side of the tree. Inside the pods are small seeds that are used to make chocolate.

## CAPUCHIN MONKEY

The capuchin is a small monkey. It is usually dark brown or black. Sometimes its stomach is a lighter color. Capuchins can use their tail to hold onto things like branches or food. Capuchins travel in groups. They can make very loud noises. Capuchins eat insects, leaves, nuts, fruit and sometimes bird eggs. They also like to eat the liquid from inside a cacao pod. Capuchins find shelter in the branches and leaves of the understory.

## CECROPIA TREE

The cecropia tree is shaped like an umbrella and has a hollow trunk. The leaves of the cecropia tree are often covered in a sticky liquid called sap. Ants live on the cecropia tree. The ants and the cecropia tree work together. The ants get food and a safe place to live. The ants live inside the hollow tree trunk and eat the sap. The ants protect the tree from animals that try to eat its leaves. They also bite any plants trying to grow around them. Scientists call this type of relationship symbiosis. Symbiosis is another word for teamwork. The cecropia tree and the ants help each other survive.



## KEY TERMS

### Adaptation

Something an animal has or does that helps it to survive.

### Banana Tree

A tree that grows in the rain forest and produces bananas.

### Cacao Tree

A rain forest tree that produces the seeds from which chocolate is made.

### Symbiosis

Teamwork between organisms.

### Toucan

A bird that lives in the rain forest with a very large beak.

### Understory

The plants that grow beneath the canopy.



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