

The Florida Everglades

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One of the most unusual habitats in the world can be found right here in our own country. It is called the Everglades. It is located in the southern tip of Florida, and provides habitat for thousands of different species of trees, birds, fish, and other animals.

The Everglades include many different habitats ranging from swamps, to marshes, to forests. As a result of all this variety, over 300 species of birds live in the Everglades. So do many different endangered species including the American crocodile, the green turtle, the West Indian manatee, and the Florida panther.



The Everglades can be a harsh place. It has two main seasons – the wet or rainy season and the dry season. The rainy season lasts from May to October. During this season, it is warm and humid. Animals get plenty to eat. Because of the heavy rainfall, there is plenty of fresh, clean water. This is especially good for **cypress forests** that need heavy rainfall to thrive. Every tree's survival is important to the many insects and animals that make these trees their habitat.

Then, from November to April, the dry season arrives. Without the rain, water levels in the shallow rivers and marshes fall. In some places the water dries up completely. Many animals must leave their habitats in order to survive during the dry season. Some small reptiles bury themselves in the moist mud and stay there until the rainy season returns.

During the dry season, freshwater is collected in limestone ponds known as solution holes. Many animals come to these holes to live and hunt so that they will have something to drink until the rainy season comes again.



The Florida Everglades is one of the most wonderful habitats in the world, but real estate development, highway construction, and water use are threatening them.

Several laws have been passed in the past decade to protect the Everglades. In 2000, the **Everglades Protection Plan** was passed. This legislation focuses on bringing freshwater into the Everglades during the dry season in order to repair damages to the habitat. The government estimates that this project, and many others in the Everglades Protection Plan, will take 36 years to complete. For this plan to work, both the beautiful area and the creatures who inhabit it must be better respected by their human neighbors.