

STAAR Science Tutorial 47

TEK 8.11B: Competition

TEK 8.11B: Investigate how organisms and populations in an ecosystem depend on and may compete for biotic and abiotic factors such as quantity of light, water, range of temperatures, or soil composition.

Ecosystems

- **Ecology** is the scientific study of the interactions of living organisms with their environment. **Ecologists** are scientists who study ecology.
- All of the living organisms on Earth, together with the parts of Earth that can support life, is called the **biosphere**. The biosphere can be classified into different **biomes**, all of the areas of earth with a similar climate and vegetation. Examples of biomes include tropical rain forests and deserts. An **ecosystem** is a defined single area of one biome type, together with all of the living organisms in that area and the non-living factors affecting the organisms. For example, the Chihuahuan Desert of west Texas is an ecosystem that is part of the worldwide desert biome.
- A **population** is all of the individual organisms of a single species living in a defined area. A **species** is one particular kind of organism that can breed with others of its kind to produce fertile offspring (children who will be able to have children of their own). All of the populations living in a defined area is the **community**.
- The levels of organization in the biosphere is summarized by this diagram:



- **Biotic** (living) factors in an ecosystem includes all of the living organisms found in an area, and the interactions between those organisms, such as resource competition, predation (predator-prey relationships) and symbiosis. This tutorial describes competition in more detail below. See *Tutorial 48: Food Webs and Symbiosis* for more information on predator-prey and symbiotic relationships.
- **Abiotic** (non-living) factors include the defining characteristics of the environment, such as the climate (especially temperature range and rainfall amounts), water, sunlight, air, rock and soil types, including the availability of elements essential to life (for example, nitrogen and phosphorus).
- Each species has a **niche**, a set of biotic and abiotic conditions in which it can survive and maintain a stable population. A species' niche includes its place in the food web, the symbiotic relationships of which it is part, and the physical conditions necessary to its survival. A species' niche includes its "role" in the ecosystem.

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