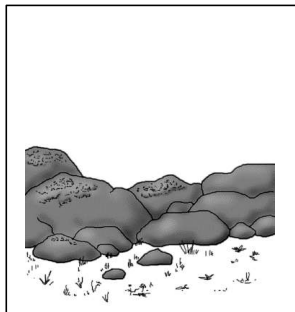# THE LIFE OF A FOREST
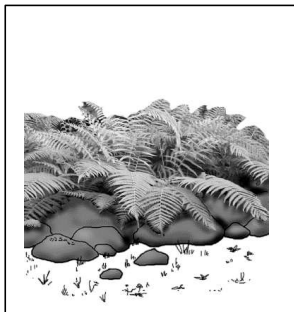
Here is a range of information about forests and the part they play in our environment.
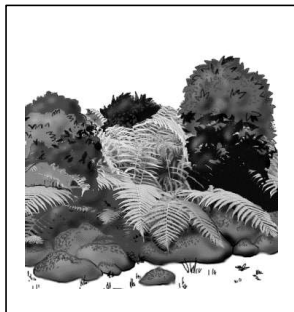

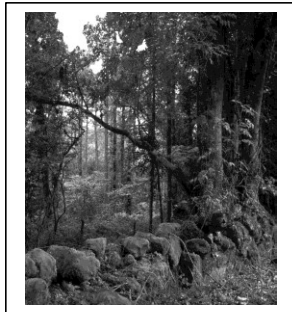**THE BIRTH OF A FOREST**

Barren rock is colonised by lichens and moss	Ferns and small plants take root in soil	Larger shrubs and small trees begin to dominate	Mature forest with tree canopy and understorey

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A BALANCED SYSTEM

Ancient woods with their varied mix of trees and plant life provide a whole range of wild mammals, birds and insects with a delicate eco-system, their lives in a state of balance. It is possible that seed-loving birds, squirrels and mice could, in theory, eat all the seeds of the next generation of trees, but it's unlikely. In any case, these animals are, themselves, the food of predators, such as owls and foxes. If the predators are too successful, they will decline in numbers because of lack of food. In this way, plants and animals depend on each other for their survival. In creating the right environment, they are the environment.

THE FOREST ABLAZE

Long before human beings came along, fires caused naturally by lightning and, rarely, by volcanic activity, were part of the cycle of destruction and renewal of woodland. The risks have increased with the introduction of timber-cutting machinery, campfires and the careless discarding of matches. The carbon content of living trees as well as brushwood and leaf litter at ground level provide a vast supply of fuel for wildfire. The destruction of wildlife and the threat to adjacent human habitation can be immense. Tackling such infernos is like a military operation with an almost equal risk to the lives of fire-fighters.

FOREST FOLKLORE

The **rowan** tree was once used as a charm against witchcraft. On the Isle of Man, rowan crosses, made without a knife are tied to the tails of cows to protect them from evil. Wood from the **ash** tree was used to cure warts. To bring **hawthorn** blossom inside was thought to foretell a death in the family. **Yew** trees are often found in graveyards because, being evergreen, they symbolise the possibility of everlasting life. **Willow** has traditionally been used to cure the sick. (Its bark contains the basic ingredient of aspirin.)

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1. What phrase in **The Birth of a Forest** refers to branches and leaves at different levels?

    canopy and understorey

2. Describe the kind of habitat an old forest provides.

    An eco-system in a state of balance for mammals, birds and insects.

3. What part do predators play in ensuring the continuation of the next generation of trees?

    Predators control the number of seed-eating animals.

4. What would happen if owls and foxes were too successful?

    Their food supply would run out and they would decline in numbers.

5. Before human beings evolved, what two natural phenomena caused forest fires?

    lightning

    volcanic activity

6. Name **three** human activities which have increased the threat of fire.

    The use of timber-cutting machinery.

    Having campfires.

    Throwing away lit matches.

7. Once a blaze establishes itself, how does the forest, itself, provide fuel?

    Trees, brushwood and leaf litter provide a plentiful supply of carbon.

8. How might people be in danger from forest fires?

They might live nearby. Also, firefighters, themselves, are at risk.

9. What is the simile that is used to describe the work of fire-fighters?

like a military operation

10. Where might you find cows being protected from evil?

Isle of Man

11. If you were a believer in ancient folklore, why might you be wary of hawthorn?

Taking it inside was supposed to foretell the death of a family member.

12. Why was the yew tree associated with everlasting life?

They are evergreen.

13. **(Its bark contains the basic ingredient of aspirin.)** Why has the writer placed this sentence inside brackets?

This is a scientific fact contained in a section on folklore. There is some

element of truth in past beliefs about willow.

14. Find two words or phrases that have been used instead of **forest**.

ancient woods

woodland

15. In **The Forest Ablaze**, find two words that are used instead of fire.

wildfire

infernos