

The Great Barrier Reef

FACT FILE



The Great Barrier Reef protects ecosystems of coral reefs, seagrass, mangroves and islands.

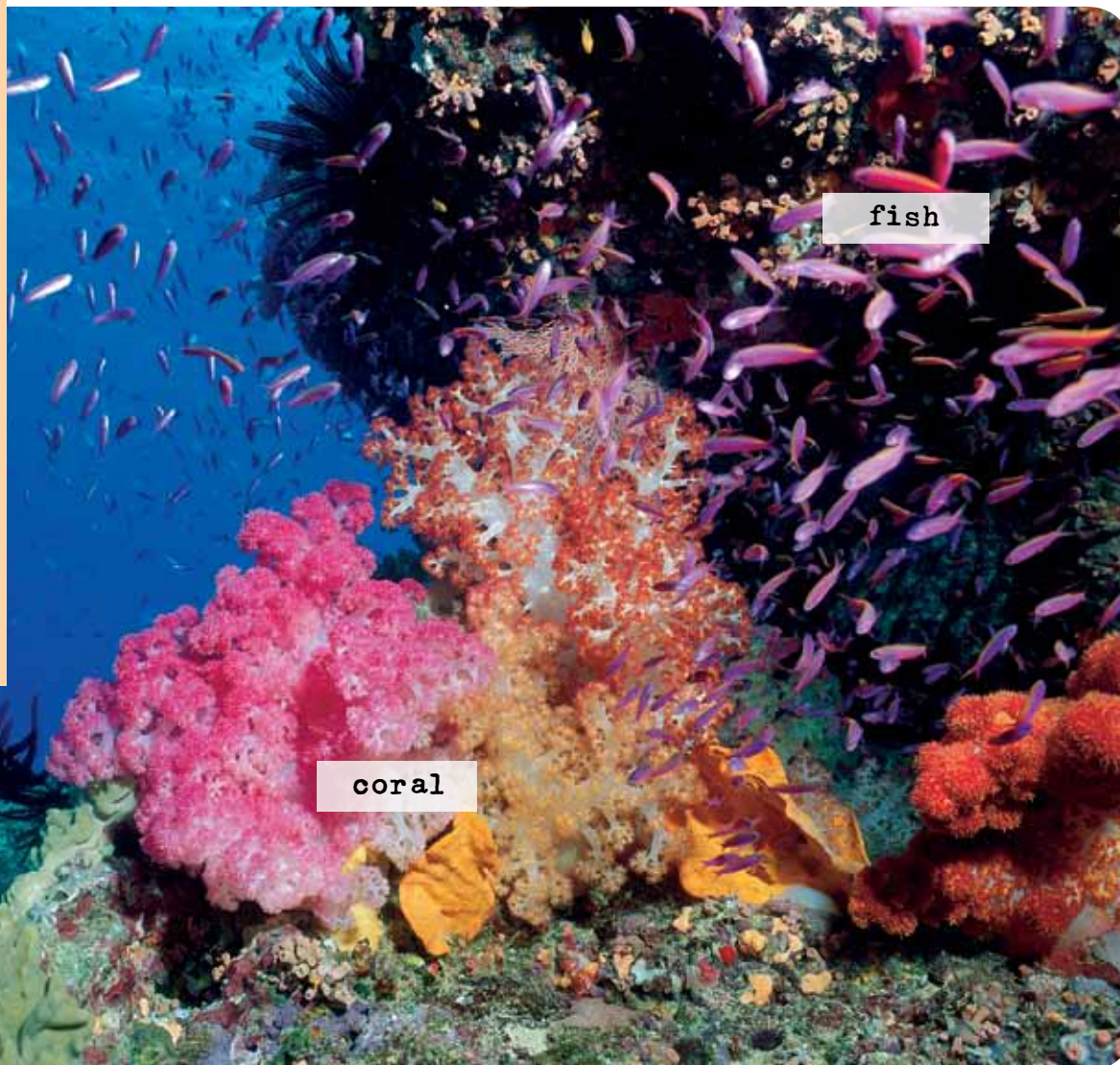
Biodiversity: 1500 fish species, 242 bird species and 2195 native plant species

Category:

Criteria:

The Great Barrier Reef is a 2300-kilometre (1429-mile) stretch of coral reefs off the coast of north-eastern Australia. The reefs are formed along 600 islands and 300 cays – small, low islands made of coral and sand. The Great Barrier Reef is the largest World Heritage site.

The Great Barrier Reef is the largest protected ecosystem on Earth.



TIMELINE

- | | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| 500 000 years ago | 1937 | 1979 | 1981 |
| The Great Barrier Reef begins to form. | Two islands of the Great Barrier Reef are made national parks. | Part of the Great Barrier Reef is made a national park. | The Great Barrier Reef is inscribed on the World Heritage List. |

Important features

More than 2900 different reefs form the Great Barrier Reef. They have been created by millions of tiny sea animals called hard corals. The reefs attract thousands of different sea creatures. Many of these sea creatures feed on one another.

Did You Know?

Jellyfish are a natural part of the ecosystem but when there are not enough turtles to eat them, jellyfish numbers increase. This affects the balance of the ecosystem.



Loggerhead turtles eat thousands of jellyfish in the Great Barrier Reef, helping to maintain the ecosystem.

Issues

The greatest threat to the Great Barrier Reef is **global warming**. Increases in the Earth's temperature are in turn increasing ocean temperatures. This can damage or even kill coral. Without the coral there can be no Great Barrier Reef ecosystem.

GLOSSARY

seagrass	grass-like plants that grow in the sea
mangroves	areas of trees growing in salt water
global warming	increases in temperatures on Earth

Gunung Mulu National Park

FACT FILE



Gunung Mulu protects mountain rainforest, **lowland rainforest** and cave ecosystems.

Biodiversity: 3500 plant species, 80 mammal species and 270 bird species, of which 24 species are **endemic** to Borneo

Category:

Criteria:

Gunung Mulu National Park is a **rainforest** on the island of Borneo, Malaysia. There are many mountains in the park, formed from a rock called limestone. Caves form easily in limestone, and one of the park's mountains, Gunung Api, has more caves than any other mountain in the world.

The caves of Gunung Mulu form unique ecosystems. Many of the animal species living there never leave them.



Gunung Mulu National Park contains the largest known cave chamber in the world.

Important features

Millions of bats and birds called *swiftlets* live in the caves of Gunung Mulu. They feed on insects. Other species that live in the caves rely on the bats and swiftlets. Snakes, rats and monitor lizards eat fallen birds and bats, and insects feed on their dung and droppings. Then spiders, scorpions and cave geckos feed on the insects.

Did You Know?

The park is best known for its 27 bat species. In Deer Cave at Gunung Api, there are 3 million bats.

Issues

One of the most serious issues facing the park is **deforestation** outside the park boundaries. Bats and cave swiftlets will feed up to 25 kilometres (15.5 miles) from their caves. It is important not to cut down trees within that distance.

GLOSSARY

rainforest	a forest that receives a lot of rainfall
lowland rainforest	a rainforest that is not high above sea level
endemic to	only found in
deforestation	the cutting down and removal of trees

TIMELINE

5 million years ago	1974	1985	2000
The oldest of Gunung Mulu's caves begins to form.	The area is named a national park.	Gunung Mulu National Park is opened to the public.	The site is inscribed on the World Heritage List.


Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California

FACT FILE



The Gulf of California protects island, coastal and marine ecosystems.

Biodiversity: more than 695 plant species, 31 species of cetaceans and 900 fish species, of which 90 are endemic to the area

Category: 

Criteria:   

The Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California is a collection of nine protected areas in the west of Mexico. The ecosystem is very diverse.

The Gulf of California site includes 244 desert and rocky islands, as well as the marine ecosystem.



Important features

About one third of the world's cetaceans can be found in the Gulf of California, including five of the world's eight sea turtles. One of the cetaceans, the rare vaquita porpoise, is endemic to the area. Vaquitas feed on small fish and squid not more than 25 kilometres (15.5 miles) from the shore.



These short-beaked dolphins are some of the many cetaceans found in the Gulf of California.

Issues

In 2008, the Mexican government cancelled over 1000 fishing permits to protect the World Heritage site. They were particularly worried about the natural habitat of the vaquita porpoise, the smallest cetacean in the world. However, plans to build harbours and docks for yachts along the coast of the Sea of Cortez could also affect the marine ecosystem.

TIMELINE

4.5 million years ago

The Cortez Sea is created as the Baja California Peninsula breaks away from the mainland.

2005

The site is inscribed on the World Heritage List.

2007

The Islas Marietas National Park is added to the listing for the Islands and Protected Areas of the Gulf of California.

GLOSSARY

diverse	having a wide variety
marine	of the ocean
cetaceans	mammals that live in the sea
endemic to	only found in