

Wildlife and Plants on Mountains

Mountains can sometimes act like barriers preventing plants and animals from crossing from one side of the mountain to the other. In the United States and Canada, for example, there are two different ecosystems (plant and wildlife communities) on each side of the Rocky Mountains.



As well as different ecosystems on each side of a mountain, you can often find different ecosystems as you climb up from base to the peak of a big mountain. Because of the rapid changes in altitude (height) and temperature along a mountain slope, ecosystems can change quickly from one area to the next.

Plant life - Vegetation

The growth of vegetation depends on rainfall and temperature.

The vegetation on the lower slopes largely depends on which climate zone the mountain is in. The foothills may be covered in broadleaved forests. These change to needleleaf trees (coniferous trees) like spruce and pines at on the upper slopes (higher altitudes).

As you climb higher up a mountain it gets colder and the trees eventually thin out and disappear. When it gets too cold for trees to grow, it is called a **timberline**

The highest parts of the mountain support only sparse grasses and low-growing alpine flowers which can withstand the harsh conditions.



If the mountain is high enough even this vegetation disappears and the peak is bare rock and perhaps covered in snow and ice.

Animal Life

Life on mountains for animals can be very harsh. Food is scarce and the climate is very cold. Many animals have adapted to survive the bitter cold.

Animal life on mountains vary from continent to continent.

The animals in the mountains of North America (Canada, USA) include the big horn sheep, mountain goats, brown bear, black bear, grizzly bear, mountain lions and antelope.

Animal Life in Mountains

High mountains are a bleak habitat for animal life. Food is scarce and the climate is very cold. Mammals living here have adapted to survive the bitter cold and most have thick woolly fur.

Mountain sheep and goats like the chamois and ibex are very sure-footed to help them climb the jagged, craggy slopes.