

## The Grasslands An Introduction

In different parts of the world, grassland areas have different names. In North America, they're called prairies; in Asia, steppes; in Africa and Australia, savannas. The grasslands of South Africa are called velds, and in parts of South America they're pampas. In Venezuela they're the Llanos, and in Brazil, the campo.

Grasslands once covered about 25 percent of the land area of Earth. They are found in a variety of climates and can have very hot summers and very cold winters. Rainfall is often fairly low, with yearly amounts varying from 40 to 100 centimeters (15 to 40 inches) per year.

The main vegetation of this biome is grass. Scientists estimate that there are about 10,000 different species of grasses on Earth. Grasses are flowering plants, often with very deep root systems. (We don't often think of grasses as having flowers, but they do.) Grasses are pollinated by wind, so they don't need colorful flowers to attract insects. Consequently, they may go unnoticed by humans. The crown, or growing point, of grass is located at ground level. This protects it from grazing animals and from fires.

Other plants that make up the grasslands include many different flowery forbs. These plants, some of which are insect pollinated, provide food and shelter for many of the animals of the grasslands.

The growth cycle of the grasslands over thousands of years has created some very rich topsoils that are many feet thick. Humans have found these to be the most suitable soils for growing the crops needed to feed the world's human population. Since only about 11 percent of the Earth's land is suitable for farming, much of the grasslands have been converted to grow crops. As a result, natural grasslands are now located in only a few remote areas and on protected refuges.

Animals of the grasslands are often sharp-eyed and fast, such as the Jack Rabbit and the Pronghorn Antelope. Many of the predators, such as lions and coyotes, have mottled colors to blend in with dry grass.



**Lions use the tall grass as cover when hunting prey.**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

For the student:

1. What are three different names used for grasslands?

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2. Why do you think this biome is called grasslands?

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3. Why would grasses need deep root systems?

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4. Why are grasslands so suitable for farming?

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5. For predators, why would camouflage coloration be beneficial?

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