

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Mountain Ecosystem

By Kimberly M. Hutmacher



A habitat is where a plant or animal lives and grows. A habitat is part of an ecosystem where lots of different plants and animals live. Mountains, with their many levels, are an ecosystem containing many different habitats.

At the base of a mountain, you will probably find a forest filled with lots of plants and trees. You might see a lake at the base. A grizzly bear or a garter snake could cross your path. You might even catch a glimpse of an owl in a tree.

Climb higher, toward the middle of the mountainside, and leave the forest behind for grasslands and maybe a stream. Here, you might encounter a mountain lion stalking its prey or a salamander slipping underneath a leaf to hide. Goats might be leaping from rock to rock.

Climb even higher, toward the top, and you'll notice a change in the temperature. It's getting colder and snow is covering the mountaintops. There aren't many plants near the mountaintop, but you might see fuzzy lichen covering rocks like carpeting. The air is thin at the top of the mountain, which makes it difficult for large animals to breathe. When people climb very large mountains, they often take special air tanks filled with oxygen. Even though you won't see many big animals, millions of tiny insects like snow fleas might dot the landscape.

Depending on the elevation, you could see deserts, river valleys, meadows, forests, and snow caps all on one mountain. With each unique habitat comes unique plant and animal life.

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1. Define habitat.

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2. What happens as you climb higher and higher up a mountain?

- a. You see more animals.
- b. The temperature rises.
- c. Forests become thicker.
- d. The temperature drops.

3. What types of animals would you be most likely to see near the top of a mountain?

- a. bears
- b. insects
- c. owls
- d. There are no animals at the top.

4. What type of habitat would you probably find at the base of a mountain?

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5. Why do you think lakes appear at the base of a mountain and not higher up?

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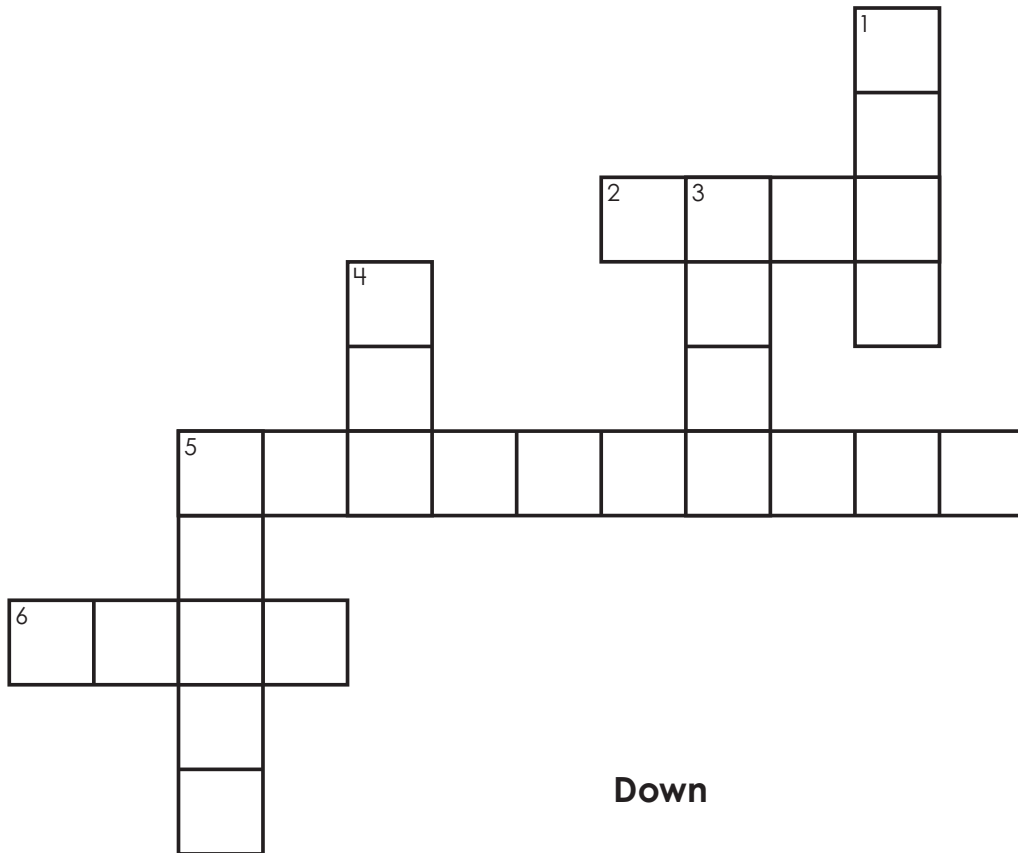
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Use animals mentioned in the article "The Mountain Ecosystem" to complete the crossword puzzle.



## Across

2. tiny wingless insect
5. amphibian that looks like a lizard
6. large, furry, omnivorous mammal

## Down

1. mammal with backward-curving horns
3. large, carnivorous cat
4. nocturnal bird with excellent hearing
5. reptile with no legs

## ANSWER KEY

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1. Define habitat.

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3. What types of animals would you be most likely to see near the top of a mountain?

a. bears

**b. insects**

c. owls

d. There are no animals at the top.

4. What type of habitat would you probably find at the base of a mountain?

**At the base of a mountain you would probably find forests filled with plants and trees. You may even see a lake.**

5. Why do you think lakes appear at the base of a mountain and not higher up?

**Mountains probably don't have lakes near the top because gravity pulls the water downwards, through streams or rivers, to the base of the mountain.**

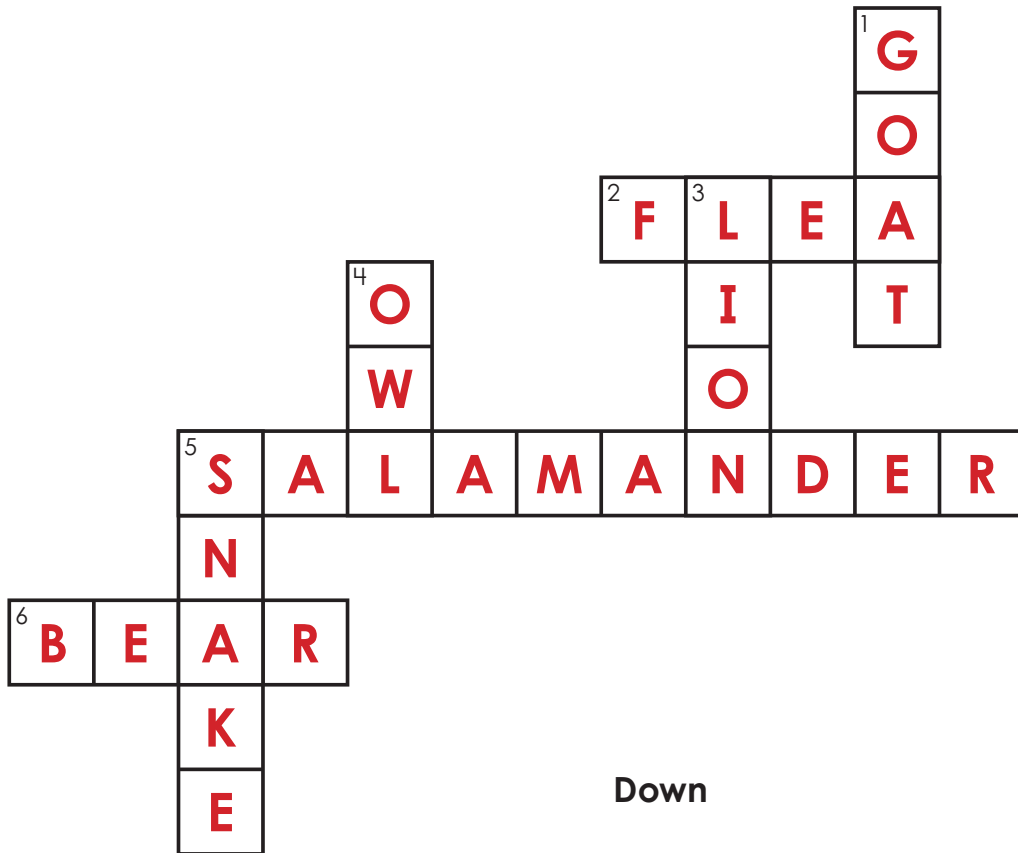
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