

Keystone Species

Each time we lose a keystone species the world slowly falls apart.

A keystone species is just that, it is a keystone. When a stone arch is built there is a keystone at the top of the arch that holds the whole structure together. If you were to dislodge that keystone the whole structure would come crashing down. Next time you see a stone arch or an old stone bridge look for the keystone, it is always in the centre at the top of the arch.

The animal kingdom has many keystone animals, each one is called a keystone species and without each of them, a part of their world would start to fall apart.

In the Central and South American rainforests there is a bird called a toucan. It is a very beautiful bird with a very large colourful bill. They are so lovely and comical looking with their bright colours and large bill that many children's books use pictures of toucans.

The bill of the toucan is specialised to eat fruit and much of the fruit it can swallow whole. Once the seed has passed through the toucan then it can grow. Not all plants and trees in the rainforests of the Americas rely on the toucans for their germination; some of them rely on other creatures. However, many of them do rely on the toucan.

Once a tree has grown it will attract many types of creatures like: beetles, bugs, butterflies, birds, reptiles, monkeys, sloths and many other types of creatures. Those creatures are only there because those types of trees and plants are there. Some types of plants and trees are only there because of the toucan. So if the toucan were to disappear then there would be a whole range of other plants and animals that would eventually disappear from the rainforest with them.

That is why the toucan is called a keystone species and there are many more. There is a bird called the hornbill and perhaps you will remember that bird that played a part in the movie Lion King it was a large blue bird called Zazu.

There are different kinds of hornbills in Africa and also on the Indian Sub-continent and they are also in South East Asia including the Indonesian islands and there are many species of hornbills. They are large billed fruit eaters and because much of the forest relies on the hornbill disperse its seeds; it is called a keystone species.

The [cassowary](#) of New Guinea and the rainforest of Northern Australia are all keystone species meaning that they have a lot to do with holding their environment together. There are many birds and animals throughout the world that are keystones.

Each time the world loses a keystone species it becomes a much poorer place and a much more unstable environment to pass on to our children; that is an axiom.

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