

## BeastBox Ecosystems



### GREAT BARRIER REEF

The Great Barrier Reef is a complex of coral reefs in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of Australia. It is the largest reef complex in the world. The reefs have formed over millions of years as living coral grows. There are at least 400 species of hard coral within the crystal-clear waters of this marine ecosystem, as well as soft corals, anemones, sponges, crabs, turtles, marine mammals, and a great variety of fishes, sharks, and rays. Climate change, water quality issues, and development threaten this amazing biodiversity.

### SONORAN DESERT

This desert is located in the southwestern United States. While it is the hottest North American desert, it gets more rain than any other desert on the planet. Rain falls both during heavy thunderstorms in the monsoon season (July-September) and in the winter (December-January). These rainy seasons support high plant and animal diversity. In addition to the saguaro cactus (the desert's "signature plant"), there are many kinds of cactus plus yucca and elephant trees. Animals like bighorn sheep, mule deer, mountain lions, coyotes, desert tortoises, scorpions, and a variety of snakes, lizards, rodents, songbirds, and raptors call this desert home. Fire, cattle grazing, and human development are the main threats to the area.



### CHESAPEAKE BAY

In the Chesapeake Bay, freshwater and saltwater collide to provide a special habitat for many species. The Bay is the largest estuary in the United States. It is a shallow but vast stretch of marshes, oyster reefs, wetlands, mudflats, and sandy beaches found in the U.S., in the states of Maryland and Virginia. Over 3,600 species of plants and animals can be found throughout the Chesapeake Bay area, including fish, crabs,

oysters, frogs, snakes, and many wetland and water birds. Pollution, climate change, over-fishing, decreases in underwater seagrass, and human development threaten this ecosystem.

### **BORNEO RAINFOREST**

Borneo's tropical forest ecosystem is home to the tallest rainforest trees in the world. Its plant and animal communities are well-adapted to an intense tropical climate with both a dry and wet monsoon season. Every level of the jungle overflows with unique native animals, including approximately 10,000 plants. The region is also home to some wonderful and highly endangered animals, such as hornbills, Sumatran rhinos, and primates including proboscis monkeys, tarsiers, and orangutans. The forests of Southeast Asia are rapidly dwindling, yet contain some of the highest biodiversity in the world. These forests are cut down to support agriculture and timber used by growing populations and for export.



### **OKAVANGO RIVER DELTA**

The Okavango Delta in Botswana is a major wetland surrounded by the Kalahari Desert. The ecosystem is a wet oasis within a generally dry area, and it supports diverse permanent and migratory wildlife species. Mammals include the African elephant, lion, wildebeest, zebra, giraffe, hippopotamus, cheetah, and spotted hyena. There are also many fish, reptiles, insects, and over 400 species of birds. Challenges to the health of this ecosystem include diverting water from the rivers that feed the delta, overgrazing in the area, and decline of the animals that live there due to

hunting and climate change.

### **MADAGASCAR RAINFOREST**

Roughly 90 percent of the species living in the lowland rainforests of the island of Madagascar are found nowhere else in the world. Forest tree canopies can exceed heights of 100 feet and are rich in evergreens, palms, bamboo, and orchids. At higher elevations, trees become shorter and have dense undergrowth. There are 15 species of lemurs and many rodents found on the island, as well as 165 species of birds (42 of which are endemic), 50 endemic reptiles, and 29



amphibians. Slash-and-burn agriculture is the main threat to the forest.