

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed October 29, 1931

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

RAIN FORESTS

Schimper's great work on plant geography, published in Germany 33 years ago, distinguishes the different types of forest growing in the tropics, as classified on the basis of climate. One of these is the "rain forest" -- still unmentioned in most of our American reference books. Its characteristics are thus described by Prof. W. M. McDougall:

"Tropical rain forests are found in regions where the annual rainfall is from 90 to 150 or more inches, the relative humidity 70 to 100 per cent., and the temperature constantly high. The dominant plants in these forests are evergreen trees with broad, thin leaves. Some of the rain forests contain the densest, most luxuriant vegetation in the world. Often five distinct layers, three of which are tree layers, may be recognized. The first of these consists of trees 100 to 200 feet in height, the second of trees 50 to 100 feet in height, the third of trees 15 to 30 feet in height, the fourth of shrubs and the fifth of herbaceous plants. There are great numbers of lianas that climb upon the trees or hang in festoons from one tree to another, and the leaves of these contribute to the formation of a very dense forest canopy. Epiphytes are extremely numerous, the branches of the trees often being thickly covered with them. The rain forest ordinarily does not present any brilliance of flowering plants, because the flowers of the trees and lianas are high up where they are not easily seen and the shade is so dense that there are very few flowering plants on the forest floor. The most luxuriant as well as the most extensive rain forests of the world are found in the valley of the Amazon River in South America."

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