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Manaus- The Amazon

The Amazon River, born high in the Andes Mountains in Peru, is the largest river on earth. The river and its tributaries cross the borders of six countries and whereas it was once flowing east to west now flows west to east. Although much of the forest is dry for half a year, the other half of the year turns thousands of miles into flooded forest. During the dry season, the water can drop slowly or as much as twenty inches a day. From December to May it may rain in the Amazon every day. During this time, fruit becomes very abundant because the water helps disperse the seeds, along with the help of fish and other animals. Every year floodwaters overflow the riverbanks and invade the land, bringing fish and other creatures to inhabit the area. The waterways now become their highways because the forest floor is now anywhere from five to fifty feet down. The Amazon River thrives on its biodiversity; having the greatest diversity of fish than any other river in the world, with at least two thousand species; many left undiscovered. The Amazon River basin is the richest bird region in the world, with over nine hundred species; with almost half found nowhere else on Earth.

The river is also home to the largest rodent in the world, the smallest monkey, and a rare monkey that lives nowhere else on Earth. The water monkey, feeds primarily on insects hunts by skimming the surface. Its eyes allow it to see above and below the water at the same time. A unique feature is its ability to “jump” out of the water for a few seconds to catch its prey. Another interesting fact is that the young are born in the male’s mouth, protecting them from any predators. Another animal Brazil is known for is the Howler monkey. They are the loudest of all land mammals; their roar can be heard up to two miles away. Sloths are also found in the Amazon. They remain in the canopy and their diet is leaves. Leafcutter ants harvest a fifth of all leaves that grow in the rainforest each year. This is an example of how even the smallest organisms can do so much for the environment. The loss of even one plant or animal will injure the whole ecosystem.

For the natives, the Amazon is both the provider and the sustainer of their existence, without the river and all of its resources the natives would suffer tremendously. The natives already lack electricity and any form of schooling, malaria and infant mortality are also very high. The village people, or Caboclos make less than one thousand dollars per year. Also, not helping the cause is the fact that fisheries are on their way down. Season after season the number of fishermen increases, leading to the decreased number of fish. This is known because the fish being caught are getting smaller, meaning the only fish being caught are the young ones. Fishing in the Amazon constitutes a source of economic wealth that moves two hundred million dollars a year and provides seventy thousand jobs.

The rainforest is disappearing at a rate of twenty football fields per minute! In Brazil, the illegal shipment of Amazon trees is taking place, many of which are endangered trees, which are being processed and sold. They are being sold in boxes with false bottoms; the legal timber stays outside and the illegal timber goes inside the box with the false bottom. Eighty percent of the timber Brazil sells is cut illegally and over two thirds is wasted or cut into sawdust. Each day ten people cut down one hundred and fifty trees! These people work fast because if their machinery is heard they can end up going to jail. They are also paid to keep their mouths shut about the work they are doing. One city in particular had fifteen illegal sawmills that worked 365 days a year. One man in the video said, “The Brazilian Amazon is a giant cookie jar that everyone sticks their hand into.” Companies from Asian have invested eighty million dollars in the logging industry. Although though are many logging companies that do not have any respect for the trees, there is one company known as “Madeireira” that says the wood is only profitable if the ecosystem does not suffer. For each fallen tree, three new ones are planted. Although they sell seventy thousand cubic meters a year, in the same period they generate forty thousand species for Brazil. Also, before cutting the tree they study the consequences of the amputation on the rest of the landscape. There can be intelligent ways of cutting down trees, this goes to show that things can be done differently and still produce revenue. All wood traded there is certified by the FSC so people know that it comes from an industry that respects the environment.

Brazil is the sixth largest gold producing country in the world. To get one gram of gold, it is necessary to crush one ton of quartz. In this process, one hundred and fifty liters of poisonous discharge are dumped into the rivers each day. From this, thousands of fish from the Amazon carry levels of mercury up to one thousand and two hundred parts per billion in their flesh; the acceptable level is five hundred. I think this is extremely dangerous and needs to be stopped.

Over the past few years the climate in the Amazon has changed dramatically. Tropical seasons are arriving regularly and without warning. There is no longer a border separating the rainy season from the dry season and every year the situation worsens a little more. Due to la Niña, there has been a shorter dry season and an increase in rainfall, which is a direct affect on the precipitation in the region. El Niño on the other hand, decreases the amount of rain and increases the temperature. Instead of occurring every five to eight years, la Niña and el Niño are occurring virtually every year. There has been torrential rain, which has caused animals that usually live on land to adapt to the water. Now, in the rainy season the water level is much higher. Banzeros are extremely violent waves. These waves leave people with little to no protection because water takes everything in its path. However, one woman in the video has stayed in her home for many years even in 2009 when most people were wiped out by the banzeros she chose to stay. She is the “doctor” of the community and gets people the medicine they need. Her daughter conducts workshops on deforestation in village for the younger generations. I think this is a great idea because when you get children involved at a young age, hopefully when they become adults they have the same mindset. There were also efforts of reforestation in which they planted a plant that would reduce the impact of the waves and would also give fish shelter. Also, in an effort to stop the decrease of fish, the community is only allowing fishing done by a fishing rod and banned the fishing net. It is also forbidden to fish with nets under the trees. I think it is a good idea for the community to start getting involved in the preservation of the Amazon. I am very excited to see species that only exist in the Amazon and to finally see things that some people will only be able to read about.