

Name: _____

Class: _____

Niches

Every organism in an ecosystem has a role to play, some have many roles. The role of an organism within an ecosystem is called a niche.

The first two niches explain how an organism gets its food. Plants (and algae) get energy from the sun. By getting energy from the sun, plants can produce their own food. Organisms that produce their own food are called producers. All other organisms are required to eat or drink to get their nourishment. These organisms are called consumers; they consume something to get energy.

All consumers get their energy from plants (from the sun). Some animals get energy exclusively from plants, we call these animals herbivores. herbivores, such as a rabbit, do not eat any meat. There are other animals that get energy from both plants and meat. These animals are called omnivores. An example of an omnivore is a bear, a bear will eat fish and will eat berries. The remaining animals are animals that get their energy indirectly from plants; they eat meat, which comes from other animals that have eaten the plants. The animals that eat only meat, such as a lion, are called carnivores.

When animals eat other animals there are two more niches that are used to describe the animals involved. An animal who hunts another animal for food is called a predator. A predator catches and kills its prey. Prey refers to an animal that is hunted. Plants are not prey, and herbivores are not predators. An example of a predator and prey are an owl and a mouse. The owl hunts the mouse, the owl is the predator and the mouse is the prey.

The last two niches describe special kinds of consumers, they are organisms that get their energy from dead or decaying organisms. Scavengers are organisms that eat dead plants or animals. A vulture is an example of a scavenger. Decomposers are like scavengers, however they do not eat the decaying bodies, they simply break down the dead or decaying material and absorb the energy. Mould and fungus are examples of decomposers.

A single organism will have many niches. A frog will eat a fly and it will be eaten by a snake. The frog is then a consumer, a carnivore, a predator and a prey.

To complete the note on the front of this paper you must search around the room for the missing words. As you find the words, record them in the table below. Once you have all of the words you can copy them into the note. The number with the word indicates its order within the note.

Word	Numbers
carnivore	32
carnivores	11
consumer	31
consumers	5,6,24
decomposers	27,29
herbivores	7,8
niche	2
niches	1,3,12,23,30
omnivore	10
omnivores	9
predator	13,14,19,21,33
predators	18
prey	15,16,17,20,22,34
producers	4
scavenger	26
scavengers	25,28

* Be sure to note that you will need to capitalize some of the words as you enter them in the note.