

Humans have adapted to live in many different environments — wet places, dry places, cold places, and hot places. People have homes on mountainsides and on ocean islands. We live in huge, busy cities and small rural communities. Today, people can even adapt to living in space.



Julie Payette, second from left on the back row, represented the Canadian Space Agency in a NASA training in April 1999.

Unlike humans, most animals and plants can survive in only a few places. When a habitat is changed or destroyed, the plants and animals have huge problems. No more food. No more shelter.

Humans change many habitats. We cut down forests and drain wetlands. Land is needed to build more homes, offices, shops, roads, and golf courses.



The habitat is being altered.

Habitats also change because of natural events. For example, if a beaver builds a dam across a river, it can flood a large area of land. Plants and animals that lived on the river banks lose their homes and food sources.

Sometimes humans move plants or animals to new places. For example, seeds and insect eggs can travel to Ontario by accident, in ships and on animals. These are called **introduced species**.



An introduced species, such as the wetland purple loosestrife, can crowd out other plants.

Chemicals used in farming and industry often end up in rivers and lakes. They change the habitats of **aquatic** plants and animals. If poisons get into the food web, they can cause sickness.

If we can change habitats in harmful ways, can we also do the opposite? Can we protect habitats by making **conservation areas**? Can we change the way we look after the plants in our gardens and farms by using natural predators and natural fertilizers? Can we cut only the most useful trees for lumber instead of a whole forest?

If we can make things go out of balance, can we find ways to put the balance back? What do you think?