

20. Asia – Flora and Fauna

Flora – vegetation cover

Vegetation in Asia = extraordinarily diverse, intimate relation to variations in soil and climate.

In the far north of the continent (Siberia) **tundra and taiga** vegetation predominate => *mosses and lichens*, coniferous forest of *larch, pine, fir, and spruce*.

South of the taiga, grasslands occur in great east-west bands. These blend (mix) to the south into a desert scrub where aridity increases, as in the intermountain basins of the highland core and its peripheries, and in much of south-west Asia (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Vegetation cover of North Asia

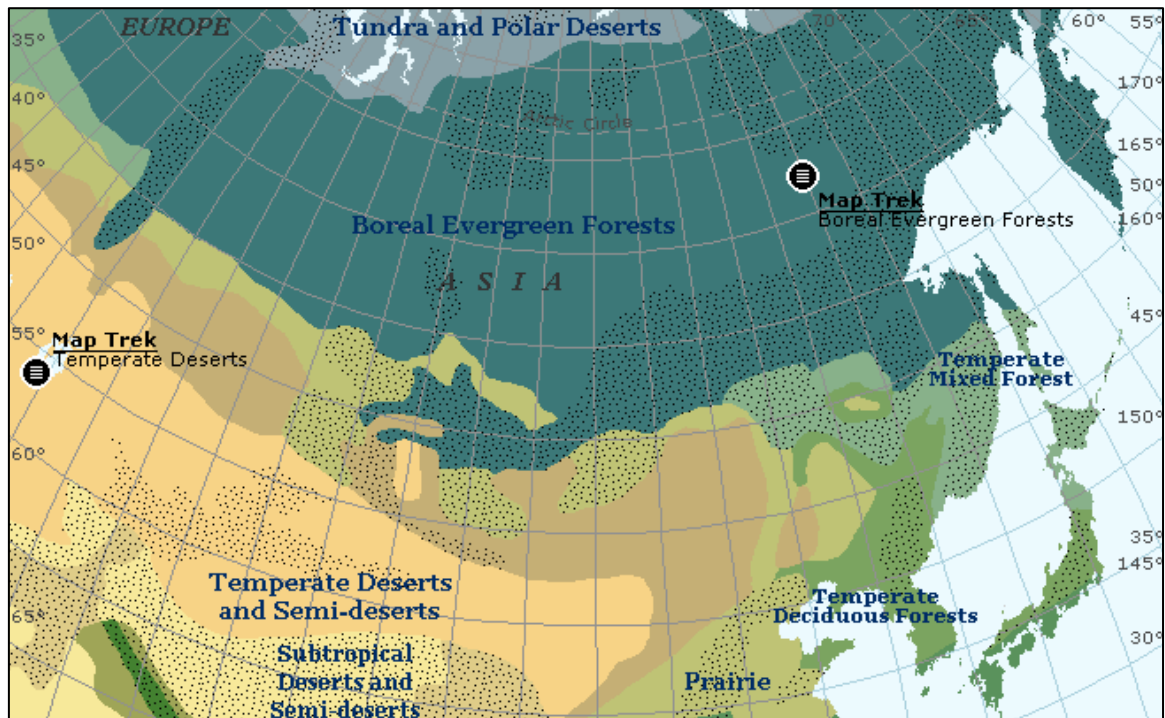
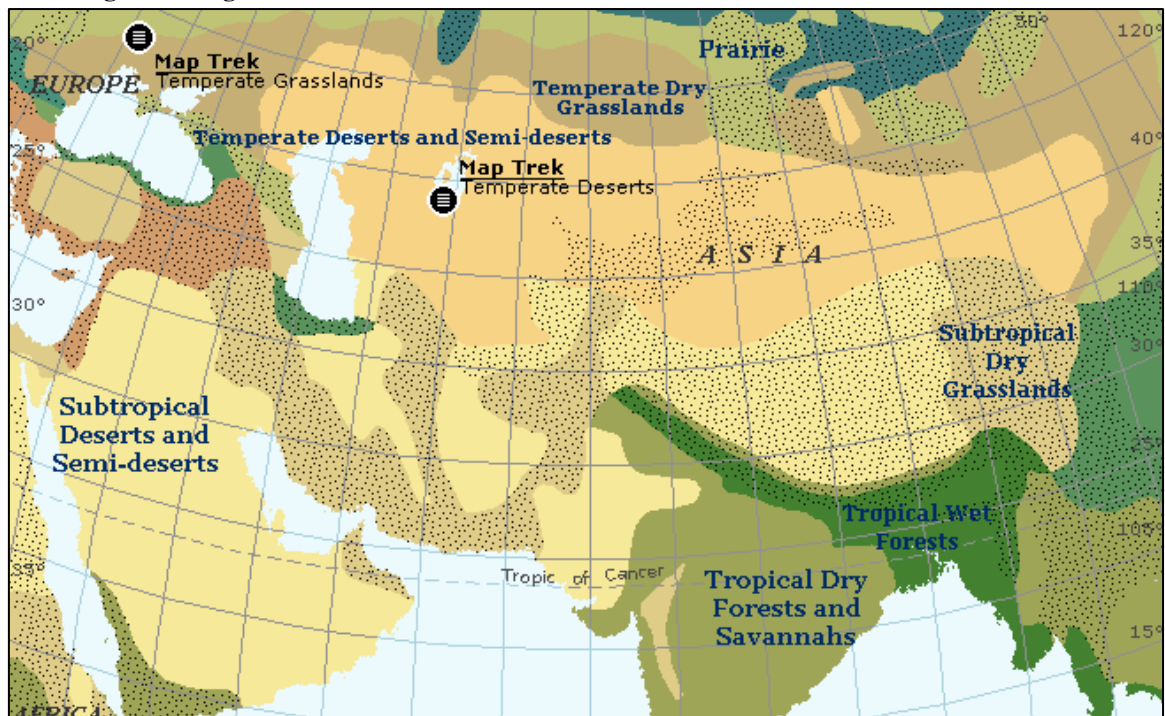


Figure 2: Vegetation cover of Central and South-West Asia



S + SE + E Asia = predominating equatorial rainforest (lowest latitudes) ⇔ heavy precipitation is characteristic throughout the year. The luxuriant evergreen rainforest is characterized by numerous vegetal species: *jackfruit*, *eucalyptus*, *oak*, and various species of *bamboo and palm* (Figure 3).

Farther north of the equator lies a more open tropical forest – monsoonal forest. This merges to the north into subtropical evergreen forest, e.g. southern China and Japan.

In the middle latitudes, mixed forests of deciduous and coniferous trees predominate, these merge (to the north) with the coniferous forest region (boreal zone) – Figure 4.

Figure 3: Vegetation cover of South-East Asia

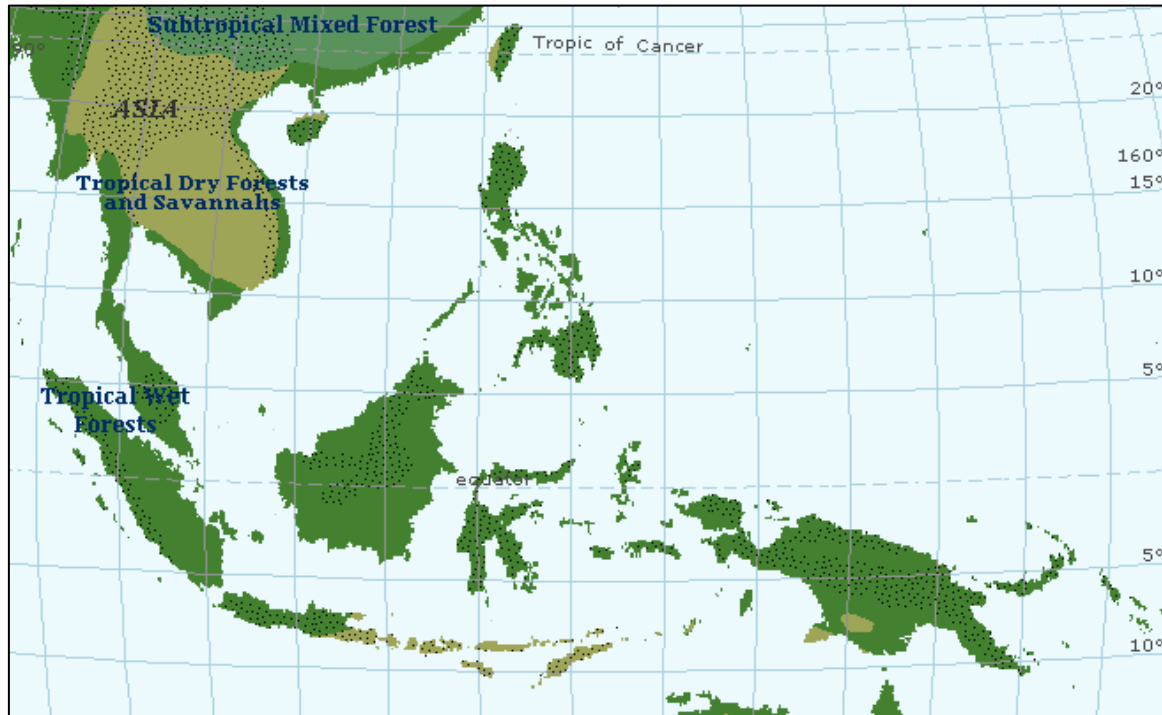
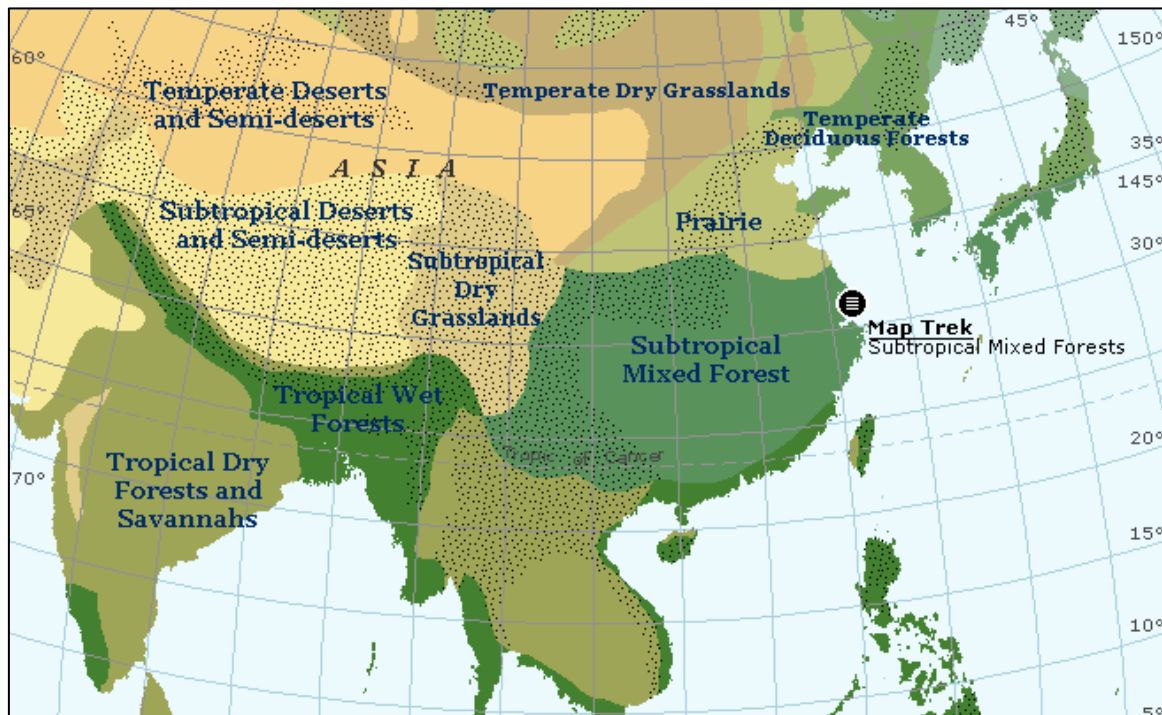


Figure 4: Vegetation cover of South and East Asia



Fauna – animal life

The Tibetan yak is most closely related to the African buffalo, the American bison, and the European bison. The yak, found only in several isolated localities high on the Tibetan plateau at altitudes of 4,000 to 6,000 m, is considered an endangered species (Figure 5).

Figure 5: The Tibetan yak



The fauna of Asia is as diverse as the continent's climates, terrain (relief/geomorphology) and vegetation.

The **northern regions** = *brown bear, otter* (Figure 6), *lynx, ermine and wolf*, in addition to a vast amount of *bird species*.

The **steppe and semi-arid regions** support *antelope* and numerous rodent species = *hare* (rabbit) and *field mouse*.

Freshwater *fish* are found in all parts of the continent = **Lake Baikal** is notable for its distinctive fauna, although severe industrial pollution has threatened the survival of many species.

Highlands = *Wild sheep and goats* and Tibet is the home of the *wild yak*.

Hot desert regions of SW and SAsia = wildlife is scarcer (rare), where the most famous animal = the *Asian lion* is virtually extinct. *Jackals and hyenas*, however, are common in these regions.

E and SE Asia = the indigenous fauna of these more humid regions has been much diminished (declined) by the effects of centuries of human occupancy – notably of loss of habitat and hunting.

In parts of **S and SE Asia** = *Monkeys* (ubiquitous in the southern areas) and the *Indian tiger* (Figure 7) still exists in small numbers. *Birdlife, snakes, and lizards* abound (occur often) and various types of *crocodiles* are widely distributed.

Wild apes such as the *gibbon* and the scarce orang-utan are found in **SE Asia**. Many types of *deer and antelope* also live in well-populated areas (Borneo), where *flying squirrels* and *tree rats* are numerous. Among the animals of unusual interest are the rare SE Asian *rhinoceros*, the *Asian elephant, the tapir, the anteater and the wild buffalo* of India and SE Asia.

Figure 6: The otter



Figure 7: The Indian tiger



Figure 8: The tapir



Figure 8: The anteater

