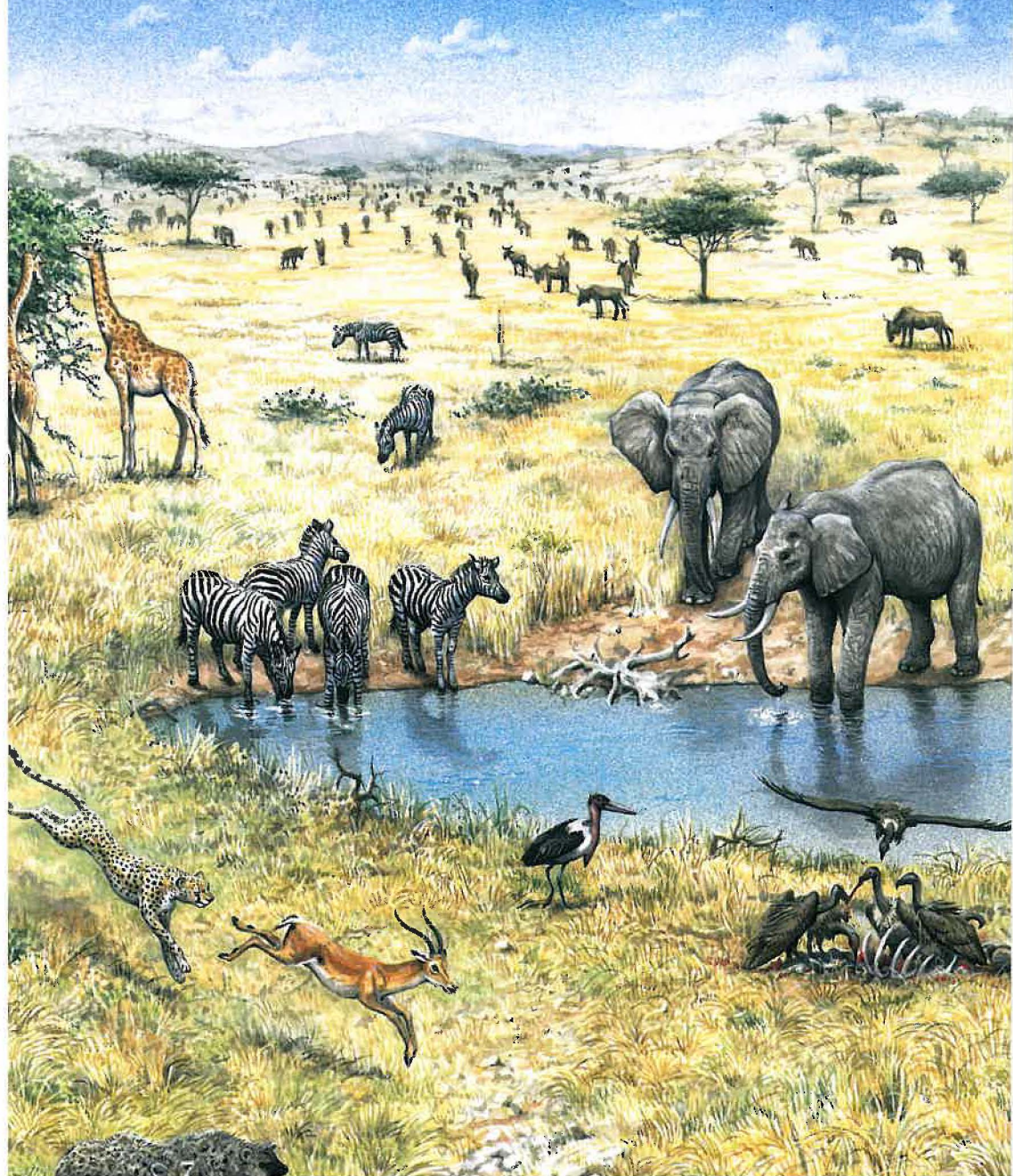


# Grassland Safari







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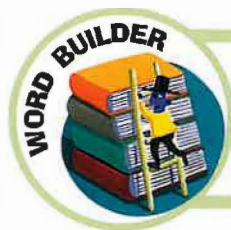
# Features



Why does grass regrow so quickly?  
Turn to page 5 to find out.



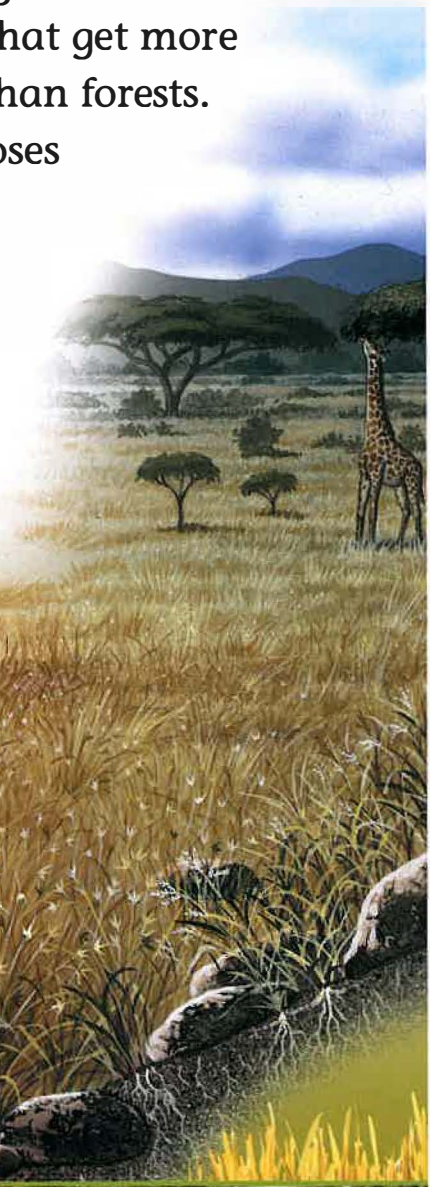
Turn to page 13 to read about Laura  
Ingalls Wilder and her much-loved  
stories set on the prairies.



What on Earth is a rufous hornero?  
Find out how this bird got its name  
on page 21.

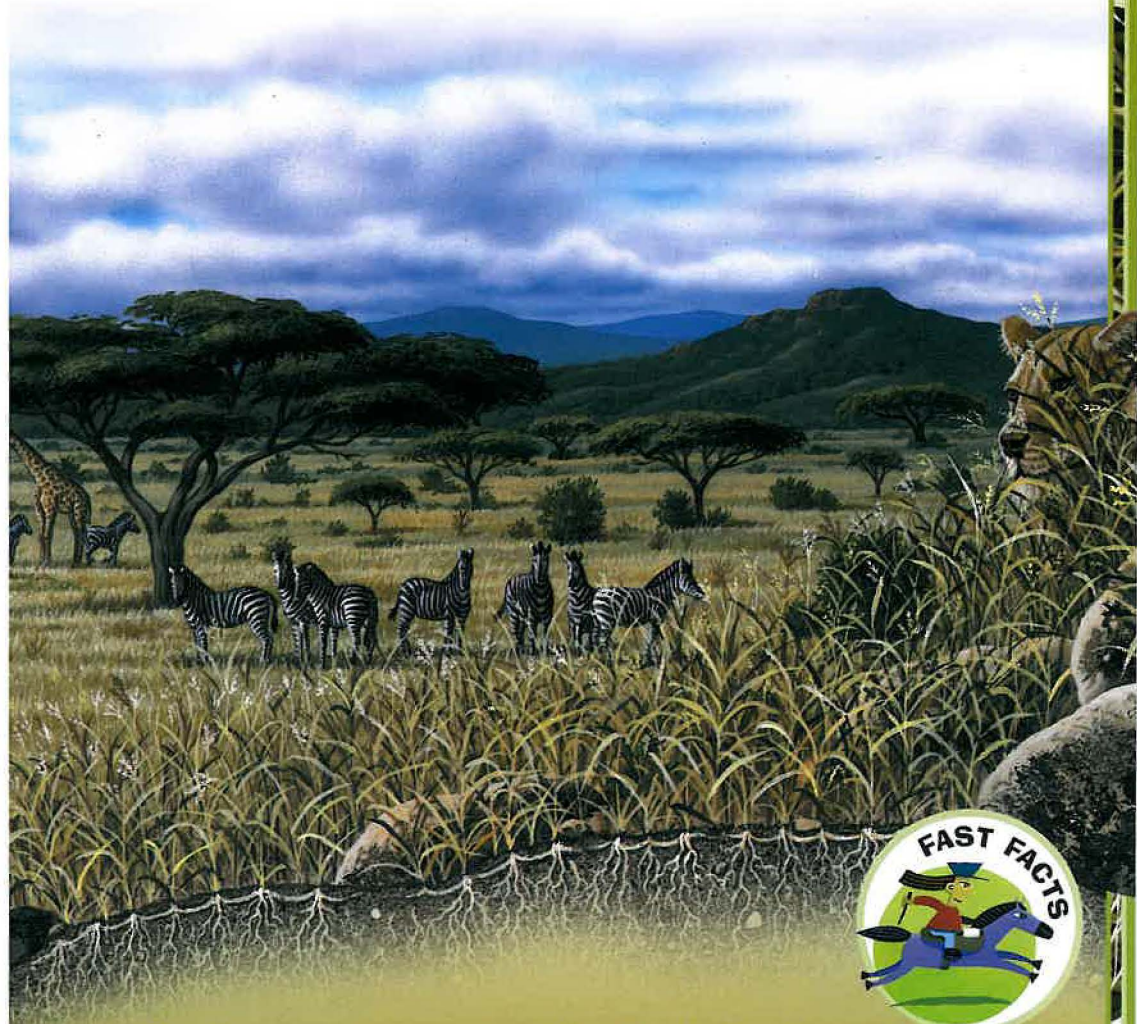
# Grass, Grass, Grass!

Grass grows in most places on Earth. Large areas of land that are covered in grass plants with only a few scattered trees are called grasslands. Grasslands are found in areas that get more rain than deserts but less rain than forests. Grass is tougher than trees! It loses less water than tall plants, so it can grow in many places that trees can't.





Both large and small animals make their homes on grasslands around the world. Many people also live on grasslands, either on farms or in cities.

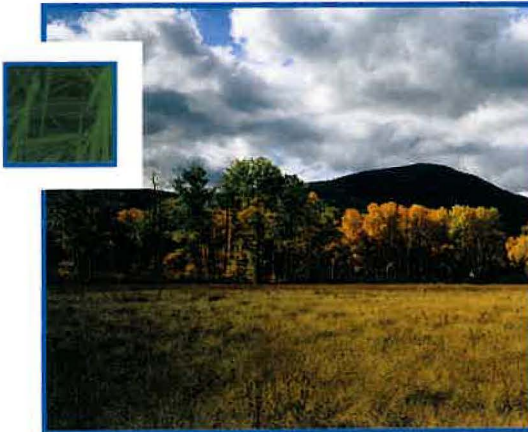


Grasses can regrow quickly after being burned, trampled, cleared, cut or eaten because the growing part of the grass plant is safely underground.




# Grasslands of the World

About one-fourth of Earth's land is covered in grassland. There are two main kinds of grassland, **tropical** and **temperate**. Tropical grasslands, called savannahs, are found near the equator. Prairies, steppes and pampas are all temperate grasslands.



There are about 10,000 different kinds of grass in the world. Some grasses, such as big bluestem grass, grow best in moist areas. Others, like June grass, grow better in drier areas.

### Key

-  Tropical grasslands
-  Temperate grasslands

### Major Grasslands of the World





# Prairies

Prairies are temperate grasslands, often with tall grass. Summers are hot on prairies, with temperatures reaching up to 38 degrees Celsius. Winters are cool, and temperatures can drop to -40 degrees Celsius. Seasonal drought, natural fires and grazing by large **herbivores** prevent woody shrubs and trees from growing on prairie grasslands.



The Canterbury Plains, in New Zealand, are prairies. Most of the area is now used as farmland.



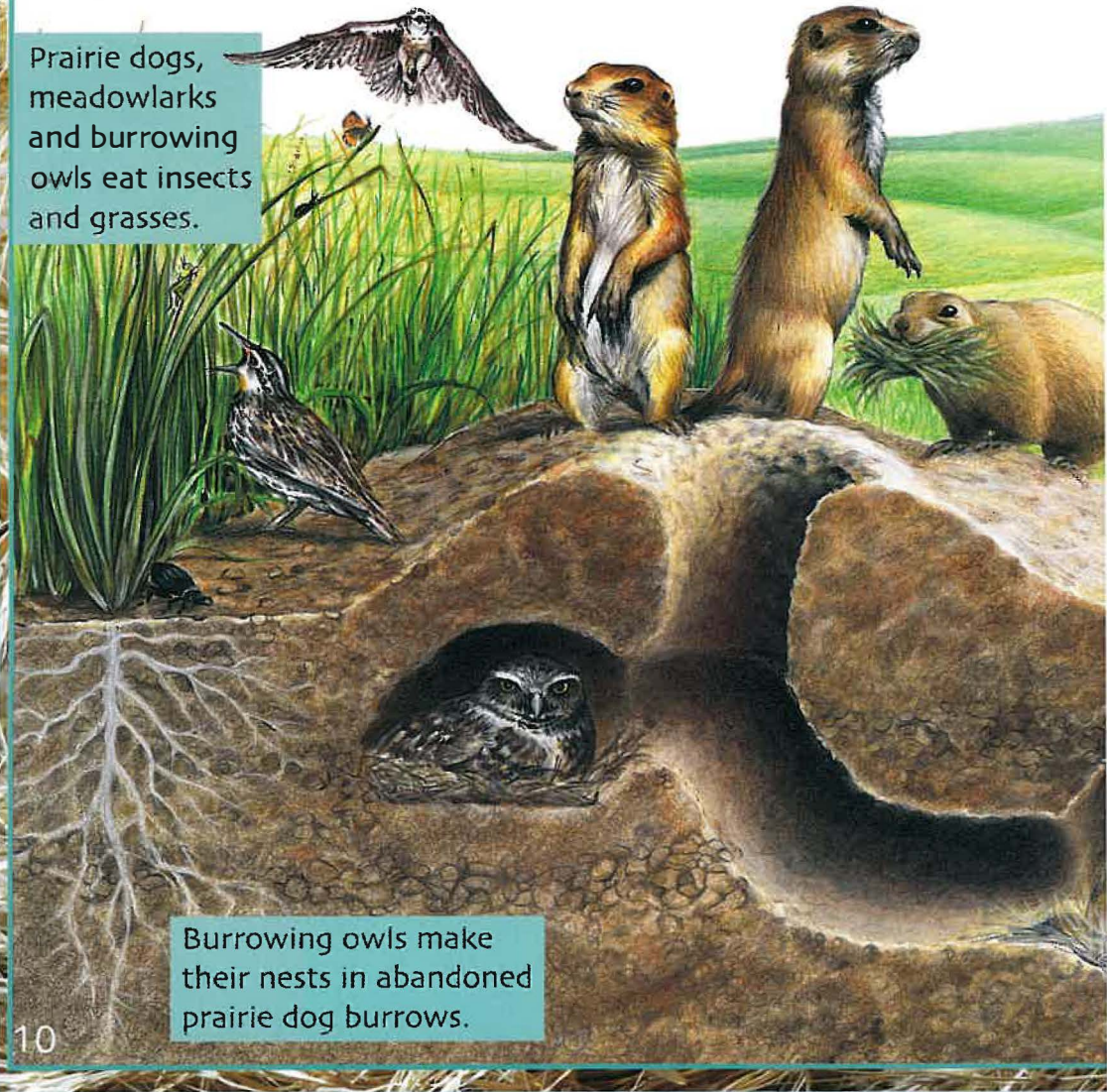
The North American prairies stretch from central Texas in the United States to southern Saskatchewan in Canada. This area is the largest grassland in the world. Many people as well as many kinds of animals make their homes on this great prairie.





## Animals of the Prairies

Every animal of the North American prairies has its own special part to play in the prairie ecosystem. From the largest bison to the tiniest insect, every animal has an effect on the other plants and animals in the area.

An illustration of a prairie ecosystem. In the foreground, three prairie dogs are standing on a large rock. One is on the left, one in the middle, and one on the right eating grass. Below the rock, a burrowing owl is visible in a hole. To the left, a meadowlark is perched on a rock. In the background, a hawk is flying over a field of tall grass. The scene is set in a prairie landscape with rolling hills.

Prairie dogs, meadowlarks and burrowing owls eat insects and grasses.

Burrowing owls make their nests in abandoned prairie dog burrows.



Prairie dogs live in large colonies called towns. Each town can have from 50 to 100 burrows. The prairie dogs' burrows are very important to life on the prairies. However, many farmers shoot or poison prairie dogs because they fear that their **stock** might step in burrow holes and break their legs.

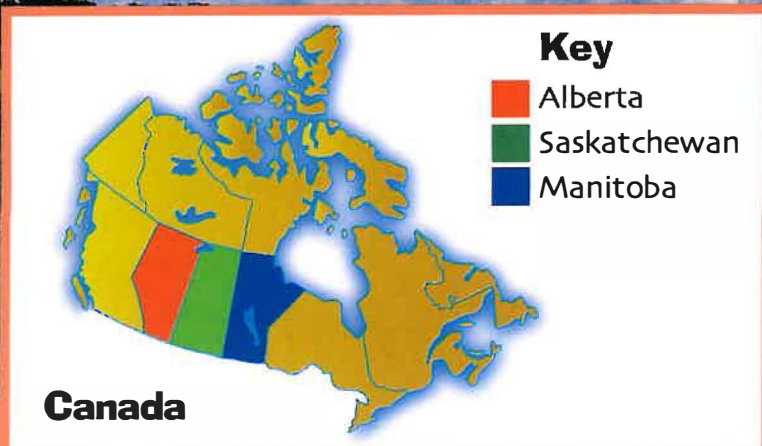
Patches of grass eaten by deer and bison make it easier for prairie dogs and birds to see insects.

Prairie dogs mix the topsoil and the dirt below, making it easier for new grass to grow.

# People of the Prairies

When the pioneers first saw the prairies of North America, they described them as “a sea of grass.” Almost half of the United States was once grassland, but today little of the prairie remains untouched. Most of it has been turned into farms, ranches and cities.

The North American prairies are also a major source of coal, oil, gas and **uranium**. However, when people mine these natural resources, they often destroy the grassland ecosystem.



Canada's prairie provinces are Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.





Laura Ingalls Wilder  
(1867–1957)

Laura Ingalls Wilder was an American children's book writer. She is best known for her famous "Little House" books. Laura Ingalls Wilder wrote about living during the 1870s and 1880s in a pioneering family of the American West. Her daughter Rose, who grew up listening to her mother's tales about life on the prairies, encouraged Laura to write them. Later, a television series called "Little House on the Prairie" was made. The stories are about Laura's life on the prairies of Kansas and South Dakota.



# Savannahs

Savannahs are tropical grasslands. There is a rainy season in summer and a drier season in winter. The drier season prevents too many trees from growing.

The Serengeti Plain in Africa is the biggest and best known savannah. It is home to many large animals. Some of these animals graze on the grass, some eat the leaves from the few trees that grow on the savannah and some eat other animals.

Wildebeests are the largest group of herbivores on the Serengeti. They are also the main food source for lions and hyenas.





When the dry season comes in June, over a million wildebeests and hundreds of thousands of zebras and antelopes move north in search of fresh grass and water. In November, they travel back again. This is called the Great Migration.

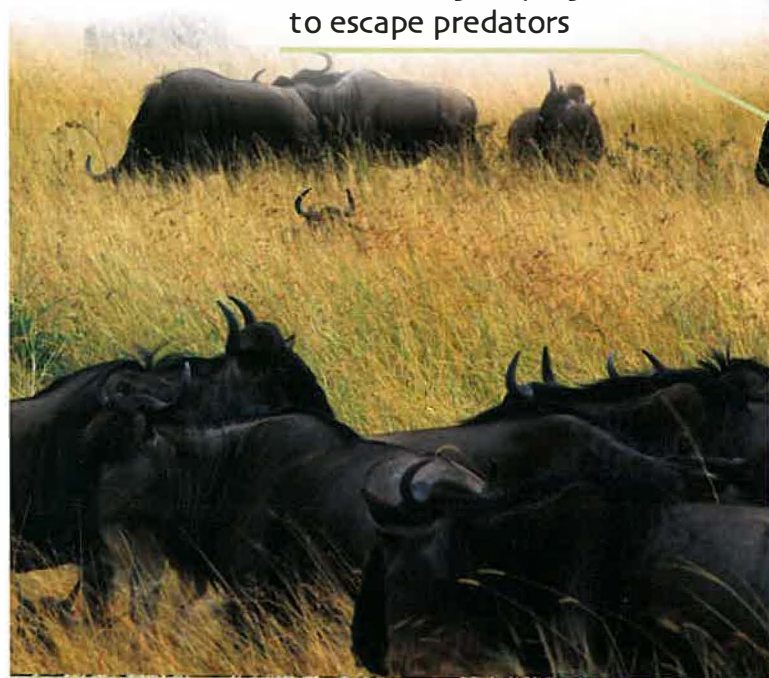
Eyes set wide apart to see nearly 180 degrees, so zebras can see predators approaching

Stripes which make it hard for predators to pick out one zebra in a herd

Strong legs and hooves for galloping to escape predators



Zebras have some special features that help them stay alive on the open plains.



# Plant Protection

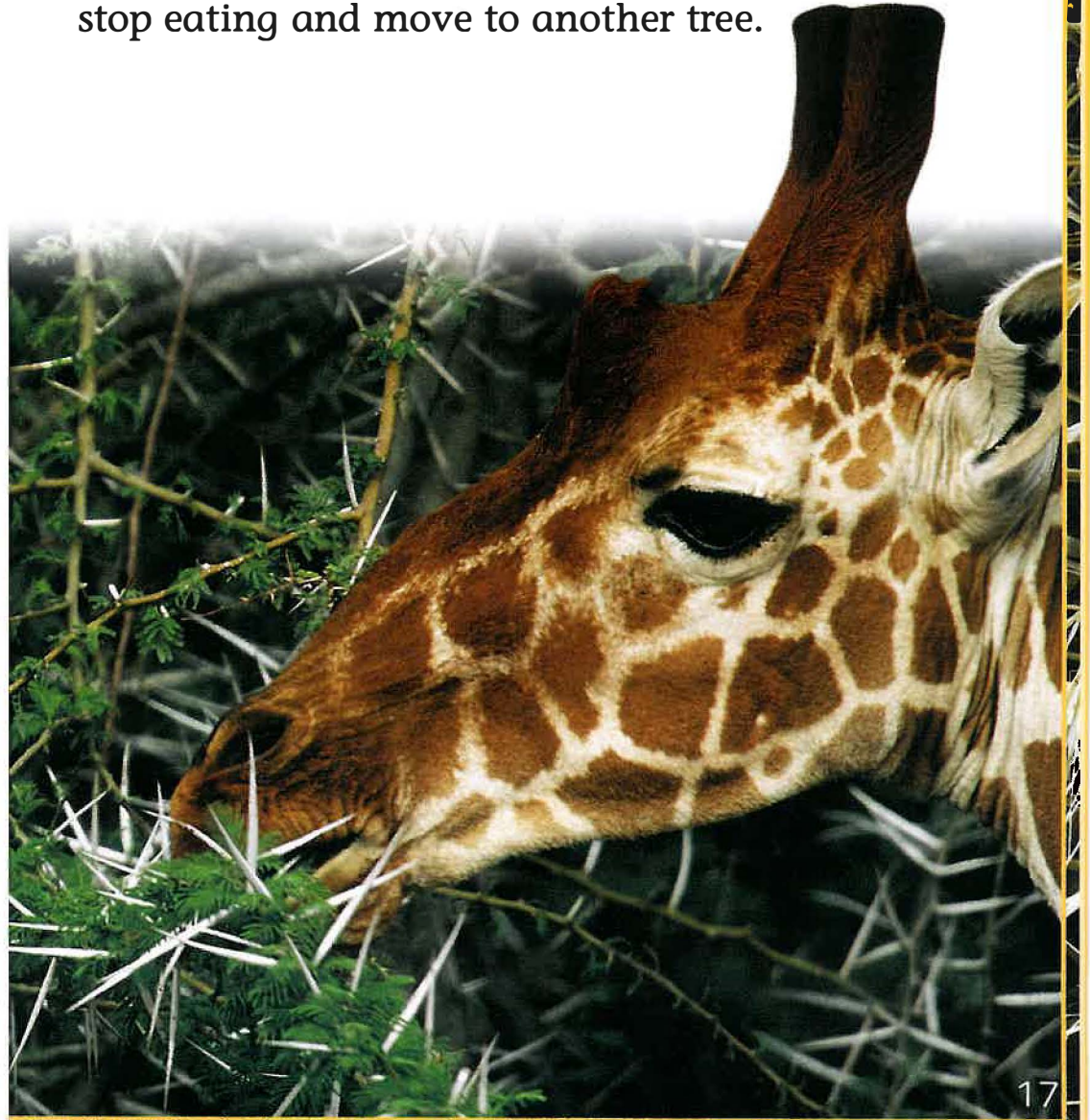
It is difficult for trees to grow in grasslands because the soil is often poor. Some trees such as acacias grow well on grasslands. Giraffes like to eat the leaves of acacia trees. However, if giraffes were to keep munching, they would eat the leaves faster than they could grow again.







So acacia trees protect themselves with toxic chemicals! When giraffes start to eat the leaves, the tree produces special chemicals that, after a while, make its leaves poisonous. This forces the giraffes to stop eating and move to another tree.



# Steppes

Steppes are temperate grasslands, like prairies. However, they are usually found in Europe and Central Asia. Steppes are often found between deserts and forests. They are warm in summer but very cold in winter.

Many of the animals that roam the steppes are herbivores such as horses, camels and antelopes. These animals usually live in herds for safety because there is little shelter on the steppes. Rabbits and other animals dig burrows for protection from predators.







The winter months on the steppes are very cold, so Bactrian camels grow long, shaggy hair to stay warm.

# Pampas

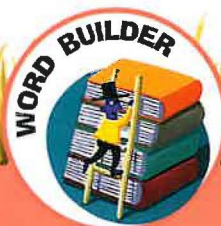
Pampas are great plains in South America. One region of Argentina is even called La Pampa. Pampas have good soil that is used for growing crops and farming animals. Huge cattle ranches cover much of the pampas. Many cities, such as Buenos Aires, have also been built on the pampas. More than 11 million people live in Buenos Aires.





South American cowboys, known as gauchos, are famous symbols of the pampas. Many stories and poems celebrate the adventures of gauchos. In the past gauchos lived by herding cattle across the unfenced pampas. Today,

you are more likely to see a gaucho at a parade or a festival.



The rufous hornero lives on the pampas. This bird gets its name from its unusual nest. Its nest looks like a bread oven! The Spanish word for baker is *hornero*.

Rufous comes from the Latin word *rufus*, which means "red".





# Glossary

**ecosystem** – a community of plants and animals interacting with their environment

**herbivore** – an animal that eats plants

**stock** – cattle, sheep, pigs, and other animals kept on a farm

**temperate** – a word that describes a place that is not too hot and not too cold

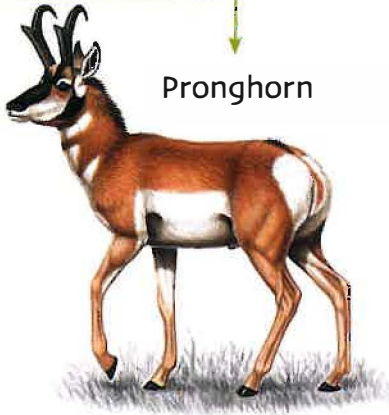
**tropical** – a word that describes what it is like in places that are in the Tropics. The Tropics are not far from the equator. Tropical places are hot and wet.

**uranium** – a silver-white metal which is used to produce nuclear power



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# Discussion Starters

1 Imagine you are going on safari to a grassland. Plan your trip. What animals would you like to see? What countries would you visit?

2 If something happens to one plant or animal in an ecosystem, it affects all the other plants and animals. What plants and animals would be affected if prairie dogs became extinct?

3 Grass growing on prairies helps to prevent dust storms. Why do you think that is? What are some things people can do to protect grasslands?

