



Urban Jungle

When cities grow, humans build houses, roads, pathways and grassy spaces over natural areas. This is called urban sprawl and it is creating problems for the environment.

Humans are clearing grasslands and forests at a fast rate. Each year an area of forests about the same size as 81 million Olympic-sized pools (25.2 million acres) is cleared around the world.

Animals usually live in small areas with special conditions called niches. Once their niche has been built over or removed, plants and animals need to find a new place to live. Some animals move to other forested areas. Other animals have no choice but to create a new home in the human city.

Urban sprawl creates environmental problems such as:

- reducing the number of places where animals can live, so some animals becoming extinct
- creating large volumes of water run-off because roads and cement don't absorb rain as well as soil and planted areas
- increased light, noise and chemical pollution and
- other environmental problems such as salinity and soil erosion.

As the population increases and more people move to city areas, urban planners need to accommodate people without expanding the city limits too much. They may choose to limit the amount of land for houses and control how roads and drains are built.

Scientists can keep an eye on urban sprawl by counting the number of plants and animals in an urban area and studying satellite images of city areas.

More Information

Nature 20 August 2002
Urban sprawl creates unwilling neighbours
<http://www.nature.com/nsu/020819/020819-1.html>

New satellite maps provide planners improved urban sprawl insight
<http://www.globaltechnoscan.com/6thJune-12thJune01/satellite.htm>

Urban Ecology <http://www.urbanecology.org/>

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
<http://www.fao.org/forestry/index.jsp>