

The Balance of Nature

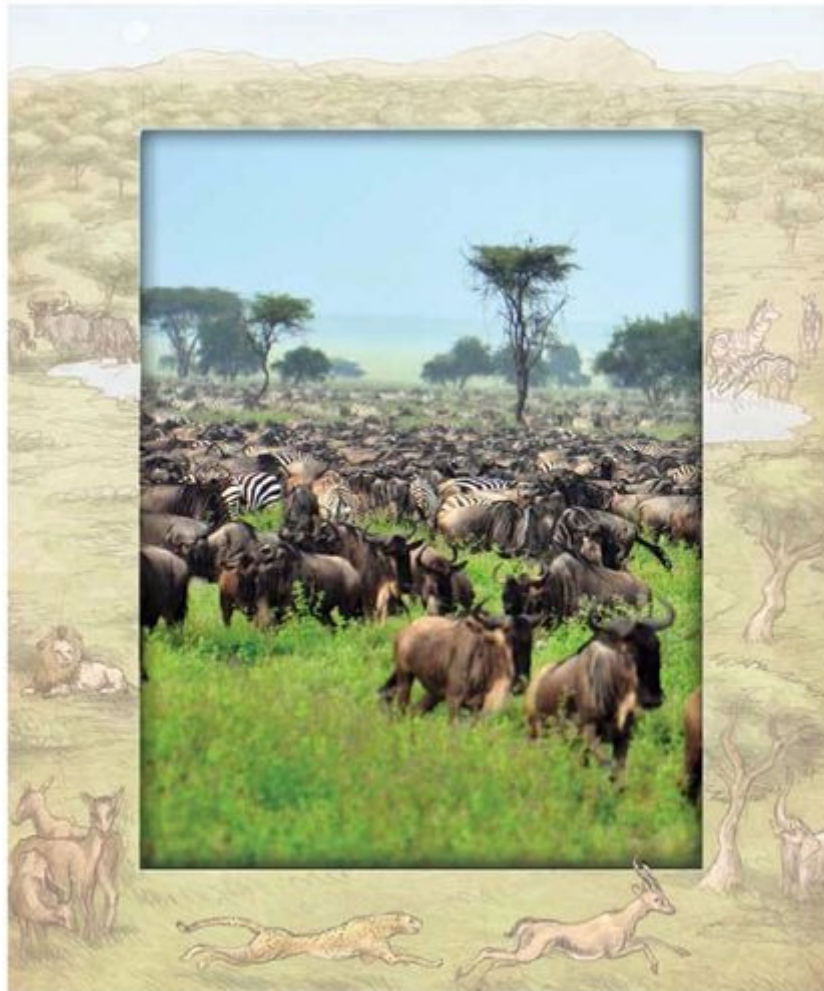
This text is excerpted from an original work of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

This photo was taken in Kenya, a country in east Africa. Kenya is famous for the wildlife on its grasslands. When people visit Kenya, they often go on safari to see the animals.

A large portion of Kenya is part of the Mara National Reserve. A reserve is a protected area of land. People are not allowed to build towns or major roads there. The land is set aside for nature, especially the animals.

Most of the Mara is open grassland, known as a savanna. The land is basically flat, with gently rolling hills. There are some trees and bushes growing in the savanna, but it is mostly grass.

In many ways, the savanna ecosystem is like any other ecosystem. There are food chains with producers, consumers, and decomposers.

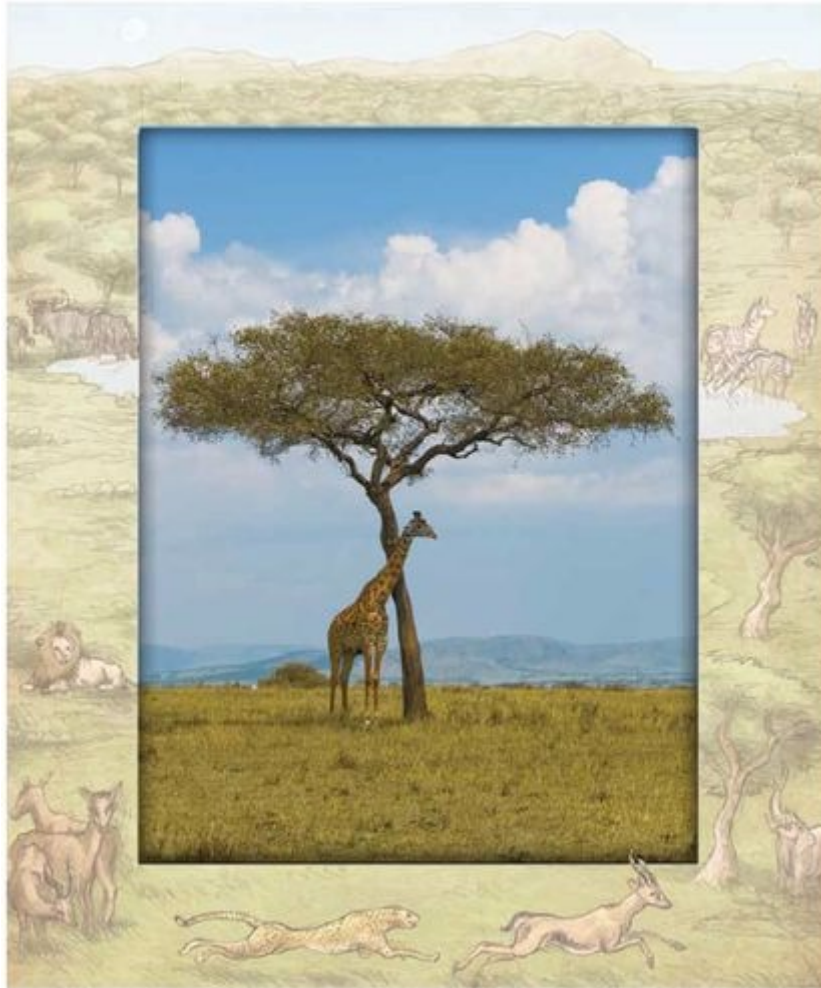


A savanna is basically flat, with gently rolling hills.

of grass for everyone. This also means there is plenty of meat for the lions!

The Mara is known for its many types of acacia trees. Giraffes like to eat acacia leaves.

Some ants in the Mara like to eat certain acacia seeds. The ants carry the seeds underground. They eat the fruit that surrounds the seed, but they do not hurt the seed itself. Instead, they leave it there in the ground where they ate it. That's how some acacias spread their seeds! This is another example of a way in which organisms rely on each other in an ecosystem.



Giraffes like to eat acacia leaves.

Each living thing in a healthy ecosystem can survive with help from other living things. The living things depend on each other. Of course, not all living things survive for very long. Many critters are eaten by bigger animals. Most seeds do not sprout. But enough will survive to make sure life continues in the ecosystem.

The savanna's grass eaters would probably be happy if all the big cats disappeared. However, if all the big cats disappeared from the Mara, this would upset the natural balance in the food chain.

~~Cheetahs and other predators hunt the weak, sick, and young members of the herd. As a result,~~

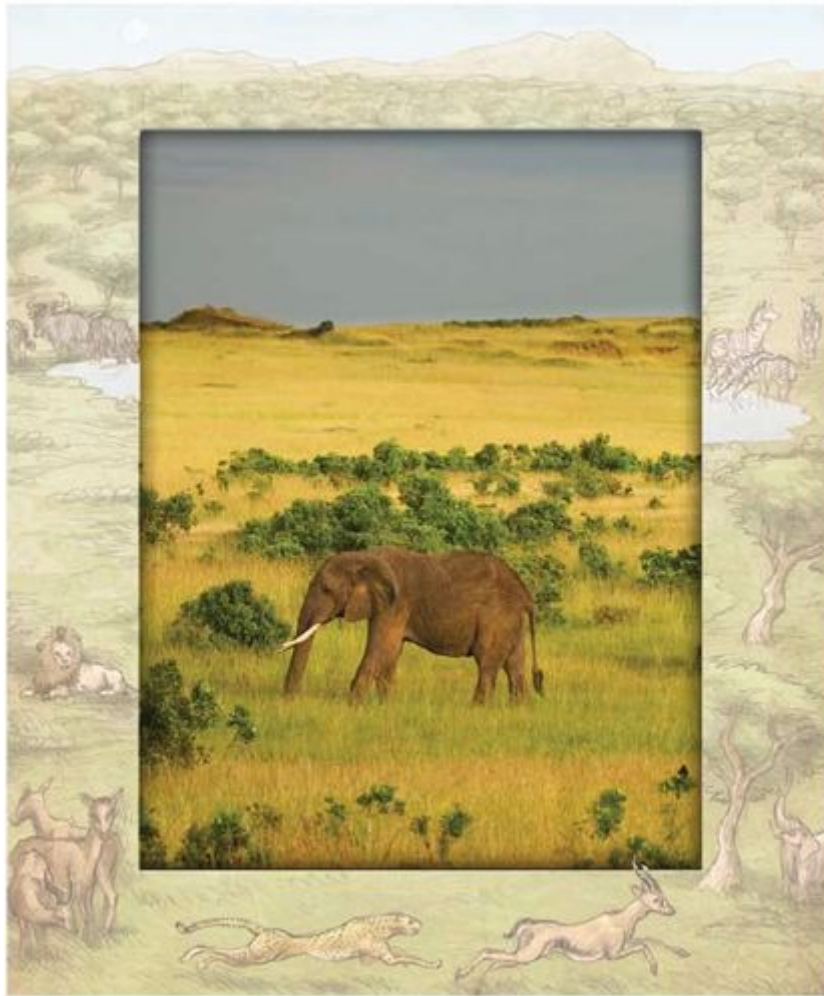
the strong animals in the herd tend to survive and have healthy young.

No gazelle wants to be eaten by a lion or cheetah. But in an ecosystem, the predators help keep the population from getting out of control. If there were too many gazelles, then all gazelles might have trouble finding enough food. Cheetahs help make sure there aren't too many gazelles!



A cheetah is a predator.

The grasslands of the Mara National Reserve seem to stretch on forever. It is hard to imagine anything bad ever happening to upset the ecosystem of this vast, beautiful land. But if nothing bad ever happened, then the government of Kenya would not have bothered making this a reserve. Many animals were illegally hunted to near extinction. The people of Kenya had to set the land apart in order to protect the ecosystem and all the animals in it.



Open grasslands