

# Rivers

## How Are Rivers Made?

Rivers are large natural streams which flow to the sea or another body of water, such as a lake. Rivers begin life at the **source**, which could be a natural spring, melted ice and snow, or rainwater running down the land. Most rivers start as a tiny stream, high up a mountain. Smaller streams merge into one larger **channel** and **erode** the land away until a river is formed. When the ground grows less steep, the river becomes wider and flows more slowly. Moisture from the land nearby finds its way to the river to add even more water. Often, it is forced to wind (**meander**) around the land more. Most rivers end up in the sea at the 'mouth' of the river.

## The World's Greatest Rivers

Some rivers around the world are famous for being long, wide or fast-flowing. The Nile river in Africa is the longest river in the world. It is 6,650km long. The Nile river **basin** covers eleven countries and flows into the Mediterranean Sea.

The Amazon river in South America is the world's widest river. At its widest point, the river is about 11km wide. This river feeds the famous Amazon rainforest and is also the fastest-flowing river in the world.



The Nile river has so many people living alongside it that the lights of the houses and streets can be seen from space.

## River Life

Rivers are essential for life as we know it. They carry water and important nutrients all around the earth and provide habitats for millions of species of plants and animals. Every river is different and supports nature in its own unique way. Without rivers, many of our forests, lakes, cities and lives would not be the same.

Humans use rivers in many different ways. In some countries around the world, rivers are a source of drinking water for people who live alongside them. Others use their rivers for washing and cleaning clothes. All over the world, fishing takes place so that communities nearby have enough to eat and, in some countries,

fish and other types of goods are transported on rivers to trade with other locations. Millions of people around the world rely on rivers to make their living.

### Water Pollution

Just like oceans and the air, rivers can become polluted in various ways. River pollution is damaging to humans and to the environment because it contaminates these freshwater habitats.

Types of river pollution include:

- Rubbish and solids (plastic, metal and other objects)
- Sediment (sand, grit etc.)
- Chemicals (factory waste, fertilisers, oils)
- Bacteria from animal and human waste

The best way to prevent river pollution is to stop the **pollutants** before they reach the river. Some helpful ways to protect your local river are:

- Keep oil and grease out of the sink. Instead, collect it in a jar and then throw it away with solid waste.
- Don't flush anything down the toilet except for toilet paper. Anything else might end up in oceans, lakes or rivers.
- Always save water. Turn off taps when you are not using them, as this means less water has to be cleaned again for use.

### Glossary

<b>basin</b>	a rounded bowl in a landscape where water, such as a river, may collect
<b>channel</b>	a path through the landscape formed by the movement of water
<b>contaminate</b>	to make something impure or dirty by adding a new poisonous or damaging substance
<b>erode</b>	to gradually wear away the land
<b>freshwater</b>	made of water that is not of the sea and therefore not salty
<b>meander</b>	to curve around the land forming a winding path
<b>pollutants</b>	substances which make water impure or unclean