

IELTS vocabulary for environment

From habitat loss and deforestation in the Reading passages to exhaust fumes and single-use packaging in our pollution essay, these are the words for climate, wildlife and waste questions.

Words

sustainable /sə'steɪnəbl/ (adjective, B2) able to continue without harming the environment

Many scholars think that the compact city, built upwards instead of outwards, integrated with nature (especially water systems), with efficient transport infrastructure, could help modern cities become more efficient and sustainable.

emission /i'mɪʃn/ (noun, B2) gas or other substance sent out into the air

Concrete is the second most used substance in the global economy, after water - and one of the world's biggest single sources of greenhouse gas emissions.

ecosystem /i:kəʊsɪstəm/ (noun, B2) all the living things in an area and how they interact

These are complex ecosystems, rich in unique plant and animal life.

habitat /'hæbɪtæt/ (noun, B2) the natural home of an animal or plant

Another threat to the survival of the saiga is loss of habitat, as a result of agricultural expansion and human settlement.

biodiversity /ˌbaɪəʊdaɪ'vɜ:səti/ (noun, C1) the variety of plants and animals in an area

"We're seeing huge peatland forests with extremely high biodiversity value being lost for a few decades of oil palm revenues," says Silvius.

conservation /ˌkɒnsə'veɪʃn/ (noun, B2) protecting animals, plants and natural places from harm

"However, we also want to highlight the research and conservation efforts that are now being carried out to try to save them from the threat of global warming."

extinction /ɪk'stɪŋkʃn/ (noun, B2) the end of a species, when none are left alive

It was almost driven to extinction by hunters in the 19th century.

endangered /ɪn'deɪndʒəd/ (adjective, B2) at risk of dying out completely

All three manatee species are endangered or at a heightened risk of extinction.

deforestation /ˌdi:fɒrɪ'steɪʃn/ (noun, B2) cutting down large areas of trees

More specifically, he's interested in how bats are responding to human activity and deforestation in particular.

erosion /ɪ'rəʊʒn/ (noun, B2) gradual wearing away of soil or rock by water or wind

Cutting down native woodland leads to erosion, as there is nothing to keep the soil in place.

drought /draʊt/ (noun, B2) a long period with little or no rain

He believes the huarango was key to the ancient people's diet and, because it could reach deep water sources, it allowed local people to withstand years of drought when their other crops failed.

renewable /rɪ'nju:əbl/ (adjective, B2) (of energy) coming from sources that are not used up

Angel says that his plan is "no substitute for developing renewable energy: the only permanent solution".

greenhouse /'gri:nhaʊs/ (adjective, B2) (of gases) trapping heat in the earth's atmosphere

In 1998, energy consumption in the transport sector was to blame for 28% of emissions of CO₂, the leading greenhouse gas.

pollutant /pə'lju:tənt/ (noun, C1) a substance that makes air, water or land dirty

The condition appears to result from the cumulative effect of a number of factors, with atmospheric pollutants the principal culprits.

degradation /ˌdegrə'deɪʃn/ (noun, C1) the process of becoming worse in condition or quality

Peter Groffman, from the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies in New York, points out that soil scientists have been warning about the degradation of the world's soil for decades.

deplete /dɪ'pli:t/ (verb, C1) to reduce something so much that little is left

A great deal of habitat was lost through forest clearance, and introduced species such as deer depleted the remaining forests of food.

species /'spi:ʃi:z/ (noun, B2) a group of animals or plants of the same kind

The saiga, a species of antelope native to Central Asia, once roamed the vast grasslands of this region in enormous herds, many millions strong.

predator /'predətə/ (noun, B2) an animal that hunts and eats other animals

The female kakapo has to spend long periods away from the nest searching for food, which leaves the unattended eggs and chicks particularly vulnerable to predators.

climatic /klaɪ'mætɪk/ (adjective, C1) relating to weather conditions over a long period

Petrie believes that archaeologists are in a unique position to investigate how past societies responded to environmental and climatic change.

pesticide /'pestɪsaɪd/ (noun, B2) a chemical used to kill insects that damage crops

Apart from engendering widespread ecological disorders, pesticides have contributed to the emergence of a new breed of chemical-resistant, highly lethal superbugs.

fertiliser /'fɜːtəlaɪzə/ (noun, B2) a substance added to soil to help plants grow

Farmers have been putting this synthetic fertiliser on their fields ever since.

irrigation /ˌɪrɪ'geɪʃn/ (noun, C1) supplying water to crops through channels or pipes

Unprecedented construction of tens of thousands of monumental engineering projects designed to control floods, protect clean water supplies, and provide water for irrigation and hydropower brought great benefits to hundreds of millions of people.

reintroduce /ˌrɪːntroʊ'djuːs/ (verb, C1) to bring an animal or plant back to an area

The attempt to reintroduce this predator marries well with the aim of bringing forests back to parts of our bare and barren uplands.

mitigate /'mɪtɪgeɪt/ (verb, C1) to make something harmful less serious

This grass growth would reduce temperatures, and mitigate emissions from melting permafrost.

Phrases for Speaking and Writing

household waste rubbish that homes throw away

The bar chart compares the proportion of household waste that was recycled in Germany, Canada, Japan and Brazil in 2005, 2015 and 2025.

recycling rate the share of waste that is recycled

The most striking feature is the contrast between Japan, where the recycling rate barely moved, and the other three countries, all of which recorded substantial gains.

a pressing issue an urgent problem that needs dealing with

Pollution has become one of the most pressing issues of our time, affecting the air people breathe, the water they drink and the land on which food is grown.

exhaust fumes harmful gases that come out of vehicle engines

As incomes rise, more families buy cars, and in crowded cities the exhaust fumes from millions of vehicles produce the thick smog that is now common in many capitals.

chemical fertilisers factory-made substances added to soil to help crops grow

Agriculture also plays a part, since chemical fertilisers and pesticides are washed from fields into streams and lakes, where they kill fish and contaminate drinking water.

contaminate drinking water make the water people drink dirty or poisonous

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tougher environmental standards stricter rules on how much damage to nature is allowed

Governments should not only introduce tougher environmental standards but also make sure they are enforced, for instance by carrying out regular inspections and imposing heavy fines on companies that break the rules.

renewable energy energy from sources that never run out, such as sun and wind

At the same time, they could invest in renewable energy such as solar and wind power, and expand affordable public transport so that people have a realistic alternative to driving.

untreated waste dirty waste released without being cleaned first

A factory that discharges untreated waste into a river saves money, while the cost is borne by downstream communities in the form of illness and lost fishing income.

single-use packaging wrapping that is thrown away after one use

Cheap, disposable goods, from single-use packaging to clothing worn only a handful of times, generate vast quantities of waste.

disposable goods products made to be thrown away after short use

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waste collection a service that takes away people's rubbish

Finally, in many rapidly growing towns, infrastructure has not kept pace: where there is no reliable waste collection, households often have little choice but to burn or dump their rubbish.

make polluters pay charge those who cause pollution for the damage

First, governments should make polluters pay, through emissions taxes, substantial fines and deposit schemes for bottles and cans, so that cleaner behaviour becomes the economically rational choice.

deposit schemes systems that refund a small fee when bottles are returned

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sewage treatment cleaning dirty water from toilets and drains

Third, investment in basic services such as sewage treatment, waste collection and public transport is essential, because individuals cannot be expected to act responsibly when no responsible option exists.

solar panels flat devices that turn sunlight into electricity

Ideally, it would also be as energy-efficient as possible, with solar panels on the roof and proper insulation, so it wouldn't cost a fortune to heat during the winter months.

perfectly adapted to completely suited to living in particular conditions

They're perfectly adapted to that harsh environment: they have thick, smoky-grey fur, wide paws that work almost like snowshoes, and an incredibly long tail, which they wrap around themselves for warmth and use for balance on steep rocks.

a hostile environment a place where it is very hard to survive

I'm curious about how they survive in such a hostile environment and how they share their territory with local herders, since there's often conflict when they attack livestock.

a conservation project organised work to protect wildlife or nature

Honestly, I'd love to volunteer on a conservation project one day, so finding out more about them would be a good first step.