

DEFINITION OF ECOLOGY

The total view of the environment as it relates to the organisms dominated by humans is called **ecology**. It is defined as the study of the interrelationships of organisms with their environment and with each other.

HISTORY OF ECOLOGY

The history of ecology started perhaps around 300 BC with a Greek named Theophrastus. He was a friend and associate of Aristotle. He was interested in the interrelationship between organisms and the living environment. He is considered as the Father of Botany, while Aristotle is the Father of Zoology.

The term oekologie was coined by a German zoologist Ernst Haeckel. It came from the Greek word oikos, meaning "home or a place to live in." Haeckel defined it as the relationship of animals both to their organic as well as to their inorganic environment.

In the mid-1900s, two groups of botanists, one from Europe and the other from America, became interested in the study of plant communities. The European group concentrated on the composition, structure and distribution of plant communities. The American group, on the other hand, was interested in the development of plant communities.

Other groups developed a liking for animal ecology. Eventually, American biologists have greater emphasis on the interrelationships of both plant and animal communities. This was the beginning of ecology as a formal field of study. Today ecology has come out as one of the most popular aspects of biology.

The study of population received special attention from a British economist, Thomas Malthus, in the early nineteenth century. He was among the first to recognise the conflict between expanding populations and the earth's capability to supply their food needs.

In the early 1920s, famous mathematicians like R. Pearl, AJ Lotka and V. Volterra developed mathematical foundations for the study of populations. This led to investigations on relationships and interactions among species and also on regulations of populations.

It should be noted though that the very roots of ecology started way before this.

A. Early man as a hunter

Early man knew how to make use of his environment. He developed a detailed knowledge of where to find food and water since his very survival depended on this.

However, this knowledge did not include knowing how to conserve his natural resources. Due to his nomadic ways, he would stay in one place and use up the food and water that could be found there. As soon as he exhausted his resources, he would move on to another place and repeat the same cycle.

Eventually, man changed from nomad to settler. He learned how to weave, make pots and manufacture tools. Man learned to domesticate plants and animals for greater control over his means of subsistence. As he increased in knowledge and skills, he learned to shape his environment to fit his needs. As a result of this, and this in turn caused soil erosion and rampant flooding.