

## MANGROVES



Coastal animals live life on the edge. They straddle two worlds, They need clever strategies to cope with being smothered each day, twice a day, with salt water and then uncovered and exposed to the sunlight.

Mangrove forests are just such an ecosystem. Living on the edge of the sea and land, they protect coastal villagers from the worst of sea storms, by acting as a wind and wave break. Mangrove trees are very special. They have evolved unique ways of protecting their cells when the sea tides come in. Sea water is salty because it has natural chemicals dissolved in it – sodium chloride (salt) and other minerals. The tree needs to keep fresh water inside its cells, while keeping the salt water out. Most mangroves have thick skin and heavy waxy cuticles on their leaves which stops the fresh water inside, vital for all life, from evaporating.

The roots bring air to the plant through special cells called pneumatophores. Mangroves suffer when soil from the land runs down and buries their aerial roots. Monkeys, crabs, birds, and fish all live in mangrove forests. They are nurseries for young fish and shellfish, which travel out into the open seas as larvae or adults.

Mangrove wood is hard-wearing and resistant to termites. It can be used for canoes, furniture and houses. Mangrove trees are easy to plant, and destroyed forests are now being restored all along the coast. Plant or protect a mangrove today! Like all forests, they are worth more to us alive.