

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Termites and Their Relationships with Other Species



Termites are fascinating insects that often live in large colonies. While they are well known for their role in breaking down wood, termites also form various relationships with other species in their environment. These relationships can be mutualistic, commensal, or parasitic, depending on the species and the situation.

### Mutualism: A Win-Win Relationship

Termites rely on tiny organisms called protozoa and bacteria in their guts to help digest wood.

Without these microorganisms, termites wouldn't be able to break down the tough cellulose found in plants. In return, the microorganisms get a safe home and a steady food supply inside the termite's body. This mutualistic relationship benefits both the termites and the microorganisms.

Termites also contribute to the environment by enriching the soil, which helps plants grow. This creates an indirect mutualistic relationship with plants, as termites recycle nutrients back into the ecosystem.

### Commensalism: One Benefits, the Other Isn't Harmed

Some animals benefit from termites without affecting them in return. For example, certain birds, like the fork-tailed drongo, follow termite swarms to catch the insects as food. The termites are not harmed directly by the birds' presence, but the birds benefit by having a ready meal. This type of relationship is known as commensalism, where one species benefits and the other is neither helped nor harmed.

### Parasitism: One Benefits at the Other's Expense

Termites can also fall victim to parasitism. Some fungi, mites, and nematodes (tiny worms) invade termite colonies and feed on the termites or their resources. These parasites harm the termites, making this a one-sided relationship where only the parasite benefits.

### Balancing the Ecosystem

These relationships show how termites interact with other species in their environment. Whether through mutualism, commensalism, or parasitism, termites play a key role in maintaining the balance of their ecosystems. These tiny insects may be small, but their relationships with other species make a big impact.