



## This week's big news

### DID YOU KNOW?

The Amazon rainforest is so big that the UK and Ireland would fit into it 17 times.



Protesters in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

### Who is Jair Bolsonaro?



Jair Bolsonaro became the president of Brazil in January 2019. He has been compared to US president Donald Trump because some of their comments and ideas are similar. During the election campaign, Bolsonaro said he wanted to build bridges and roads through parts of the Amazon. He has been criticised by environmental groups for wanting to cut down parts of the rainforest and failing to support conservation efforts.

# Huge fires in the Amazon spark worldwide protests

A record number of fires have broken out across the Amazon rainforest in South America. World leaders have called for action to protect the area, which is the planet's largest tropical rainforest, and huge protests have been held across Brazil and in other countries.

### What caused the fires?

Forest fires can start naturally in Brazil during a time of year known as the dry season. However, scientists believe that most of the fires this year were started by humans. They think that the fires might have been started by farmers who want to clear parts of the forest illegally. They do this to create more land where their cattle can graze and to grow crops. Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, has been criticised for encouraging this behaviour. Deforestation (destroying trees) has increased since he became president.



### How many fires have there been?

Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) has been tracking the fires using satellites. Its reports show that there have been more than 72,000 forest fires in Brazil this year, more than half of them in the Amazon rainforest. That's an 80% increase compared to last year and the highest number of fires in Brazil since records began in 2013.

### Why is this important?

The Amazon is one of the world's largest natural habitats, home to at least 10% of the Earth's animal and plant species. It is also home to around 400 tribes of indigenous people (people who have always lived there, rather than moving there from another place.)

The Amazon is often called the lungs of the Earth because the trees release oxygen and absorb carbon dioxide, a gas that causes climate change (the long-term change in the world's weather patterns).

### How has the world reacted?

Over the weekend of 24–25 August there were 30 separate protests across Brazil, as people demanded that more be done to tackle the fires. Similar rallies were held around the world. People gathered outside Brazilian embassies (buildings used by diplomats, who represent their country in a foreign country) in Colombia, Spain and the UK. The French president, Emmanuel Macron, said the fires were "an international crisis". He threatened to block a trade deal that a group of European countries has agreed with some South American countries, unless Brazil takes action to deal with the situation.

### How has Brazil's president responded?

Brazil's president, Jair Bolsonaro, said Macron was overreacting to the problem and described the situation as a matter for Brazil to deal with on its own, without any international help. Macron had also announced that £18 million would be made available to Brazil to help it put out the fires. However, the Brazilian government refused to take up this offer. On 24 August, Bolsonaro sent thousands of soldiers to the Amazon to tackle the blazes.



# Amazon Fires

*Read the article and then try the following activities...*

## Hold a debate

People around the world have been putting pressure on Brazil to deal with the forest fires. Discuss whether you think other nations are right to get involved. Isn't it up to the Brazilians what happens in their own country? Of course, they can ask for help if they want it but, if not, shouldn't everyone else mind their own business? How would you feel if it was happening in this country? Or are some things too important to leave to one nation? And, if so, how far should the rest of the world go to protect the planet?

## Writing challenge!

Choose one of the following writing warm-ups.

**1** Write an imaginary recount of a forest fire from the perspective of one of the many animals that live in the Amazon rainforest. Remember to describe the events using all your senses as well as your feelings. Remember to include a satisfying ending. Do you survive and, if so, how?

or

**2** Write a short poem, building on the metaphor of the Amazon being 'the lungs of the world'. Perhaps you could write it from the perspective of the planet as a person – how would you feel to have your lungs full of smoke?

## Investigate

The article says the Amazon region is often called 'the lungs of the world' because it does so much to absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. Your task is to find out how and why this happens. Research and produce an illustrated fact file, outlining what the process involves, what it is called and, ideally, stating what chemical reaction takes place.