

# GAME 1: THE STORY OF THE FIG

Print page I & II back-to-back on thick paper. Cut along the dotted line

- 1 You encountered a **Peepal** tree covered with shiny, heart-shaped leaves.

Peepal is one among the 60+ fig species found in India. It was under a Peepal tree that the Buddha attained enlightenment.

*Find a leaf that is heart-shaped*

- 3 You spotted the female **Fig wasp** so tiny you could swallow her and not notice.

Each fig species depends on a specific kind of fig wasp to pollinate the hidden flowers. It is a one-way journey for the female wasp who squeezes in through a tiny hole at the tip of the fig, deposits her eggs and sheds the pollen from her parent tree before her life ends.

*Spot a pollinator (bird, insect or mammal) and guess the plant it pollinates*

- 5 You met a **Cluster fig** tree covered with large numbers of ripe figs.

Fig fruit are available all year round, therefore can support more wildlife than any other trees. The animals that eat figs will also disperse the seeds of many of other tree species whose fruit they eat. Figs are among the oldest fruits consumed by humans.

*Find a seed, guess how it gets dispersed*

- 7 Fig trees grow everywhere - cities, villages, rainforests, and deserts. They produce roots that grow fast and strong, even in the toughest of ground, and can keep growing over several meters until they reach water. Fig trees have survived cyclones, drought and extreme rainfall offering a lifeline to wild animals.

*Find a plant growing out of a human-made structure*

- 2 Have you seen a Peepal, Banyan or other fig tree produce fig fruits but never a single flower?

Here is the secret: the **fig** is not a fruit at all. It is a hollow ball called a **Synconium** whose entire inner surface is lined with hundreds of tiny flowers that are never seen by us.

*Find a flower that is tiny and dull coloured*

- 4 When the next generation of female fig wasps emerge from within the figs of their birth, they take flight laden with pollen and eggs. They have 2-3 days to find a fig of the right species in which to deposit both. But before taking flight they must escape the predators such as the ants that patrol their fig tree.

*Find an insect that feeds on other insects*

- 6 You met an old **Banyan** tree who is a type of strangler fig.

Unlike regular trees, strangler figs don't grow from the ground with their roots underground. Instead, the seeds germinate high up in another tree. The roots descend towards the ground eventually forming thick columns.

*Spot a plant growing on a tree*

- 8 You walked into a **Rubber fig** tree.

In Meghalaya in northeastern India, heavy rainfall makes rivers swell, and they are then impossible to wade across. The Khasi tribes in the Khasi Hills have worked out a solution. They train the aerial roots of rubber figs to grow across rivers, creating living bridges that are centuries old.

*Find a climber, check the direction of its growth*

# JIGSAW PUZZLE 1: STARS OF THE RAINFOREST



ORIENTAL PIED-HORNBILL