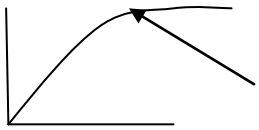
Ecology Key Terms

Directions: Using your notes and your knowledge of ecology, provide a definition for each term and an example when applicable.

Term	Definition and example (when applicable)
Ecology	The study of living things interacting with each other and their non-living environment
Biosphere	All places on Earth where life is possible
Biome	All ecosystems of one type (examples: all deserts, all tropical rainforests)
Ecosystem	Living and non-living things interacting in a particular area (examples: Mill pond, Jones Beach, creek behind Mepham)
Community	All livings things in an ecosystem (example: all birds, fish, plants, insects in Mill Pond)
Population	All members of ONE species in an ecosystem (example: all sparrows in Mill Pond)
Abiotic	Non-living (example: rocks, water- something that was never once living)
Biotic	Living (example: birds, bacteria, people, insects)
Habitat	A place where an organism lives (example: squirrel in a tree)
Niche	An organism's role in their habitat (example: squirrels eat parts of trees)
Limiting factor	Something biotic or abiotic that controls the size of a population (example: amount of food, habitat, and cars are limiting factors for squirrels)
Competition	When two organisms fight over the same food source or habitat (try to occupy the same niche)
Symbiotic relationship	A long-term relationship between two biotic factors where at least one benefits
Mutualism	Both organisms benefit (clown fish and the sea anemone)
Parasitism	One benefits, the other is harmed but NOT killed (tick on a dog)
Commensalism	One benefits and the other is unaffected (barnacle on the whale)
Producer	An organism capable of making its own food via photosynthesis (plants, trees, grasses, algae)
Autotroph	Another term for a producer ("automatically has food")
Consumer	An organism that must eat other organisms to obtain energy

	(humans, cows, rabbits, foxes)
Heterotroph	Another term for a consumer
Primary consumer	An organism that only consumes producers (insect)
Secondary consumer	An organism that typically consumes primary consumers (bird)
Tertiary consumer	An organism that typically consumes secondary consumers (wolf)
Scavenger	A consumer that feeds off of something already dead (raccoon, opossum, vulture, hyena)
Decomposer	A special type of consumer that breaks down dead organisms to RECYCLE NUTRIENTS back into the ecosystem (fungi and bacteria)
Herbivore	Another term for a primary consumer
Carnivore	An organism that only consumes other consumers
Food chain	A single pathway of energy flow (arrows show energy flow and "what eats what")
Food web	A diagram illustrating multiple pathways of energy flow in an ecosystem
Predator	An organism that hunts and kills another consumer (fox)
Prey	An organism consumed by a predator (mouse)
Carrying Capacity 	The maximum amount of a population that can survive indefinitely in an ecosystem (determined by limiting factors)