Mutualism Encyclopedia Article

Mutualism

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Mutualism

A mutualism is a **symbiosis** where two or more **species** gain mutual benefit from their interactions, and suffer negative impacts when the mutualistic interactions are prevented from occurring. Mutualism is a form of symbiosis where the interactions are frequently obligatory, with neither species being capable of surviving without the other. A well-known example of mutualism is the relationship between certain species of algae or blue-green bacteria and **fungi** that results in organisms called **lichens**. The fungal member of the relationship provides a spatial **habitat** for the algae, which in turn provide energy from **photosynthesis** to the fungus. Mutualistic interactions are thought to be the origin of the many cell organelles like mitochondria and chloroplasts, which may have resulted from the acquisition of free-living **phytoplankton** and other single-celled organisms by host species. Both the incorporated cell and the host soon evolved so that neither could exist without the other.