

‘Great Indoors’: Your home is a jungle of tiny animal lodgers

When humans began building shelters about 20,000 years ago, we unrolled a welcome mat for other species. Over the past few thousand years, the indoor biome has grown to colossal proportions as cities and suburbs spread across the continents. More recently elevators and other technology have lifted the indoor biome into the sky.

If you add up the area of the indoor biome in Manhattan — including its walk-ups and high-rise apartments — it’s three times bigger than the area of the island of Manhattan itself.

We humans are whittling down coastal wetlands, tropical forests and other biomes. But not the indoor biome: Globally, it’s already over 247,000 square miles, bigger than France and growing rapidly. Ours is a biome with a future.

And yet the indoor biome remains at science’s frontier. “We know virtually nothing about it,” said Laura J. Martin, an ecologist at Cornell University.

Biologists ignored the Great Indoors in part because it didn’t really seem to be in their job description. Traditionally, they headed into the wilderness to study nature in its pure state.

But recently some scientists have gotten curious about our non-human lodgers, thanks in part to new technology that [makes it possible to sample the DNA from any environment](#). Homeowners, too, are starting to open their doors out of curiosity — even if it means they have to step around the post-docs in the bathroom.

The preliminary results are staggering. One of Ms. Martin’s co-authors, Robert R. Dunn of North Carolina State University, [has surveyed houses in North Carolina](#) to catalog the species they contain. He and his colleagues typically find dozens of fungi species in each house, and hundreds of animal species.

Read full, original article: [The Next Frontier: The Great Indoors](#)