



Oak Woodland Forests

Adapted from [Teachers Pay Teachers](#) RedwoodForestGLADUnitBigBook-1

The important thing about an oak forest is that it is a unique environment that is home to different animals and plants.

Oak forests are unique environments. Oak tree species are the most common trees, making them the "dominant" tree species. There are many other types of trees that also live in oak forests, also called "mixed oak woodlands". Oak woodlands provide habitat, or homes, to different kinds of animals and plants. Almost half of the animals in California visit or live in mixed oak woodlands.

Oak woodland forests can be found all over California: near the ocean, in hills and mountains, and in California's Central Valley. Some species of oak trees found are:



Valley oak (*Quercus lobata*),

Coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*),



California black oak (*Quercus kelloggii*),



Interior live oak (*Quercus wislizeni*),





Blue Oak (*Quercus douglasii*),

Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*)



Images from [Heritage Oak Tree Identification](#)

Other types of trees live in oak woodland forests as well. The different types of trees make up a varied ecosystem. In the mixed oak woodland forests, you will find Pacific madrone trees, California bay laurel, California buckeye, pine trees, and many other trees!

There are different animals that live in oak woodland forests. There are different kinds of birds, like the Scrub jay, the Acorn Woodpecker, and Pygmy Owls. Squirrels, Woodrats and Chipmunks use oak trees for their homes and for food. Tree frogs, snakes, and Gray foxes call oak woodland forests their home. You can find bobcats and mountain lions too!

How do these animals make their homes in oak woodland forests?

California Scrub Jays are part of the Corvid family, which includes crows, ravens, jays, and magpies. Birds in this family are known to be very smart!

Scrub jays live in places like oak forests, woods near rivers, and pine forests. They build nests shaped like baskets out of twigs, and line them with soft materials like fibers. They look for food in thick grass, bushes, and low shrubs. They eat a variety of things like seeds, nuts, fruits, berries, insects, spiders, frogs, lizards, and even bird eggs. They often search for food in pairs or with their families.



Acorn Woodpeckers live in holes they make in dead trees.



They often build their nests near other pairs of woodpeckers so they can store acorns and nuts together in tree holes, called *communal granaries*. Acorn woodpeckers mostly eat acorns and other seeds and nuts. By using their storage places, they spread acorns and seeds around, which helps forests grow again.

What is a raptor?

A raptor is a special kind of bird that eats meat. Some raptors are hawks, falcons, kites, eagles, vultures, and owls.

All raptors have a hooked beak, strong feet with sharp claws called *talons* and very good eyesight. Raptors only eat other animals. They use their feet and sharp talons to catch their prey, then carry it away. Their beaks are sharp and curved, which helps them tear into their food.

Pygmy Owls are raptors that are small and sturdy.

They mostly hunt and eat birds, and sometimes they catch rodents or insects. Even though they are small, they can catch prey that is up to three times their size!



Pygmy owls like to live in forests that have a mix of different kinds of trees, not in forests that are very thick and dense. They don't build their own nests. Instead, they use holes that woodpeckers have made in trees for their nests.

Western Gray Squirrels use oak trees to live in and raise their babies.

They especially like older oak trees with big branches and lots of leaves on top. They make their homes, called **drays**, in these trees. Drays are like nests made from leaves and small sticks. The squirrels also use bark, grass, and moss to keep their drays cozy. Some drays can be really big, more than 2 feet across!



Western gray squirrels eat nuts, acorns, and seeds from pinecones. They find acorns under oak trees and collect them to save for winter. They bury nuts in the ground about three to four inches deep so they can eat them later when it's cold.

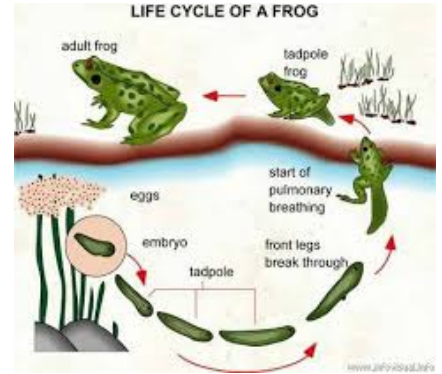
Dusky footed woodrats are great at climbing trees!

They make their homes in trees and old, hollow tree trunks called **snags**. Female woodrats build big, round nests where they have their babies and take care of them.



Their nests are made of grass, small sticks, and tree bark. You can find many of these nests close to each other because woodrats like to live together in groups of three to 15 nests, or even more. They eat plants, seeds, fruits, nuts, insects, and small animals. Dusky-footed woodrats help plants grow by spreading seeds around, which makes their habitat more diverse and interesting.

Frogs are a kind of *amphibian*. Amphibians are small animals that need water or wet places to live. Toads, salamanders, and newts are also amphibians. They can all breathe and drink water through their very thin skin. Frogs spend part of their lives in the water and part on land.



California tree frogs are tiny frogs with big toe tips.

When it is warm and sunny, California tree frogs hide in shady spots under rocks and trees, near the water. When it's rainy, streams and pools can flood! California tree frogs find higher up places like trees and big rocks, where they are safe from floods.



They can be different colors, but usually, they are light green or brownish, with some dark spots.

California tree frogs have big, round pads on their front toes that help them climb steep surfaces.

Gray foxes eat many different foods like gophers, rabbits, and mice, as well as birds, fruits, insects, berries, nuts, and grains. They have strong, curved claws that help them climb trees. Gray foxes climb trees to hunt small animals. They like to live in forests, places with lots of bushes, and rocky areas. Being near water is very important for foxes. Fox families live in dens that can be found in hollow trees, logs, cracks between big rocks, or underground.



There are two wild cat species in California: bobcats and mountain lions. Both are meat-eaters, or ***carnivores***. They hunt and eat other animals. They are good at hiding, so people don't often see them in the wild. They make their homes in forests, places with some desert, mountains, and areas with lots of bushes.

Bobcats are medium-sized wild cats, bigger than your pet cat at home.

They have fur that is brown or gray with black spots and stripes. Bobcats are known for their short, "bobbed" tails and tufts of fur on their ears. They are fast runners- they can run 25-30 miles per hour!

Bobcats hunt and eat small animals like rabbits, squirrels, birds, rats, and mice. Bobcats are most active at night, but they sometimes start hunting before the sun sets. During the day, they hide in dens they find in hollow trees, thick bushes, or rocky holes.



Mountain lions are large animals that are at the top of the food chain.

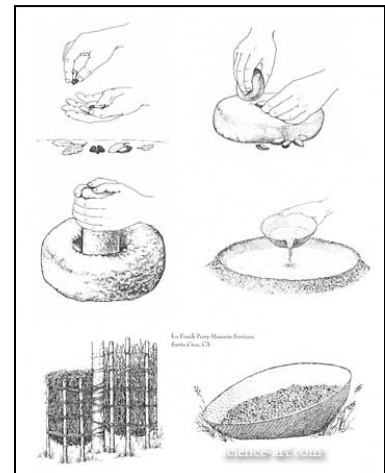


Mountain lions are mostly active from evening until morning, but they can hunt at any time of day. They hunt large animals like deer, elk, moose, mountain goats, and wild sheep, but they prefer deer the most. Mountain lions don't use dens. Instead, they rest in daybeds where they can stay safe from bad

weather, and raise their babies. In rocky areas, they might use caves or shallow spots on cliffs. In forests, they use thick bushes, under big tree roots, or under fallen trees as their daybeds.

Another important thing about an oak forest is that many streams flow through them. Trees and plants help keep the water clean, by holding back soil on the sides of the streams. Oak and other trees create shade so less water evaporates on sunny days. Water is stored underground, in healthy soil under trees and plants.

Indigenous (native) peoples of California planted and took care of oak trees. They spread oak woodland forests throughout California! They used oak acorns for food, and different indigenous communities used parts of the tree for medicines, to make baskets, furniture, and other everyday tools. Oak woodland forests are very special to indigenous peoples of California.



The important thing about Oak woodland forests is that they are unique environments that need to be respected and protected.