

Oaks in the Garden

Oak Woodland Habitats

Oaks are considered a keystone species, a species essential to an ecosystem. “Over 5,00 species of insects, 58 species of reptiles and amphibians, 105 species of mammals, and over 150 species of birds rely on oaks for some of their life cycle” (RCDSMM, 2015). Look closely, what do you see on the oak trees in the Garden.

See **Leaf Litter Activity** and **Soil Experiment** for background information and activities on soil health. See **Springs and Seeps in the Garden** for information on mosses, fungi, and lichens.

Bedrock Mortars

The bedrock mortars in the Arroyo are similar to those used by the Chumash to process acorns. Acorns formed a staple food for many tribes. Native Californians still prepare, cook, and eat meal made from acorns. This process is an important part of many ceremonial occasions. In some areas, acorns were ground in individual rock mortars that could be brought from place to place. In other places, bedrock mortars were used. In this case many mortar depressions were formed in large rock outcroppings. Some of these remain today, and they are often located among oak trees and near streams.

See **Chumash Uses of Native Plants** for more information on the Chumash and how acorn meal was processed.

Birds in the Garden

Look at the acorn woodpecker and sapsucker displays. Think about how these birds rely on plants to survive. These two birds are related (both are woodpeckers) but they have very different methods of obtaining food. Acorn woodpeckers are common at the Botanic Garden. These birds collect acorns during the fall. They drill holes in tree bark and store acorns in them as a future food source. Acorn woodpecker family groups guard and tend specific ‘granary trees’ year-round. These birds also feed on insects.

Sapsuckers visit the Garden occasionally in the winter. They drill rows of small holes in tree trunks. These holes are bored at a downward angle and fill with sap. The birds feed on this sap as well as the ants that are attracted to the liquid.

Suggested Questions for your Visit

1. Did you find any living things as you explored the Leaf Litter Tray
2. Name some of the types of Decomposer organisms that help to break down oak leaf litter.
3. Did you see any mammals on our under our oaks? What did you see?
4. Look at the oak trees. Can you see a bird on the trunk? What type of bird is it?
5. How do Sapsuckers feed?
6. Acorn Woodpeckers store acorns in ‘granary trees’. How do they do this?