

Oak Woodland Display

Dense canopies of Coast Live Oaks overlap and create a shady Oak Woodland. Here, wildlife thrives. With an ample supply of acorns in the fall and many niches to fill, insects, salamanders, mule deer, woodrats, birds and even skinks live in, or pass through the Oak Woodlands.



Plants

Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*)



- Lives for centuries
- Has fire resistant, very thick bark
- Dominant oak in Southern California
- Acorns important food source for Acorn Woodpecker, Scrub Jay, Gray Squirrel, Deer and Woodrat as well as the Native Americans

- Duff under Coast Live Oak provides a moist environment for Salamanders that breathe through their skin.

Poison Oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*)



- Most common understory species in moist Oak Woodland
- Similar to Poison Ivy (which is not found in Southern California) but a different species. Both have the leaves of three, a sign to beware; all parts of the plants have urushiol that can bind to the skin and cause an allergy (contact allergy). Washing with soap (especially alcohol soap) may wash away urushiol if done immediately after exposure.

- But doesn't affect birds or animals, whom eat the white berries and the leaves (but keep your dog on a leash as you can get exposed to the urushiol oil from the fur of the dog when you pet him).
- Beware of brown leafless stems in the fall and winter as well, the plant drops its leaves, but the stems are just as allergenic.

Holly-leaved Cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*)



- Thorny-like shiny roundish leaves that tend to fold up, taco like (similar Holly-leaf red berry leaves fold down), white flowers in spring
- Has tasty edible cherries, but the fruit is very thin, not much flesh, favored by birds, for Native Americans an alcoholic brew
- On Ecology trail, this bush (6-20 feet) is preferred by the woodrats for building their nest, giving protection above from raptors

- A small hole in the nut shell with rough edges indicates a mouse gnawed the shell to get at the seed which contains cyanide.

- A deep rooted bush with evergreen waxy stiff leaves
- Prefer moister areas: north facing slopes, ravines and canyons

Oaks (*Quercus*)

- Before agriculture, the oaks were one of the primary foundation plants for all life in Southern California. Over 4,000 species of life depend on the oaks for food, shelter and habitat.
- Acorns were a well-balanced food for Native Americans: one third protein, one third starch and one third fat.
- Placerita Canyon has four species of oak trees:
 1. Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*)
 - short stout trunk with many large, crooked, spreading branches
 - leaves are oblong with leaf edges turned under
 - very often found streamside but cannot tolerate wet roots
 - found in valleys or on slopes usually in open park-like groves
 - iconic tree of our park
 - acorns preferred by Native Americans
 2. Canyon Live Oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*)
 - found in canyons and on gravelly and rocky slopes
 - short trunk and large spreading horizontal branches
 - found on the Canyon Trail and Los Pinetos Trail
 - acorns are variable sized
 - leaves are shiny green above
 - has the largest acorns
 3. Interior Live Oak (*Quercus wislizeni*)
 - uncommon in Placerita Canyon but found on the ridge beyond the Manzanita Trail
 - evergreen tree with short trunk and crown of stout spreading branches
 - lance shaped or elliptical leaves
 - acorns are long and egg shaped with deep cap
 4. Scrub Oak (*Quercus berberidifolia*)
 - found on dry, barren slopes in Chaparral
 - thicket forming shrub or small tree with multiple trunks
 - leaves are small and oblong with sharp or spiny teeth and gray, hairy undersides
 - acorns are long and egg shaped
- Oaks are vulnerable to gall insects that deposit eggs in branches causing the tree to form a “gall” to isolate the developing larva in a spongy ball.

Birds

Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis occidentalis*; Taxidermy - in tree on left side)



- Distinguished by round-headed look, lacking the “ear” tufts of many owls, 40” wingspan, stocky, overall brown color with white spots
 - Uncommon to rare and declining, nocturnal; roosts in trees in daytime
 - At night, hunts from perch for small mammals
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- Found in the oak canyons of Placerita Canyon Natural Area
 - According to ebird, 21 sightings in 2014 (last in Aug.); no juveniles seen in 2014 (2 seen in July 2013) PLEASE DO NOT DIVULGE EXACT LOCATION

Western Scrub-Jay (*Aphelocoma californica*; Painted on back wall)



- Distinguished by deep-blue above and brown back patch, white throat and long tail (Note: There are no Blue Jays in California)
- Common year-round resident. Important bird for oak woodlands (acorn dispersal)
- Very intelligent

Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*; Painted on back wall)



- Distinguished by coloration: pale buffy, gray and white owl with dark eyes and heart-shaped face with no “ear” tufts (think Catori)
 - Fairly common (but secretive) year-round resident
 - Has exceptionally keen hearing; can locate rodents and other prey in total darkness
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- Commonly heard call is a rasping screech, often heard in flight

Common Raven (*Corvus corax*; Taxidermy - 2 in tree on right side)



- Distinguished by color: all glossy black, long pointed wings, a wedge- shaped tail, very heavy black bill
- Our largest songbird; almost half again the length and twice the weight of a crow (think Buddy)
- Very intelligent (just watch Buddy)

- Ravens soar high in the air like hawks (crows flap their wings more)
- Omnivores - road kill; seen at dumps, landfills; effective predators of rodents, reptiles, eggs, young of small birds

Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*; Painted on wall at tree on right side)



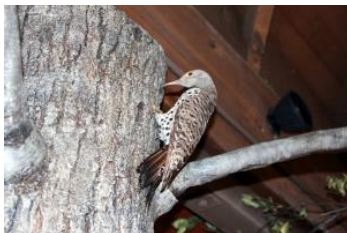
- Distinguished by a “clown” face - glossy black above, black-yellow-white face, red crown; large white patches in wings seen in flight
- Very noisy, very social - nests in communal groups
- A community of Acorn Woodpeckers care for the nestlings.

- Stores acorns in conspicuous “granary” trees (or utility poles). Sallies after flying insects and forages for ants on the ground
- Year-round resident; this is our “signature” bird

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*; Taxidermy - female clinging to oak tree; male in tree to the right)



- Distinguished by large size, light brown above, barred back, round black spots below; black crescent across chest
- “Red-shafted” (form) flickers show salmon-red color in wings and tail; male has red “whisker” mark on face



- Spend time on ground hopping about looking for ants and other insects; climbs tree trunks; also eats fruits, berries, nuts and seeds
- Its range is from Alaska to Nicaragua all it needs is trees

- Male defends territory by drumming on trees, etc.
- Cavity nesters (starlings compete for same nest driving flicker away)
- Fairly common resident; migrants also, arriving late Sept. - March

Mammals

Dusky-footed Woodrat (*Neotoma fuscipes*)



- Life Span: 4 years
- Mating season: Nov – Mar
- Gestation Period: 23-38 days
- Litter Size: usually 1-3
- Litters per year: several

- Nocturnal rodent
- Commonly called "packrats" or "trade rats"
- Builds large, domed dens that can reach several feet in height
- Religiously solitary (except in the mating season when they are most vulnerable to predation), dens are frequently found in clusters of up to several dozen, forming rough "communities"

Dusky-footed woodrats of California have been found to selectively place California bay leaves (*Umbellularia*) around the edges of their nest within their stick houses to control levels of ectoparasites such as fleas. The leaves contain volatile organic compounds which are toxic to flea larvae. (source: Wikipedia.org)

Long-tailed Weasel (*Mustela frenata*)



- Life Span: 5 years in captivity
- Mating season: Jul - Aug
- Gestation Period: 205-337 days
- Litter Size: 4-8
- Litters per year: one

- Supple and streamlined: expert swimmers and skilled tree-climbers
- Slender predator: hunts small mammals, birds, frogs, snakes
- Mainly nocturnal
- Size: 11-18" (male larger than female)
- Habitat: Woodlands, fields, brushy areas, farmlands

Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)



- Life Span: 25 years in captivity
 - Mating season: October
 - Gestation Period: 195-212 days
 - Litter Size: usually 2
 - Litters per year: one
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- Named for their large, mobile ears
 - Move in small groups consisting of a doe, her fawns and her year-old young
 - Bucks travel alone, may form herds after the fall rutting season
 - Size: 4-6.5' (male larger than female), slender
 - Antlers have two equal branches, each forking into two tines
 - Reddish-brown or yellowish-brown in summer, grayer in winter
 - Tail tipped black and usually white above
 - Similar species: White-tailed deer (smaller ears, no black tail tip)
 - Habitat: forests, mountains, grassy areas

Other

Arboreal Salamander (*Aneides lugubris*; small display box at railing on the left)



- Found from Northern California to Baja
- Also called Climbing Salamander
- In dry season estivates under litter, log or rocks to stay hydrated until the rainy season
- Size: 2-4" long

- Is lungless and respire through skin and mouth tissues
- Has sharp teeth and will bite
- Toes are adapted for climbing
- Makes a squeaking sound
- Eats small worms, snails, ants, termites, sow bugs
- Prey is captured by its tongue
- Aggressively territorial
- Female lays 6-24 eggs and young hatch fully formed

California Sister (*Adelpha californica*)



- Common in California
- Found in Placerita Canyon Oak Woodland from late March to October (sometimes, adults may last through the winter months)
- Two orange patches near the tips of the forewings

- Usual host plant for larvae are Coast Live Oak, Canyon Live Oak or Scrub Oak which makes it unpalatable to predators
- Males are commonly seen mud-puddling in the creek around the waterfall area in Placerita.