

Oak Woodland Display

Dense canopies of Coast Live Oaks overlap in an Oak Woodland; a cool, shady respite from the hot sun. A variety of other plants live in the shade of the oaks where the ground is covered with leaves and acorns. With sturdy, high branches and an ample supply of acorns in the fall, this is home to larger birds and mammals like hawks, owls, mule deer and woodrats. Insects, salamanders, 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 newts and salamanders that breathe through their skin

Poison Oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*)



- Common understory species in Oak Woodland – winter deciduous woody shrub or vine
 - Leaf divided into three glossy leaflets – bronze when unfolding in February/March, bright green in spring, turning reddish in summer and bright red or pink July to October
 - White flowers March to June
- 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 dermatitis); washing with soap (especially alcohol soap) may wash away urushiol if done immediately after exposure
 - Urushiol doesn't affect birds or animals which may eat the white berries and the leaves (Dogs can pick up the urushiol on their fur and transfer it to humans, so keep pets leashed!).
 - Beware of brown leafless stems in the fall and winter as well! The plant drops its leaves, but the stems are just as allergenic. All parts of this plant upon contact can cause a rash - summer or winter!

Holly-leaved Cherry (*Prunus ilicifolia*)



- Evergreen shrub with spiny-toothed, holly-like leaves that tend to fold up like a taco shell (similar to Holly-leaf Redberry with leaves that fold down)
 - White feathery flowers bloom terminally April/May; purple to black fruit is an edible cherry, but mostly skin and seed (although birds love them)
 - Prefers moist areas, north-facing slopes, ravines, canyons
- On Ecology Trail, look for Dusky-footed Woodrat nests as they prefer this shrub for their nests, giving them protection from raptors
 - Bees love this plant and Native Americans fermented the fruit into an intoxicating drink

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 and storage-stable food for Native Americans
- Oaks are vulnerable to gall insects that deposit eggs on branches causing the tree to form a gall in a spongy ball to isolate the developing larva
- Placerita Canyon Natural Area has four species of oak trees, none of which are deciduous

1. Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*)

- short, stout trunk with many large, crooked, spreading branches
- leaves are dark green and oblong with spiny-toothed, convex edges and show tufts of hair on veins on underside
- flowers are produced mid-spring; male flowers are pendulous catkins, female flowers inconspicuous; fruit is slender acorn*
- very often found streamside but cannot tolerate wet roots
- found in valleys or on slopes usually in open park-like groves
- distinctive “signature” tree of our natural area
- acorns preferred by Native Americans

2. Canyon Live Oak (*Quercus chrysolepis*)

- short trunk with spreading, horizontal branches and broad, rounded crown
- leaves are flat, glossy dark green with prominent spines and pointed at tip; underside of leaf golden to gray
- found in canyons and on gravelly and rocky slopes; at Placerita on Canyon and Los Pinetos Trails
- acorns* are large, egg-shaped with turban-like caps

3. Interior Live Oak (*Quercus wislizeni*)

- tall and very broad evergreen oak with stout-spreading branches in an umbrella shape in foothill woodlands below 5,000 feet
- dark green leaves lanced-shaped and holly-like, but flat and hairless
- flowers are inconspicuous and monoecious (male & female flowers on same tree)
- found on ridge beyond the Manzanita Trail, but uncommon in Placerita Canyon Natural Area
- acorns* are pointed and sit deep in cap (2 years to mature)

4. Scrub Oak (*Quercus berberidifolia*)

- small evergreen shrubby oak – thicket forming often with multiple trunks
- variable, dull green leaves, small and oblong with sharply toothed (ouch!) margins and hairy underneath
- flowers are yellow but inconspicuous
- found more often in chaparral than in oak woodlands
- acorns* are small and egg-shaped

*Acorns were the staple diet of our Native Americans. They preferred the acorns of the Coast Live Oak. It has been estimated that a family of four required at least 500 pounds of acorns each year, and they often gathered more for trading purposes. They ground the acorns when dried and leached the shelled meal to remove the tannic acid.

Birds

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



- Distinguished by round-headed look, black eyes, lacking the “ear” tufts of many owls. 40” wingspan, stocky, overall brown color with white spots on chest, belly and back
 - 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; however, no recent confirmed reports of sightings. (This may be because the area of its habitat is closed to the public at this time)

California 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 - 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
- Very intelligent

- 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)



- 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

- Spends 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 year-round resident; some migrate here, arriving in late September until March

Mammals

Mule Deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*)



- Life Span: 9-11 years in wild, 25 years in captivity
 - Mating season: October
 - Gestation Period: 195-212 days
 - Litter Size: usually 2 fawns
 - Litters per year: one
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- Distinguished by tan coat (grayer in winter), large 'mule-sized' ears and black-tipped tail
 - 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
 - Males' antlers have two equal branches, each forking into two tines. Males shed antlers January to March.
 - Similar species: White-tailed Deer (smaller ears, no black on tail)
 - Habitat: forests, mountains, grassy areas

Other

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



- Life Span: 5 years
 - Found from Northern California to Baja
 - Also called Climbing Salamander
 - In dry season estivates under litter, log or rodent burrows to stay hydrated until the rainy season
 - Size: 2-4" long
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- Distinguished by a triangular head, thick body, dark gray or brown back, cream underside and usually yellow or white spots; prehensile tail
 - Lungless and breathes through skin and mouth tissues
 - Has sharp teeth and will bite
 - Toes are adapted for tree climbing as high as 60 feet
 - Makes a squeaking sound as a defensive stance
 - Nocturnal and eats small worms, snails, ants, termites, sow bugs; predators are snakes and birds
 - Prey is captured by its tongue and crushed by powerful jaws and sharp teeth
 - Aggressively territorial
 - Female lays 6-24 eggs in tree cavity or moist log and young hatch fully formed

California Sister (*Adelpha californica*)



- Common abundant California butterfly, found in oak woodlands from late March to October (adults sometimes can live through winter)
 - Distinguished by dark brown to black upper wing surface with wide white bands on both wings and two orange patches near tips of forewings
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- Host plants for larvae are Coast Live Oak, Canyon Live Oak or Scrub Oak, the diet of which makes it unpalatable to predators. Eggs are green, laid singly on tips of leaves on upper surface; four larval instars; 65 days from egg to adult
 - Mud-puddling is common; also attracted to water. Often seen flying near upper branches of oak trees