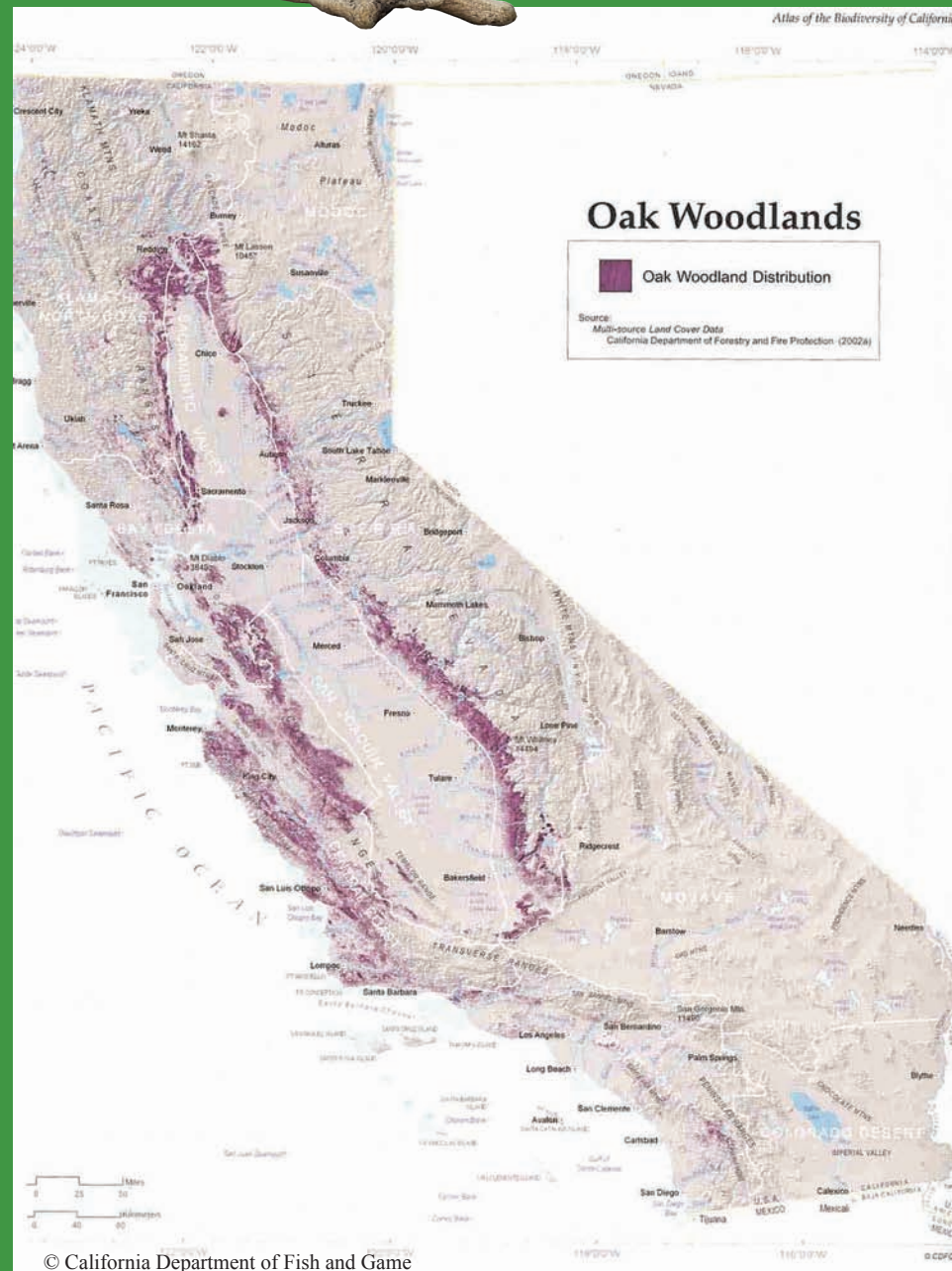


Foothill Woodland

What are foothill woodlands and where are they found?



Woodlands vary according to precipitation, elevation and exposure. Generally, canopy cover exceeds 30% (unlike more open communities such as oak savanna). Where more open, a dense understory of trees, shrubs and forbs can be supported. Buckeye, Douglas iris, columbine, currants, elderberry and yes, poison oak are common. On north-facing slopes, however, woodlands often have little understory as the trees competing for light block it from reaching the ground.

Widespread across the northern hemisphere, including California, the genus *Quercus* includes dozens of oak species, from stunted little scrub oaks to the majestic, broad-canopied valley oak. About 16 species of oaks call California home (depending on the botanist asked), 11 of which are endemic (restricted) to the state.

Why are oak trees such an important component of the woodland?

Valley Oak Apple Galls



© 2004 Kayvon Shaki-far

Few of California's trees are as significant as the oak group—both ecologically and esthetically. Providing food, nesting sites and protection, oaks shelter many animal species. Sun-dappled oak woodland also supports numerous species of shrubs and herbaceous vegetation. And surely nothing speaks “California” like an open, spacious landscape of oak woodland or savanna. Oaks are key players in California's natural systems—the keystones that hold everything else in place!

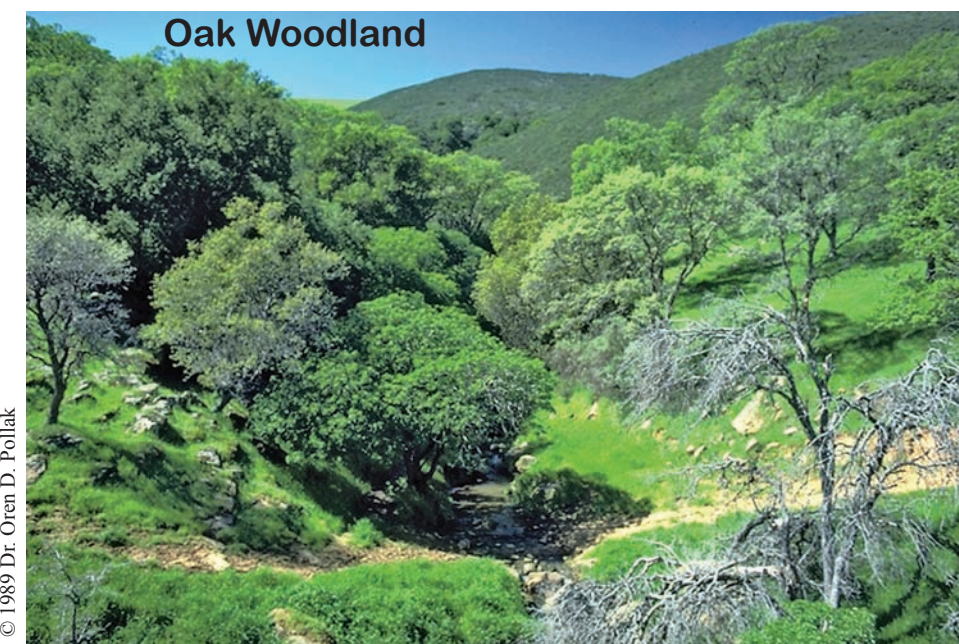
Some oaks are evergreen, retaining their leaves through the year. The coast live oak, for example, is called that because of this feature. Other species are deciduous and lose their leaves as winter approaches;



Columbine

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Oak Woodland



© 1989 Dr. Oren D. Pollak

black and valley oaks follow this strategy.



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How did the acorn woodpecker get its name?



Acorn Woodpecker

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For the acorn woodpecker, oaks are a major obsession. These striking birds (no one forgets this one, with its red cap, dashing black and white feathers and pale, demented eye) harvest the acorns by the thousands, storing them in granary trees (or in old telephone poles for that matter) for later use. The granaries are drilled with holes for every

acorn, and the birds whack the acorns into place with their strong beaks. Such intense labor may seem a waste of time, but the granaries serve as valuable larders of acorns and for the insect larvae they attract—food for the future.

Squirrel



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California Quail



© Joyce Gross

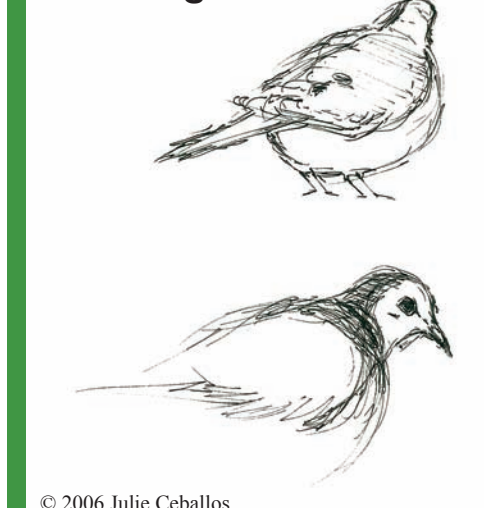
What animals live in the foothill woodland?

Many other animals rely on acorns for food. Black-tailed deer depend on them during fall and winter, unfortunately having to compete today with the non-native wild pig for this resource. Rodents such as the wood rat and deer mouse enjoy the fat and protein provided by the fruit. Wild turkeys feed on acorns as they drop from the trees. Furthermore, cavities in old oaks are valuable homes for other species: carpenter bees, bats, western bluebirds and chickadees. Yet other creatures browse on oak leaves and flowers. Even fallen oaks become apartment complexes for many tenants—invertebrates, salamanders, lizards and snakes. In short, oaks serve as the base of many intricate interrelationships.

Acorns were vital for California's Native Americans, too. Leached of their strong tannins by soaking in water, acorns were

ground into a meal used as flour. Acorn harvests and preparation occupied many days of hard work, but the results were well worth the work.

Mourning Dove



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Black-tailed Deer



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Mountain Lion



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