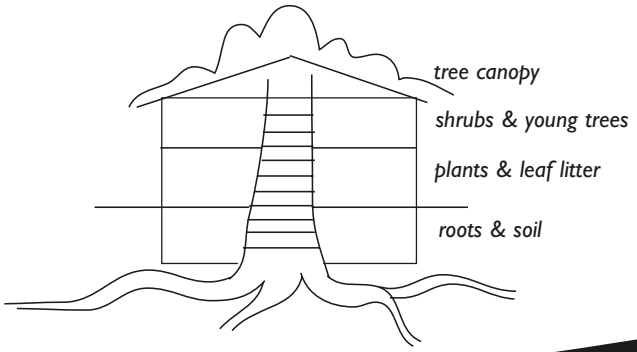
Family or class activity
Who lives in the wood?

Take a stroll through your favourite wood and consider how important the different areas within it are to the wildlife living there.

The amount of sunlight penetrating the tree canopy greatly affects who lives where. The availability of water and types of soil are other important considerations.

Photograph:WTPPL/Robert MacLEOD

As you walk through the wood look up and compare how much light is coming through the tree canopy in different areas. Compare this change with what is growing on the ground. For example, bluebells prefer a lighter environment than shade-loving wild garlic with its pungent smell. Each level of the woodland from soil to canopy has inhabitants suited to their unique environment. We can liken the layers of typical deciduous woodland to that of the floors of a house to help us understand the diversity and adaptation that occur. Just as each floor or level of the house has a different use; each level in woodland has different inhabitants and uses. Let's look at the floors of the house and compare to the wood to investigate just how specific they are to their uses.



Basement

In many houses (particularly in North America), the basement is a utility area. It contains the hidden machines that make our day to day living run smoothly. The boiler and the access to the water supply are typically found here. It is also used as a storage area and a refuge from harsh weather conditions as the temperature is more constant underground.

The basement of our woodland contains the strong, vital root system of all the plant life in our wood. From this powerhouse, water is pumped to the upper levels of the forest. The soil, as well as being an anchorage point, is a source of food and a home for many burrowing animals. Some animals may also hibernate underground to protect them from harsh winter conditions.

Challenge

Look for holes in the ground which may be animal burrows. Can you find holes of different sizes? What do you think may be living there? Small holes (about 2cm) may house voles. Larger holes (about 10cm) may be used by rabbits. Bigger holes than this may have been dug by foxes or badgers. Are they being lived in now? Look for signs of freshly dug soil and animal tracks.

WOODLAND TRUST

Family or class activity
Who lives in the wood?

Ground floor

The ground floor, for many, is the area where we do most of our active living. It is usually here that we eat, play, work and, in some cases, exercise.

In our wood, this level is home to many animals, both large and small. These creatures are dependent on the plentiful supply of plant material found here. From the deer to the badger, the food supply found at this level is vital to the forest ecosystem. Fallen branches and leaf litter also provide homes and food for small woodland inhabitants such as woodlice.

Challenge

Look more closely at the leaf litter on the ground. Wearing gloves, push aside the top layer and delve underneath. Many small creatures will scurry away. See if you can identify three of them.

www.naturegrid.org.uk/woodland/woodland_gallery.html has useful information to help.

small white caterpiller

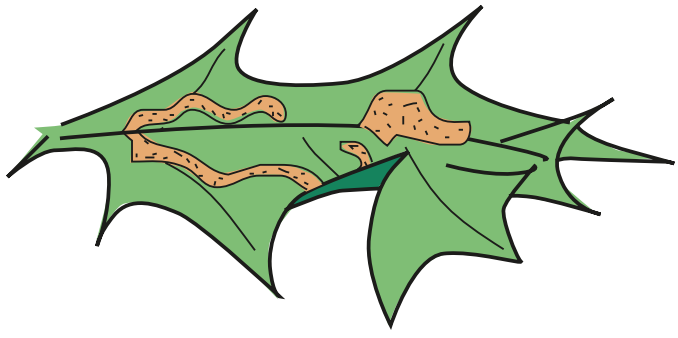
First floor

The first floor is away from the distractions of the lower levels and everyday life. We retreat here for peace, quiet, and rest.

In our woodland this is the level of shrubs and young trees. Many species are found here. Birds build nests and aim to escape the dangers of predators amongst the branches of these lower shrubs and trees. Insects and other minibeasts make their homes here, using the foliage as cover for the various stages of their lifecycles and for food.

Challenge

Find a holly tree. Look closely at the leaves. You will probably see that many of them have wiggly tracks damaging their surface. These are made by small insects called leaf miners that lay their eggs on the underside of the leaves in May or June. The eggs hatch and the larvae burrow through the leaf between the top and bottom surfaces. Later in the season they break out of the leaf and fly away. See if you can find one still inside the leaf.



holly leaf with miner track

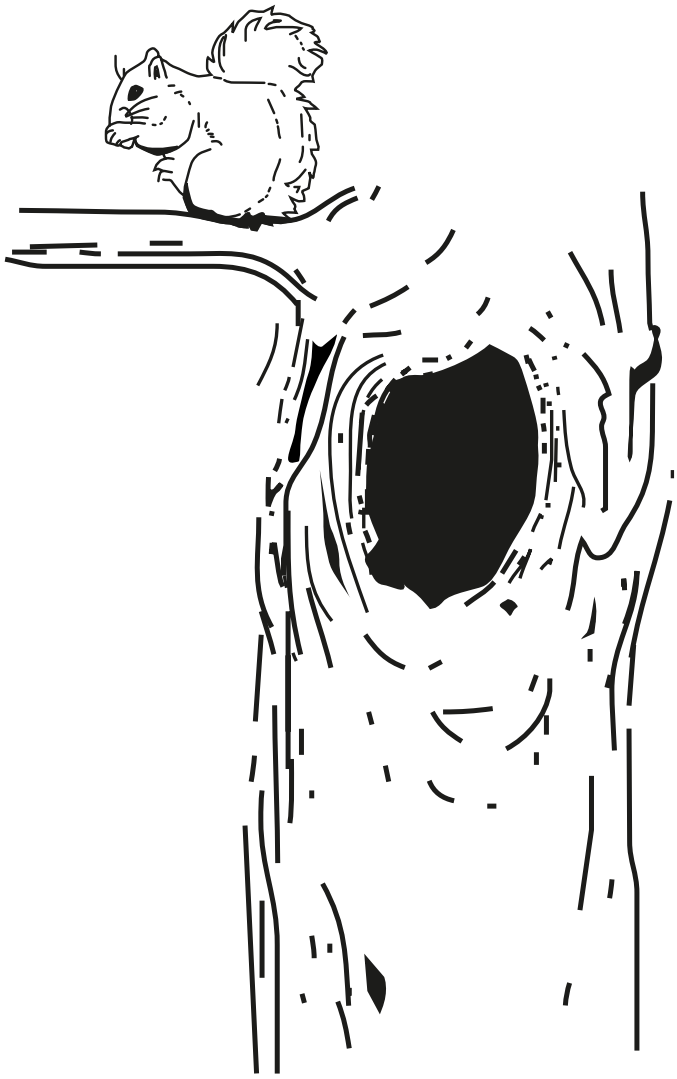
WOODLAND TRUST

Family or class activity
Who lives in the wood?

Roof or attic

The roof protects us from the weather which would otherwise cause damage to the content and fabric of our house. Both the sun and rain are kept out.

The tree canopy of our wood filters the amount of light, heat and rain which reaches other levels. Each species of plant and animal is adapted to where it lives in the wood. Some of the larger bird species, with their robust nests made from strong twigs, choose to nest high in the tree canopy away from predators.



Children's activity

Build your own birds nest using twigs and other materials found in the wood. Remember, if you were a bird you would have to be able to carry the pieces in your beak. How can you help it stay together? What will you use to make it comfortable inside for the chicks?

Staircase

Lastly, the staircase is the means by which all levels are reached and interconnect. The habitat provided by tree trunks, both living and dead is an important and thriving, interconnecting ladder between the levels of the woodland ecosystem.

Challenge

Play hide and seek in the wood. Each time you hide, imagine you are escaping from a predator who wants to eat you! Where are the best places to hide? Try to imagine what sort of creatures may use your hiding places. In the winter it will be harder to hide as many leaves have gone. What would you do to stay safe? If you were a tiny insect what sort of places would you choose to hide away in?

Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund

WOODLAND TRUST

Family or class activity
Who lives in the wood?

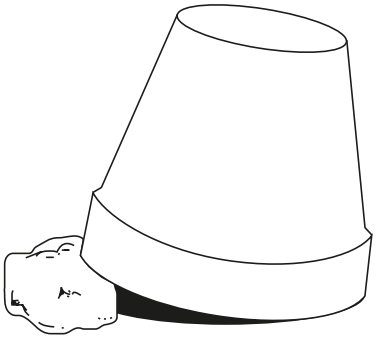
Flower pot hotels

Each woodland creature is uniquely suited to its home. Try this simple activity in your garden, backyard or school grounds.

Challenge

Equipment: Flower pots (earthenware are best as they are not easily disturbed) and a few small rocks

- Find areas that have different levels of light. Choose some that are very shaded and some that are in full sunlight.
- Turn the flower pot upside down and prop it up on the rock



- Do this in each different area
- After a few days, go back to your minibeast hotels and discover just what has decided to visit
- Do the residents differ between pots?
- Are some pots empty?

Your shaded pots may contain residents such as slugs, snails and woodlice who like to stay away from the drying effect of the sun.

Your pots in full sunlight may contain spiders and some beetles or nothing at all. Why do you think this is?

Seasonal challenge

Try to revisit the same wood each season. Look at some of the species mentioned in this activity sheet or others that you have noticed and track them through the seasons.

Visit www.naturedetectives.org.uk and discover how you can record seasonal sightings. This site also gives information to help you with identification and has more downloadable activities.