

Keeping Oak Woodlands Healthy

If the birds are there, the oak woodland is healthy.

How do you know if your oak woodland is healthy? Look for these 12 oak woodland focal species—together they feed and nest in the different layers of a healthy oak woodland forest. **Healthy oak woodlands are important habitats for birds and other wildlife, and also places where we farm and ranch.** Healthy oak woodlands provide food, cover, and safe access to water for over 300 different kinds of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians—more than any other habitat in California. **If the birds are there, your oak woodland is healthy!** Tips for keeping your oak woodland forest healthy are on page 2.

	Acorn Woodpecker	Oak Titmouse	Nuttall's Woodpecker	Northern Flicker	White-breasted Nuthatch	Ash-throated Flycatcher	Lawrence's Goldfinch
Photos Courtesy of Tom Grey							
Tip for a Healthy Habitat	Retain acorn producing trees, snags and cavity trees.	Retain or plant fruit or insect producing plants. Keep cavity trees and snags.	Keep a good mix of mature oaks or deciduous trees and cavity trees. Plant forest layers.	Create ant habitat by leaving a healthy ground layer. Retain snags and cavity trees.	Retain mature pines, oaks, and dense, tall streamside vegetation. Keep cavity trees.	Plant or retain tall vegetation, mature oaks, pines, large trees, and dead trees with cavities.	Create accessible water. Keep seed bearing flowers and grasses, and a healthy ground layer.
How to Identify	Black back, white belly, white patches in wings, visible in flight. 'Clown' face markings with red cap. Very vocal woodpecker.	5 inch gray-brown bird. Lighter underside. Small pointed crest on head. Males and females look alike.	7 inch woodpecker with black and white barred back. Males have red cap on back of head, females do not.	12 inch woodpecker, brown barred back and wings, spotted underside. Black bib, brown cap, red under-wing and tail noticeable in flight. Males have red mustache.	Blue-gray back with gray nape and black head cap. White face with white chest and buffy underside.	Brown-gray back with long rusty colored tail. Gray throat and breast. Yellow-white belly. Short bushy crest on head.	5 inches with gray back and sides. Yellow in wings and large chest patch. Males have black forehead and chin.
Nest Site Layer in Forest	Uses holes in trees or hollow limbs. Often prefers snags.	Nests in holes in trees, hollow limbs or rotten stumps, usually high up in tree.	Males drill new nest holes each year, sometimes in fence posts, utility poles or large shrubs but prefers large trees or snags.	Pair excavates nest holes each year, most often in dead or decaying deciduous trees.	Cavities often un-used woodpecker nesting holes.	Utilizes pre-existing holes in trees or hollow limbs.	Builds a cup shaped nest of sticks, 10-15 feet off the ground. Prefers small diameter blue oaks or tall shrubs.
Feeding Forest Layers	Feeds on insects in any forest layer. Collects acorns and stores in shared granary tree.	Feeds on insects, seeds and fruit no more than 30' off the ground.	Searches limbs and trunk for seeds, insects and fruits	Feeds on the ground for insects, especially ants. Also eats berries and seeds.	Searches for insects along pine and oak branches near trunk. Also sometimes eats nuts and seeds.	Flies from perches to catch insects on the ground or off plants. Occasionally eats lizards and mice.	Feeds on seeds from annual plants, occasionally feeds on the ground for seeds.

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	Western Bluebird	California Quail	Western Scrub-Jay	Yellow-billed Magpie	Lark Sparrow
Photos Courtesy of Tom Grey					
Tips for a Healthy Habitat	Retain cavity trees or snags. Remove non-native birds nesting in bluebird habitats.	Keep or plant shrubs and downed wood. Create a healthy ground layer.	Keep or plant shrubs and plant or retain acorn or nut producing trees.	Keep large mature trees. Create healthy ground layers and rangelands.	Keep or plant shrubs, native bunch grasses, and keep a healthy ground layer.
How to Identify	7 inch bird with blue head and upper-parts with red breast and gray belly.	Plump birds with gray-brown backs. Male has black throat and plume on forehead. Often found in groups.	Gray back with blue upper-parts and tail, gray underside. Dark cheek patch and thick beak.	20 inch black and white body, long dark tail, thick yellow beak. White patches on wings noticeable in flight.	6 inch bird bold chestnut head stripes, whitish underside. White outer tail feathers noticeable in flight.
Nest Site Layer in Forest	Occupies empty cavities in trees. Usually in 20% or less canopy cover.	Under brush or dense vegetation. Nest is placed in a depression on ground.	Uses tops of shrubs or low in trees, hidden by mistletoe or dense vegetation..	Large dome-shaped nest, high in the tree canopy or far out on high limbs.	On ground or in a low shrub. Cup nest made of grass, weedy stems and hair.
Feeding Forest Layers	Eats ground-dwelling insects although will catch flying insects. Rely on berries in winter.	Feeds around or near shrubs for escape cover. Eats seeds, nuts and berries, sometimes insects.	Feeds on insects and seeds on the ground, gathering nuts and fruits in the fall. Also eats eggs and lizards.	Searches ground near woodlands for insects, grains, carrion and small mammals.	Walks on the ground searching for seeds and insects.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

- **Contact NRCS** to create a grazing management plan that will reduce disturbance to nesting birds and other wildlife.
 - **Retain a mix** of living and dead trees, especially those with cavity holes for nesting birds.
 - **Protect and enhance** the shrub layer. Healthy oak woodlands should have a mix of small and large shrubs.
 - **Protect young oaks**, and foster regeneration by keeping healthy forest layers.
 - **Protect water resources** by enhancing access areas to reduce runoff and erosion.
 - **Plant native grasses**, flowers, shrubs, and trees on your property to create habitat for nesting birds and wildlife.
 - **Create habitat corridors** and plant a mixture of habitat types in your shelterbelts that include dense areas interspersed with open grasslands.
- Contact your local NRCS for technical and/or financial help with these beneficial activities.*

Scrub Jays Help Oak Forests Survive

The **Western Scrub Jay** “plants” acorns for winter food, but many are never eaten and instead grow into oak seedlings. Without jays, the oaks don’t grow. The jays need shrubs amongst the trees to feed and raise their young. If shrubs are absent, Scrub Jays are too, and the next generation of oak trees may not be planted.

Critical Oak Woodland Forest Layers:

Top Canopy: Pines, large mature oaks

Mid-canopy: Oaks, snags, shrub tops

Interior Mid-canopy: Oak interior, shrubs, cavities, snag trees

Understory/Ground: Bunch grass, low shrubs, downed wood, leaf litter

