

Woods and forests are always attractive to children. They are places of adventure and excitement, even if there are only a few trees! That these places are home to shy animals that are hard to spot makes visits even more interesting. This set consists of six woodland animal families. Each family is made up of two pieces: male/female on one side, with a baby in a different pose on each of the reverse.

Key vocabulary

- Deer and foal
- Fox and cub
- Otter and pup
- Owl and owlet
- Rabbit and kit
- Squirrel and kit
- Prey, predator
- Tall/taller/tallest
- Small/smaller/smallest
- Wings, beak, claws
- Antlers, hooves
- Wood, woodland, forest
- Holt (otter)
- Den (fox)
- Burrow (rabbit)
- Drey (squirrel)
- Nest (owl)
- Sort
- Compare
- Similarities
- Differences
- Different from / similar to



Activity ideas

Using the animal characters

- Children will love all the little details and will take great delight in comparing and sorting the animals. Tell me about your different groups? How have you divided them up?
- Different members of each family face towards each other for extra play value. This also works across families, increasing opportunities for imaginary play and the development of storytelling skills.

- Play a barrier game during which one child describes a hidden animal to a partner. You can use the [online poster](#) as a reference point. Use magnifiers to explore the animal characters in more detail. This will reveal details of markings, type of fur, how the babies look the same/different to their parents. Take the opportunity to talk about what is meant by camouflage.
 - Does anyone know what camouflage means?
 - Are any of these animals camouflaged?
 - Why do you think they are?
 - Do you know any other animals that are camouflaged?

The squirrel and rabbit do not want to be seen by predators, while the owl does not want to be seen by their prey.



- Create a woodland habitat for the animals to live in using natural materials, such as bark chippings, twigs, soil, pebbles, fabric for water, moss, and so on.
- A name and description of each animal's home can be found [here](#). This guidance will help you plan what materials to make available and discuss the best ways to construct the different homes.

Create and make

- Focus on the nest of the owl family: twigs, dry grass, soft feathers, leaves. How can we make a really good nest? How will we keep the owl's eggs safe? Challenge the children to make suitable nests. Display the nests so that the children can discuss the ways they tackled the challenge. A great activity for developing fine motor control.
- Pine cones can be used for animal sculptures. Use one for the body and draw the face of one of the animals on paper, which can be decorated and stuck on the cone. Add feet and a tail.
- Convert your outdoor area into a park, with brooms, brushes and wheelbarrows to keep it clean and animal-friendly. The Percy the Park Keeper stories will inspire such role play. They also feature a number of the animals from this set.
- Make a paper plate fox face. Paint the plate red, then, once dried, fold two parts of the plate over to meet at a point, creating the white cheeks of the fox. Decorate with eyes, nose and ears.
- *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell and Patrick Benson is a beautiful picture book to use, which covers lots of themes that young children will relate to. Use it to explore the structure of the story, finding ways to record the key events in order: flow chart, pictures, role play.
- Provide some paper owl templates on which the children can create the plumage by applying paint fingerprints. A wonderful activity for sensory feedback.



Learning more

- Pieces of deer antler can be bought from pet shops. These work well to explore the hardness of the material and what an antler looks like inside.
- Encourage the children to refer to books, pictures and video to learn more about the animals in the set. Give specific questions for the children to answer, with the detail tailored to the children's level of understanding.
- Research the footprints of the animals in the set, some of which can be found in Yellow Door's Let's Investigate Woodland Footprints (YD1072). Print out a series of footprints of one of the animals. Lay them out on the floor and put the animal at the end of the trail. Ask the children what they think the footprints belong to before they follow the trail to find out.
- While you may not get any of these woodland animals in your outdoor area, you can make this space more attractive to other animals, including birds. There are many types of bird feeders that can be made. Try making fir cone feeders. Wrap some wire round the base of a cone. Press a mixture of fat and bird seed into the cone. Hang the cone upside down in a tree for birds to feed from.
- Gather acorns and use them as counters for number activities, particularly number bonds to 5 and 10.

Games you can play

- Gather a selection of model eggs: wooden, marble, fabric, and so on. Yellow Door sell Size-Sorting Eggs (YD1088) that are good for this game. Hold egg races to find out which is the quickest rolling egg. Discuss why this might be the case.



- Hide carrots round your setting and challenge the children to find them. Once the carrot hunt is over, use them to make carrot soup to share, involving the children in the stages of preparation.

Extending the learning

- Look at photographs of different bird eggs, exploring what different patterns they have. Discuss how these might be shown on paper egg templates. Leave a range of art materials for the children to choose from to recreate some of these patterns.
- Use the information sheets available from the link above to learn more about the animals. Watch some online examples of wildlife presenters talking about animals: Sir David Attenborough, Chris Backshall, Chris Packham, Kate Humble, Michaela Strachan. Challenge the children to present what they have learned in a style that can be recorded and shared with others.

Children's books featuring woodland animals

Woodland Creatures by Emily Bone and Maribel Lechuga

Red Fox Running by Eve Bunting and Wendell Minor

Hide and Seek in the Forest by Rachel Elliot and Gareth Lucas

The Leaf Thief by Alice Hemming and Nicola Slater

My First Book of Woodland Animals by Zöe Ingram

Who's Hiding in the Woods? by Katharine McEwen

