

These beautifully illustrated, double-sided wooden puzzles offer an engaging and playful way to introduce young children to animals and their habitats. The set includes four two-piece puzzles, each featuring a chunky animal piece that fits snugly into a related habitat base, making completion by little hands easy and satisfying.

A good fit

As an introduction for very young children, these wonderfully tactile puzzles can simply be set up on a nature-themed playmat with some of the pieces standing up and some laying down.



- Give the child time to experiment with and investigate the pieces at their own pace. This will enhance independent learning and fine motor skills as they discover how to turn the pieces to fit them into their related other part. This is also important for strengthening hand-to-eye coordination and spatial awareness skills.
- Allow the child the time and freedom to handle and explore the puzzles, noticing the different shapes, feeling the edges, surfaces and holes, and observing the charming illustrations on both sides of the pieces. This exploration boosts spatial representation skills and helps to develop a visual and tactile experience of shape, sorting, ordering, comparing, patterns, differences, and similarities.

- If the child is struggling, gently take a piece that they are not using and demonstrate how to fit it with its partner piece. Provide a running commentary, keeping language and instructions at a level that matches their age and understanding. For young children this may be as simple as 'Turn it like this,' or, for a more knowledgeable child, 'Look it's a bird. It lives in the nest... like this.'

Hands-on exploring

The puzzles are perfect for supporting early mathematical understanding, spatial awareness, and schematic play.

- Use mathematical language, including 'match', 'sort', 'different', 'same', 'too big', 'too small', 'shape', 'size', 'corners', 'points', and 'circular', plus adjectives such as 'flat', 'smooth', 'bumpy', 'spiky', and 'curved'.
- Introduce prepositional language and key spatial concepts, including 'under', 'behind', 'on', 'in', 'upside down', and 'wrong way up', plus rotation verbs such as 'twist', 'flip', 'turn', 'spin', 'rotate', and 'balance'. Using hand gestures to emphasise these words helps children to connect the word to the physical action and develop their spatial thinking.

- Visualisation – imagining and manipulating an object in your head – is an important problem-solving and spatial reasoning skill. Encourage development of this skill by placing an animal piece in a habitat piece in which it doesn't fit or isn't lined up correctly. Ask the child to explain why it isn't fitting, where they think it might fit or what needs to be done to make it fit. They can then check their predictions with the piece to see if they have visualised it correctly.
- Verbalise the outcome to consolidate the learning, for example 'I had the squirrel upside down. I needed to turn it round to make it fit,' or 'I tried to put the rabbit on the lily pad, but it was the wrong shape. The rabbit shape is rounded with a flat base, and the lily pad has lots of curved sides.'
- Many children will love the schematic nature of repeatedly placing the animals in and out of their homes, lining them up in rows or stacking them. Allow them the freedom to satisfy these schemas as many times as they wish.

'Order is one of the needs of life, which when it is satisfied, produces a real happiness.' *Maria Montessori*



Who goes there?

Who's Hiding? is perfect for a game of hide-and-seek! The outer piece of the puzzles shows the same habitat on both sides, while the inner piece depicts the animal linked to the habitat on one side, with the reverse showing the missing part of the habitat artwork.



- Set up the puzzles so that all the inner pieces have the animals facing down, leaving their habitat uppermost.
- Explain to the child that you need their help to find some animals that are playing hide-and-seek.
- Model descriptive and new vocabulary by asking questions:
 - 'Ooh, look at all these little white eggs! What do you think might be hiding here?'
 - 'Hmm, I can see some shiny acorns in this hole in the tree. Who might have left them there?'

- Children will delight in having a guess and seeking out the hidden occupant.
- Encourage further investigation and observation by looking for details in the illustrations: food sources, colours, and parts of the habitat such as trunk, bark, twigs, moss, grass, and so on.

Tell me a story

The chunky nature of the pieces allows them to stand upright, which is a great invitation for some rich storytelling and new language play.

- Set up the pieces amongst additional props to encourage creative thinking and spark imagination. Try log slices, wooden blocks, caves, rocks, pebbles, leaves, flowers, twigs, and tree stumps.

- Allow the child the freedom to explore and take the play in whichever direction their imagination leads them.
- Find suitable pauses in their play to extend their vocabulary and encourage further ideas with:
 - **Open-ended questions:** 'Who did you find?', 'Where was he hiding?', 'Why do you think...?', 'What was he doing?'
 - **Expanding on ideas:** 'Was he hiding from the squirrel? Where could he hide now?'
 - **Narrating play:** 'I'm calling the rabbit 'Old Mr Whiskers', and he's hopping off to find a friend to go on an adventure with!'
 - **Introducing new vocabulary:** "Mr Squirrel is getting ready for winter. Look underneath. Can you see his acorns? How many does he have?'
 - If the child seems unsure or is reluctant to join in, you could engage them by reenacting your story with the pieces: 'Hello, Mrs Bird! What are you doing? Oh, you've collected some more feathers to line your nest, have you? I bet you're getting excited to see your chicks, aren't you?'
- You could pretend the animals are looking for food, going on holiday together, looking for a lost friend, pretending they don't know which home is theirs and trying to fit in the wrong one, playing hide-and-seek, or waking up in their homes, having an adventure, and returning to sleep. Anything goes!



If children become engaged and offer ideas and suggestions, take their lead with enthusiasm and praise, which will build their confidence and encourage independent play.

Who am I?

- Hide one of the pieces under a cloth or behind a book, and, whilst looking at it, use descriptive words to describe it – such as 'It's green, has two big eyes and long back legs that are fabulous for jumping.' Can the children guess which bug it is? Once children have understood the concept, they can play it with their friends.
- Use magnifiers to explore the animal characters and their habitats in more detail. Look at markings, how many legs they have, types of skin or fur, what they have used to build their homes, who can fly and who can't.

Outdoor Explorers



These puzzles are a wonderful resource to take outside, to engage the senses, refine fine motor skills, and explore the natural world.

- Use the outer shapes as inspiration for recreating versions of the animals' homes, using leaves, twigs, bark chippings, moss, flowers, and feathers. The children could make clay shapes to attach the materials to. This is a wonderful activity to do on a Forest School outing.
- Draw round the shapes on paper and decorate them using natural materials and glue. Cut out pictures of the animals and glue them in their homes.

- Take the outer pieces and find the real thing to match them up against – the squirrel’s den to a tree trunk, the rabbit’s burrow to a mossy bank. Invite the children to fill the gaps with matching materials such as bark or moss.

Shapes and shadows

- Stand the shapes in a sunny spot or use a torch to discover the shadows they form as the light floods through them. To extend this beautiful STEM activity you could cover the shapes with tissue paper for colourful shadow play.
- Hold the outer shapes up to the sky and talk about what you can see through the shapes. Can you see a cloud-shaped circle? Make sure to avoid looking directly at the sun.

Get talking – useful words

- Squirrel, tree, drey, rabbit, burrow, bird, nest, frog, lily pad, dragonfly, worm
- Home, habitat, hiding, woodland, forest, pond, countryside, field, branch, roots, grass, bark, twigs, feather, petals, daisies, dandelion, clover, acorns, moss, lichen, leaves
- Fly, hop, jump, climb, dig
- Wings, legs, beak, tail, feet, ears
- Hide, in, inside, on, on top, under, underneath, underground, besides, behind, upside down, wrong way up
- Sort, match, size, shape, fit, same, sides, edges, points, corners, circular, different, opposite, too big, too small
- Bumpy, curved, flat, smooth
- Twist, flip, turn, spin, rotate, balance



Books about woodland animals

Percy The Park Keeper by Nick Butterworth

Frog’s Day Out by Julia Donaldson

Guess How Much I Love You by Sam McBratney

Little Bird by Rod Campbell

The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin by Beatrix Potter