

# Trees and Their Value for Wildlife and People



#### AMERICAN BEAVER

Scientific Name: Castor canadensis

**Description:** Beavers are North America's largest rodents. They have glossy, waterproof fur to keep them warm, and scaly, paddle-like tails. Beavers live with family members in homes called lodges

constructed with sticks, rocks, and mud. A beaver colony builds a dam around its lodge to protect it from predators and to store caches of branches under the ice as food for the winter – they eat the bark. Beavers cut down trees by chewing around the base of the tree trunk with their ever-growing incisors.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Beavers are found throughout the continental U.S., except in Florida and southwestern deserts. They build their homes in ponds and streams with their favorite deciduous trees nearby.

Fun Fact: Beavers are credited with being "nature's engineers," because they alter the environment so significantly through dam building.

Conservation Status: Beavers were once overexploited for the fur trade, but with the help of protective measures and reintroduction programs, they are now abundant.

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## SALAMANDER

Scientific Name: Aneides lugubris

**Description:** Arboreal salamanders are usually brown above with yellow spots. As their name implies, arboreal salamanders are excellent

tree climbers. Their large toes and prehensile tail aid them in climbing up to 60 feet above the ground! These salamanders are lungless and breathe through their skin, so they have to keep to moist habitats. When conditions dry up in the summer, arboreal salamanders take to tree cavities and logs to wait for better weather.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Arboreal salamanders live in coast live oak woodlands and yellow pine and black oak forests in California.

Fun Fact: Arboreal salamanders have several mechanisms to thwart predators. When disturbed, they squeak and jump. They also have sharp little teeth and a powerful bite!

Conservation Status: Stable. Like many amphibians, the greatest threats to arboreal salamanders are habitat loss and pollution.

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#### **FLYING SQUIRRELS**

Scientific Name: Glaucomys spp.

**Description:** Flying squirrels are tree-dwelling mammals with graybrown fur and large eyes. A special membrane connects their front and back legs, and this membrane is what catches the air and lets them glide between trees. When one of

these squirrels takes flight, it launches itself from a tree branch and uses slight leg motions to steer. The tail is used as a brake to assist with landing. A flying squirrel can cover 150 feet in a single glide from tree to tree!

U.S. Habitat and Range: Flying squirrels are found in deciduous and coniferous forests and woodlands in almost all U.S. states.

Fun Fact: Flying squirrels are social animals. To keep warm in the winter, they sometimes nest in tree cavities in groups of more than a dozen individuals!

Conservation Status: Flying squirrels are actually common forest animals, but few people ever witness the spectacular glides of these nocturnal rodents. Two subspecies are federally listed as endangered.

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#### NORTHERN SPOTTED **OWL**

Scientific Name: Strix occidentalis

**Description:** Northern spotted owls are dark brown with white spots and a wingspan of about four

feet. These nocturnal raptors are "perch and pounce" predators. They spend their nights poised on tree branches, scanning their surroundings for signs of tree voles, woodrats, or flying squirrels. When one comes into view, the owl swoops down and uses its talons to capture its prey.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Monogamous pairs of northern spotted owls defend nesting and hunting territories in old-growth forests of the Pacific Northwest.

Fun Fact: Northern spotted owls are an indicator species, which means that their presence in old-growth forests indicates a healthy ecosystem.

**Conservation Status:** Federally listed as threatened. Logging and competition with barred owls are the two main contributors to the decline of northern spotted owls.

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### **PUERTO RICAN BOA**

Scientific Name: Epicrates inornatus

**Description:** Puerto Rican boas are long, slender snakes that are brown to gray in color. They are non-venomous and must rely on constriction to kill their prey. One of their most fascinating hunting tactics

is to hang from a tree branch in front of a cave and to catch bats that fly out at dusk. After they've caught their prey, they suffocate it and swallow it whole!

U.S. Habitat and Range: Puerto Rican boas are endemic to Puerto Rico. They're especially abundant in the northwestern part of the island, which has lots of caves and trees.

Fun Fact: The Puerto Rican boa has a place named for it! The Cave of the Boas, which houses several hundred thousand bats, is prime hunting territory for these snakes.

Conservation Status: Puerto Rican boas are federally listed as endangered. However, they're probably more common than once was thought, despite mongoose predation and harvesting for their fatty oils.

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#### **RED MAPLE**

Scientific Name: Acer rubrum

**Description:** No matter the season, red maples are usually sporting their namesake color. In winter, their bare branches give rise to red twigs and buds. Small red flowers bloom in spring and drop red fruit until early

summer. And of course, autumn sightseers marvel at the brilliant red fall foliage! This fast-growing species has taken up a spot as one of the most abundant trees in eastern U.S. forests. Their extensive growth is kept in check by moose, deer, and rabbit, for which red maple is a favorite treat.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Red maples can tolerate an incredible range of environmental conditions, from sun to shade or rainy to dry. They're found in deciduous forests throughout the eastern U.S.

Fun Fact: Many people refer to samaras (red maple fruits) as helicopters or whirlybirds, because a winglike projection makes them spin when they fall!

Conservation Status: Stable. Red maple is often planted as an ornamental tree. The wood is used for making clothespins, boxes, and musical instruments.

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#### **SOUTHERN LIVE OAK**

<mark>Scientific Name:</mark> Quercus virginiana

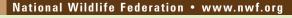
**Description:** When it comes to impressive branches, southern live oaks take the cake. Their sweeping crowns can reach 150 feet in diameter—nearly the full width of a football field! Southern live oaks

are an emblem of the Old South and are the state tree of Georgia. Their tasty acorns are eaten by a number of animals including sapsuckers, mallards, wild turkey, squirrels, black bears, and deer, and the threatened Florida scrub jay uses this species for nesting.

U.S. Habitat and Range: Southern live oaks grow in the warm climate of the southeastern U.S

Fun Fact: Wood from southern live oaks is incredibly tough and durable. The naval vessel USS Constitution was nicknamed "Old Ironsides" after her live oak hull survived repeated cannon fire during the War of 1812.

Conservation Status: Stable. Southern live oaks aren't commonly used for their timber anymore. They're susceptible to some diseases and pests, as well as freezing temperatures and acid rain.





**STICK INSECTS** 

Scientific Name: Order Phasmida

**Description:** As their name implies, stick insects, or walking sticks, are easily mistaken for the tree branches they live amongst! Stick insects evolved their twig-like appearance as a form of camouflage to avoid

predators like birds and reptiles. When stick insects need to move around without attracting attention, they sway back and forth to look like a slender branch fluttering in the breeze. In addition to providing a place to blend in, trees also supply stick insects with leaves, their favorite food!

U.S. Habitat and Range: Stick insects are found in woodlands throughout the continental U.S. They spend most of their time in trees, but they're very hard to spot!

Fun Fact: Even the best camouflage can occasionally fall short. Some stick insects have developed the ability to produce foul-smelling chemicals as a last defense against predators.

Conservation Status: Stable, but threatened by habitat destruction, pesticide use, and collection for the pet trade.

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**WOOD DUCK** 

Scientific Name: Aix sponsa

**Description:** With their striking green heads, red eyes, and colorful bodies, male wood ducks are often described as the prettiest aquatic birds. Each year, pairs of wood ducks lay eggs in tree cavities or

nesting boxes. The ducklings hatch after a month and soon leave the nest in search of food. Unlike other members of the duck family, wood ducks have sharp claws for gripping bark, so you may see one perched in the branches of a red maple near a stream or marsh!

U.S. Habitat and Range: Wood ducks require trees and water, so swampy forests, marshes, and beaver ponds are their favorite homes. They can be seen in most U.S. states for at least part of the year.

Fun Fact: Wood ducklings are brave critters! They've been observed jumping from nests up to 290 feet above the ground and landing safely!

Conservation Status: After an extensive population decline in the late 1800s, wood duck numbers are now

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