

Key Vocabulary: A Home for Many

TEACHER PAGE: ANSWER KEY

Word Bank

bacteria	decomposers	ecosystem	fungi
habitat	nutrients	snags	species

A habitat is the natural home or environment for an organism, where it gets everything it needs to survive, including food, water, shelter, and space. Some organisms need huge habitats and others use tiny ones.

Trees are important habitats for many plants and animals. For some organisms, a tree may be just part of their habitat, and for others, a tree may be their entire habitat. For example, a squirrel may visit an oak tree to get acorns to eat, and also depend on many other trees and plants for food and nesting. But a patch of moss on the oak tree gets everything it needs right on that tree.

Even standing dead trees, called snags, provide habitat for a number of different species. Tree frogs and beetles live under a snag's bark, while woodpeckers and other birds feed on the insects that live on snags. Chickadees nest in holes created by woodpeckers. Squirrels and deer mice store food in the holes.

Dead trees also contain small insects, bacteria, fungi and other organisms that eat the dead and decaying plant matter. These decomposers are very important for any ecosystem because they recycle nutrients from the tree so that other plants can use them. Without decomposers, trees and other plants would not get essential nutrients, and dead matter and waste would pile up.