



A place called home

Every living thing has to find a place where it can live, find food and protect itself from others. Here is what happens in an oak tree.

Just like us, animals and plants have a place where they live – a kind of home. It may be in a river bank, a hillside or in the branches of an oak tree. It is a place where the animal or plant finds food, shelter and some protection from its enemies. We call this natural home a **HABITAT**.

Living with others

When you look around at the homes of animals and plants, you find that each living thing lives where it is best **ADAPTED** to survive. You will see this in many of the pages of this book. You will also find that many living things depend in some way on one another, making up a great living family (community).

An oak tree (Picture 1) is not only suited to where it lives, but it is also home to many other plants and animals who depend on the tree for food and shelter.

The oak tree

A fully-grown oak tree may be 30 to 35 metres tall and spread its branches nearly as wide. Its many leaves allow it to soak up the light that it needs to make its own food and it gets water and other nourishment from the ground. The oak tree survives where it does because it is adapted to cope with a cold winter. It does this first by

shedding its leaves in autumn, and then by not growing during the winter.

Many lodgers

The oak tree provides a home for more kinds of animal than any other woodland tree. Scientists have counted 30 different kinds of birds that make their home in oak trees.

They are not alone. Many insects also use the oak as a home – oaks contain over 200 different kinds of moth alone!

How does the tree cope with all these hungry lodgers eating its leaves and fruits (acorns)? A single oak tree produces up to a hundred thousand acorns a year! With so many, some are bound not to get eaten. Each oak needs only one of the acorns it has produced to grow into a tree each century for the woodland to survive.

► (Picture 1) An oak tree provides many places that can be used as homes. Beetles live in the roots, in the cracks of the bark and some even burrow under the bark and into the wood. Caterpillars munch away at the soft leaves.

The angles of the branches make roosting and nesting sites for birds. Natural hollows provide homes for squirrels, owls and even bats.

Summary

- Plants and animals survive in a place because they are adapted to live in it.
- Each habitat contains many different kinds of living things.

