

Woodlands in NSW

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Introduction

You may not know this, but you have probably all been to a woodland and some of you may be lucky enough to have woodland on your property or near to where you live.

In fact, your school may even have some woodland on it!

So just what is a woodland?

Technically speaking, a woodland is an area of trees which are often spaced well apart and when you look up towards the tops of the trees, their leaves and trunks are far enough apart so that you can still see the sky. This is called the tree canopy because it is like the woodland's roof.

Compared to a forest, the trees in a woodland are spaced further apart and the trees are often not as tall as they are in a forest. If you walk through a woodland it is usually lighter and brighter than walking in a tall forest.

Distribution

Woodlands occur in many parts of NSW and other parts of Australia from the coasts to the inland arid deserts.

If we take a journey starting from the NSW coast and head westward, you can find woodlands in

1. coastal areas
2. Up on the tablelands
3. In the mountains
4. On the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range
5. On the semi-arid inland plains
6. And even in the far western arid areas of NSW

How do woodlands differ?

Woodlands are different from one another for many different reasons.

The amount of rainfall, the types of soils and the altitude play a very important role in how a woodland looks.

Different types of woodlands have different species of trees

Trees like the rough-barked ironbarks, a variety of Box and Gum tree species

And native Cypress Pines trees are just some of the examples of trees that grow in woodlands

Woodland trees can grow to different sizes and the gaps between trees can be different in different areas.

Woodlands also differ from one another by what grows underneath the trees.

In some woodlands, grasses grow under trees (Woodstock photo) these are called grassy woodlands.

In other woodlands shrubs and small trees are more common than grasses. These are called shrubby woodlands.

Temperate woodlands

Today we will focus on one major group of woodlands called temperate woodlands, which were once very common across NSW but are now quite rare

Temperate woodlands once occurred across a large geographic area of the eastern half of NSW where the rainfall is at least 450 mm per year

Why are temperate woodlands threatened?

Temperate woodlands have been cleared in the past for agriculture, grazing, timber, mining and urban developments

On average more than 85% of temperate woodlands have gone since Europeans settled in Australia

In some areas more than 95% of woodlands have disappeared

What we see now are mainly small patches of woodlands that are grazed and some are quite degraded from weeds

Why are temperate woodlands so important?

Well, despite the huge loss of woodlands, the small areas that are left provide habitat for many species of plants and animals like frogs, lizards, mammals and birds

Some of these plants and animals are now also threatened with extinction if we do not look after them

We call these plants and animals ‘threatened species’

What makes a good woodland?

Can you think what a good woodland might look like?

Have a think about what kinds of features are important habitat for plants and animals

Some woodlands that have not been grazed heavily by cows, sheep and rabbits still have lots of native grasses and small ground cover plants called herbs and forbs which sometimes have beautiful flowers in spring and summer

A woodland with lots of these native ground plants can provide good habitat for animals like insects, reptiles and small native mammals

A woodland that still has some native shrubs like wattles will provide food and shelter for animals like spiders and birds. Birds often nest in shrubs and feed on the fruits and seeds

Woodland trees of all shapes and sizes provide habitat for all kinds of plants and animals

Young trees or saplings as they are called are important for shelter and provide food for birds and mammals like possums and gliders. The leaves of young trees are very nutritious and they attract insects which are then eaten by birds and mammals.

What makes a healthy woodland?

Big trees provide lots of different food and habitats for birds, mammals and parasitic plants called mistletoes

Trees with loose bark have lots of spaces for insects, spiders and small reptiles to live under, and they provide food for birds and mammals

Large old trees sometimes have hollows in them – what do you think might live in them? Birds like parrots and owls and mammals like bats, possums and gliders.

A woodland with all or most of these different features is called a high conservation value woodland.

What can you do to help?

So now that you have learnt a bit about our temperate woodlands, what sorts of things can you do to help?

Take a look around your local area

Can you find a patch of woodland?

You and your class could take a field trip, map the area and look for interesting plants and animals

See if you can work out what type of woodland it is by looking in books or checking out the NSW Threatened Species Website

Your school might want to consider looking after a local woodland or you might like to plant some local woodland trees, shrubs and grasses in your school grounds or home garden.