

Red's Winter Scavenger Hunt

Hey, Little Oak Explorers! Winter may be chilly, but the forest is still filled with treasures waiting to be discovered. So, I'm inviting you all on a Winter Scavenger Hunt! We'll search for all sorts of special things that make the winter forest unique—and I'll share some of the secrets that help animals stay warm and safe until spring. Ready? Let's go exploring!

Winter Scavenger Hunt List

1. **Pinecones:** Look for pinecones on the ground or tucked into the branches of evergreen trees. These cones are not only pretty; they're an important winter food for squirrels and birds. When you find one, imagine the forest feast it holds!
2. **Ivy:** Put your hand behind the branches on a windy day. You see how it is windproof and waterproof, calm and still back there? That is why it makes such a great hotel for small birds in winter, such as sparrows, wrens, dunnocks, tits, finches and robins! Being the sole nectar bearing plant over winter, ivy also hosts insects, therefore meaning the birds have warmth, cover, water from the moisture on the leaves, and food in the form of small black berries (and the live insects). Ivy will replenish its fruits at least twice, and more during hard winters like this winter will be. The Ivy is the coolest hotel in town for the small birds!
3. **Animal Tracks:** If you see tracks in the snow or mud, try to figure out which animal left them! Foxes, deer, rabbits, and even otters leave prints as they move around. Following their tracks can lead to more winter discoveries. Can you draw the tracks that you find?
4. **Frosty Feathers:** Sometimes you'll find feathers on the ground—especially after a gusty winter wind. Feathers help birds stay warm by trapping heat close to their bodies. Each feather you find is like a tiny piece of nature's winter coat.
5. **Bark with Moss or Lichen:** Trees wear their own winter "coats" with bark, moss, and lichen that help protect them. Moss and lichen are also food sources for tiny creatures in the forest, helping them survive through the cold. Side note: lichen is really only prevalent in areas with great air quality, so if you find plenty of it you know the air you are breathing in is of great quality!

Thank you, Explorers! You've learned a lot about how animals and plants stay cosy in the winter. Each of these items has a purpose, and together, they keep the forest alive, even when it's chilly outside. So, take your winter treasures home to remember this adventure, and next time you're in the forest, look closer—there's always more to discover!

