

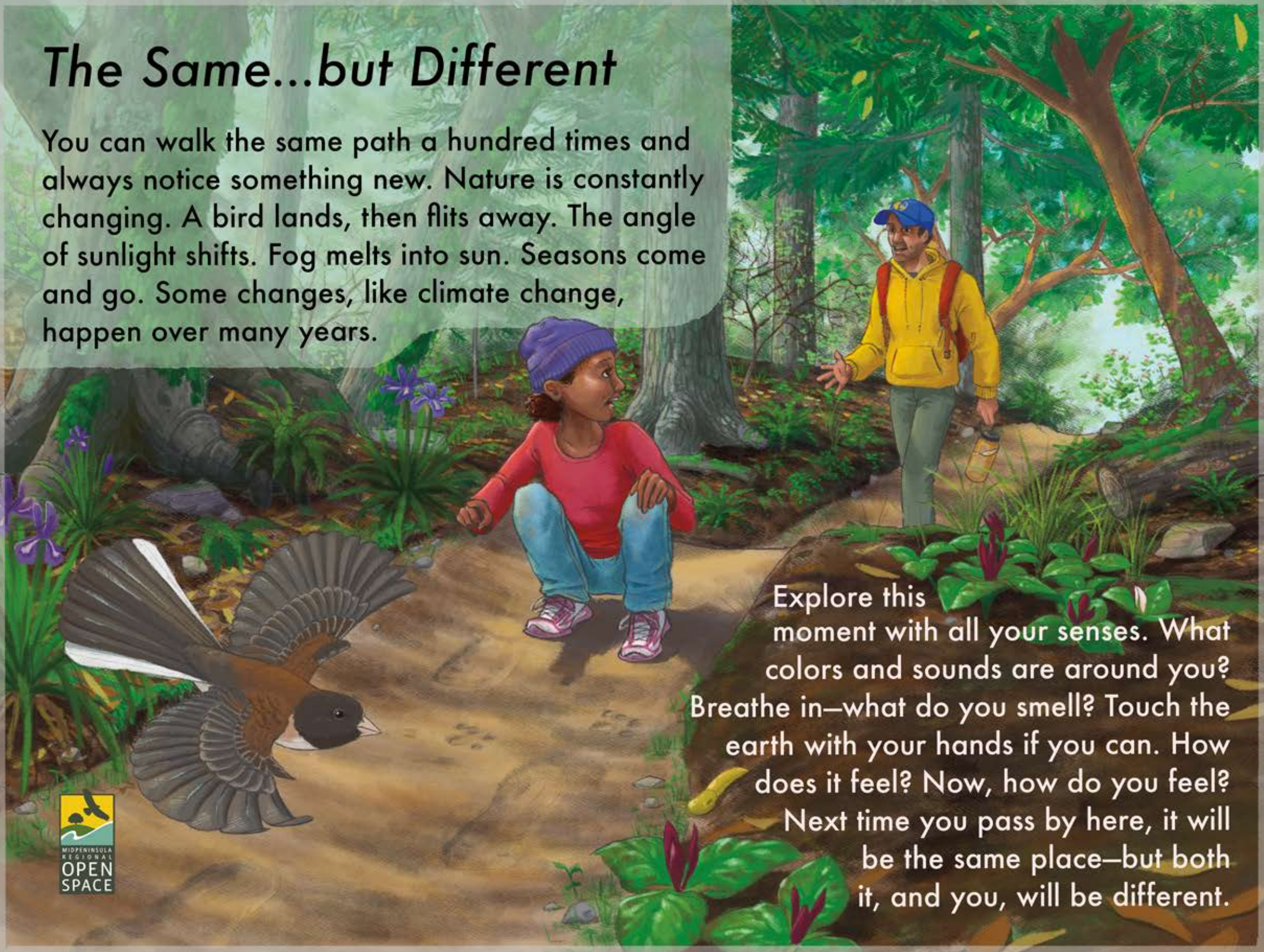
Breathe Deep...

And smell the spicy aroma of the California bay laurel tree. This tree is traditional food and medicine to the Native peoples of this area. The nuts are eaten roasted, while the leaves can be used as a spice, steeped into a tea to relieve headaches and colds, and even made into a treatment for headlice. You won't find much else growing under a bay tree. While medicinal to humans, the leaves contain chemicals that make it hard for other plants to grow.



The Same...but Different

You can walk the same path a hundred times and always notice something new. Nature is constantly changing. A bird lands, then flits away. The angle of sunlight shifts. Fog melts into sun. Seasons come and go. Some changes, like climate change, happen over many years.



Explore this moment with all your senses. What colors and sounds are around you? Breathe in—what do you smell? Touch the earth with your hands if you can. How does it feel? Now, how do you feel? Next time you pass by here, it will be the same place—but both it, and you, will be different.

Life on the Edge

Different habitats provide different food, shelter, and exposure to sun, wind, and rain. The diverse conditions on the edges between habitats attract wildlife that likes variety. For example, rabbits browse in grassland but stay close to scrubland so they can quickly hide from predators.

Species that are adapted to just one habitat may struggle if something creates a new edge - like building a road or clearing land for development. Midpen protects these "specialist" species by preserving and restoring habitat connections in a greenbelt of open space land.

A Web of Life

Every living thing on earth is part of a web that moves nutrients in interlocking cycles. Each cycle is kickstarted by sunlight energy, which allows plants to grow, and ends with decomposers that return nutrients to the soil by eating what nothing else will - like rotting things and poop. In between can be many other creatures. **Where do you fit in?**

Sunlight and soil "feed" an oak tree. An oak moth caterpillar munches the tree's leaves.

An oak titmouse catches the caterpillar.

A bobcat hunts the bird.

Insects, fungi, and bacteria decompose the bobcat's scat and return its nutrients to the soil.

Small but Mighty

Invertebrates (animals without backbones) are easy to overlook, but they play important roles in the ecosystem.

When **California sister** butterflies are caterpillars, they eat bitter oak leaves, which makes the butterflies taste terrible. Predators learn to recognize and avoid their patterns, so the **Lorquin's admiral** butterfly evolved to match.

Vivid dancers are damselflies, close relatives of dragonflies. These damsels can look after themselves - they are skillful aerial predators, catching mosquitoes and other insects on the wing.

Banana slugs eat decaying plants and fungi. Like bananas, they can be yellow, brown, or speckled in-between. They are a favorite meal for California giant salamanders.

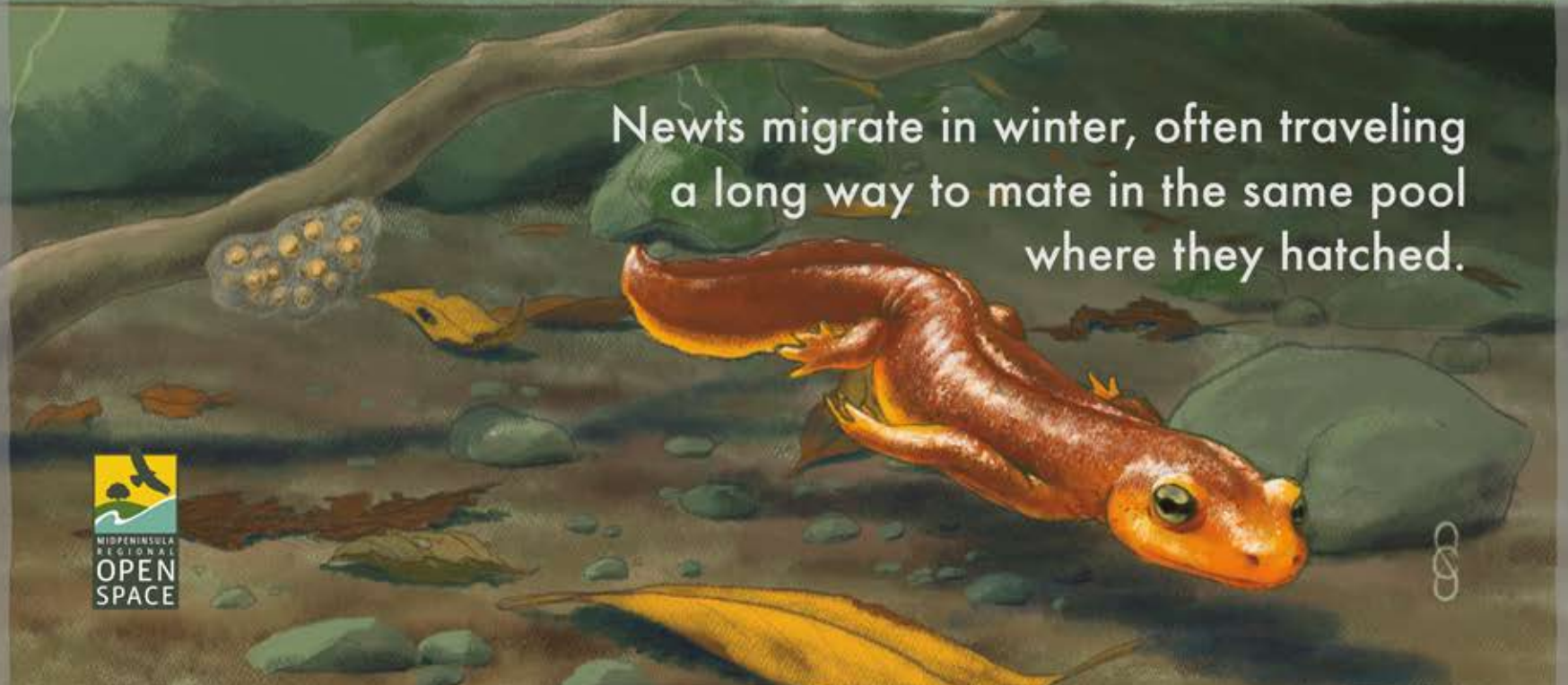


Meet Your Newt Neighbors

California newts are amphibians like frogs. They lay their eggs in streams and ponds, where the tadpole-like larvae live for one to two months before metamorphosing into adults. Slow and clumsy on land, they protect themselves by blending in with leaves on the forest floor, and by producing a toxin on their skin.



Newts migrate in winter, often traveling a long way to mate in the same pool where they hatched.

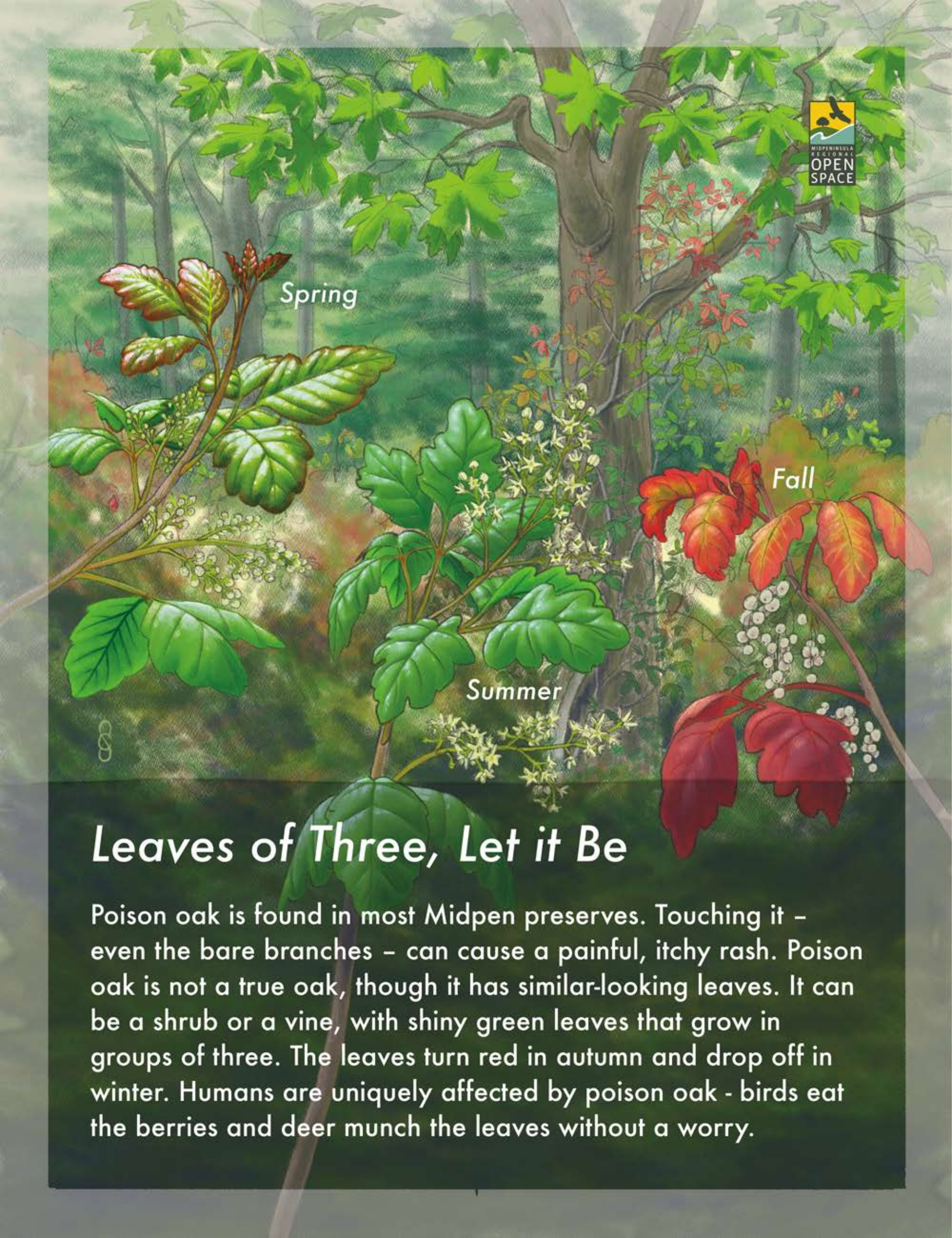


Go Nuts!

As long as people have been on this land, they've been eating nuts. Native people collected acorns - the nuts of oak trees - and ground them into flour for nutritious porridge and bread. In the 1930s, farmers planted the walnut and almond trees you see around you, along with vineyards and olive trees on nearby slopes.

Midpen has restored most of those cultivated areas to more natural conditions, but you still don't have to look far to find nuts...in the trees, on the ground, or if you packed a trail mix snack today, maybe there are some in your bag right now!



An artistic illustration of poison oak in three seasonal stages. The background is a soft-focus forest scene with tall trees and green foliage. In the foreground, three branches of poison oak are shown. The left branch, labeled 'Spring', has three-lobed leaves that are reddish-brown at the tips and have small, round, greenish-white buds. The middle branch, labeled 'Summer', has three-lobed leaves that are a vibrant, shiny green and are covered in small, white, star-shaped flowers. The right branch, labeled 'Fall', has three-lobed leaves that are a deep, bright red and are covered in small, round, white berries. The labels 'Spring', 'Summer', and 'Fall' are written in a white, serif font. A small, stylized logo is visible in the bottom left corner of the illustration.

Spring

Fall

Summer

Leaves of Three, Let it Be

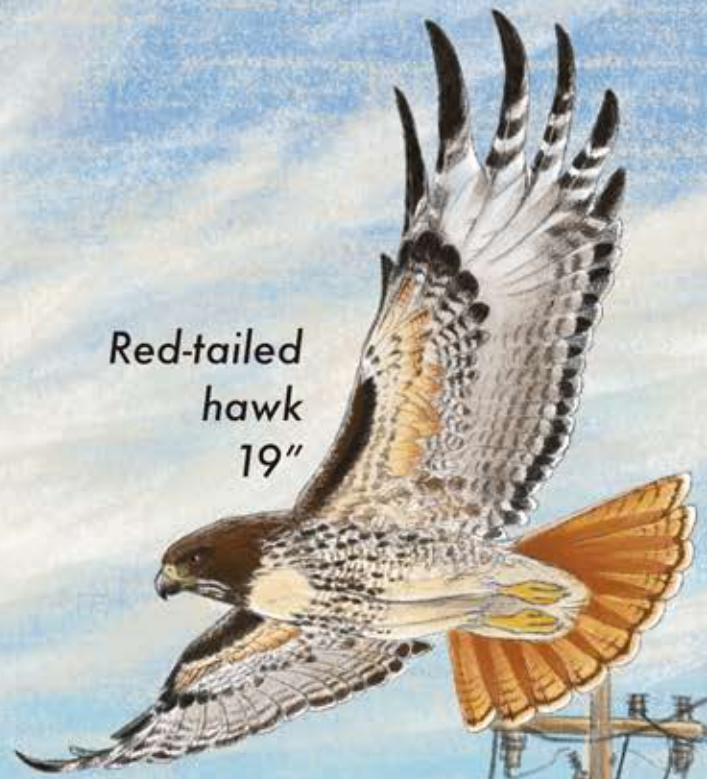
Poison oak is found in most Midpen preserves. Touching it – even the bare branches – can cause a painful, itchy rash. Poison oak is not a true oak, though it has similar-looking leaves. It can be a shrub or a vine, with shiny green leaves that grow in groups of three. The leaves turn red in autumn and drop off in winter. Humans are uniquely affected by poison oak – birds eat the berries and deer munch the leaves without a worry.



American kestrel
(male)
9"



Red-tailed
hawk
19"



White-tailed kite
15"



Measurements are
body length from
head to tail tip.

Northern harrier
(female)
18"

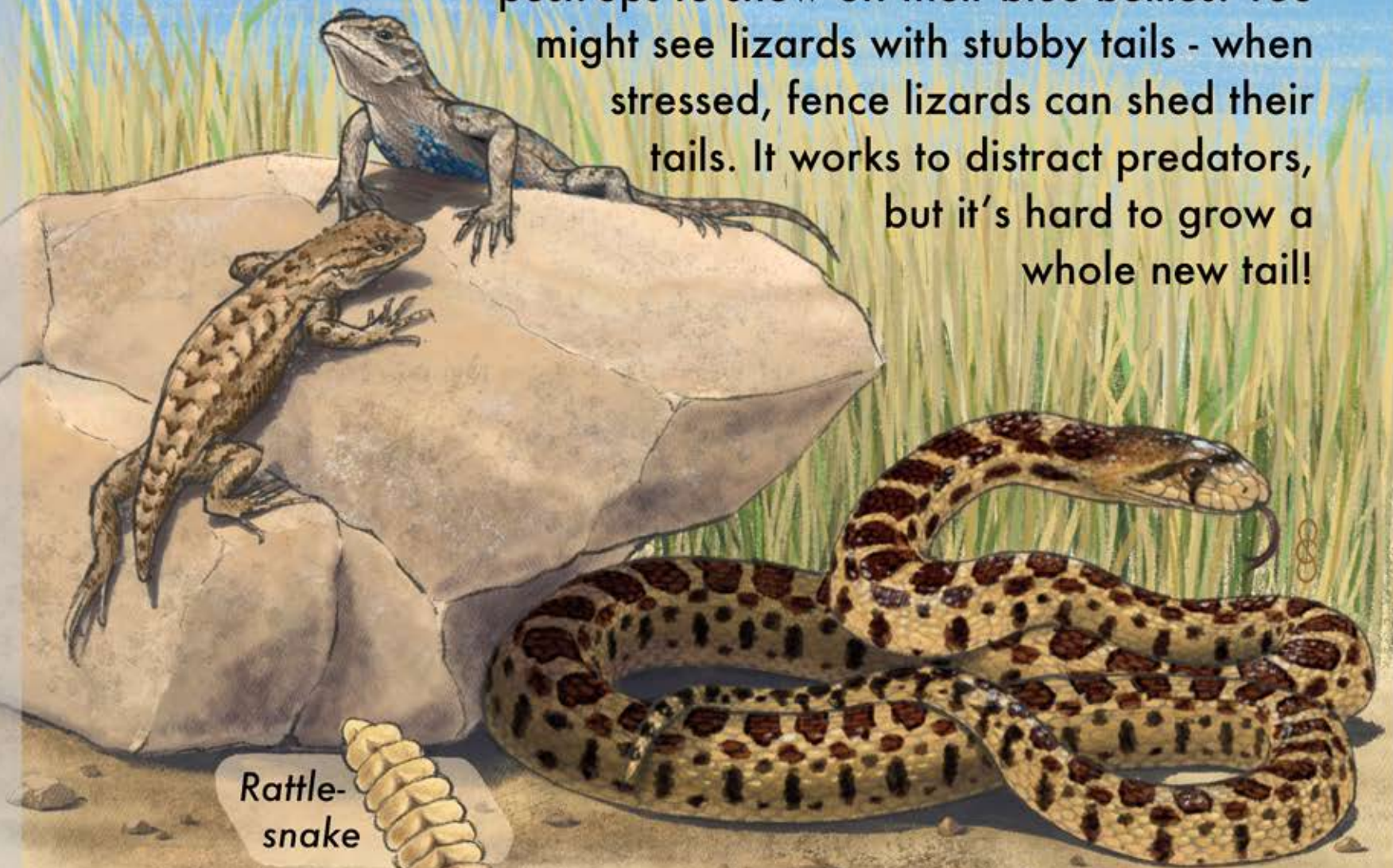


Hunters in the Sky

As you hike, don't forget to look up! You might see a raptor—not a dinosaur, but a bird of prey. These birds, like hawks, eagles, and falcons, share a name with their prehistoric ancestors for good reason. They hunt with a deadly combination of excellent eyesight, strong feet with sharp talons, and hooked beaks perfect for tearing meat. Raptors aren't picky eaters. They'll eat rodents like mice and squirrels, other birds, lizards and snakes, and even insects.

Scales and Tails

Reptiles like lizards and snakes thrive in the warm grassland. Western fence lizards often sunbathe on rocks, logs, or fences. The males attract females and intimidate other males by doing push-ups to show off their blue bellies. You might see lizards with stubby tails - when stressed, fence lizards can shed their tails. It works to distract predators, but it's hard to grow a whole new tail!



Rattle-
snake

Gopher
snake

Gopher snakes eat rodents and live in rodent burrows. They aren't venomous and almost never bite humans, but when threatened, they mimic the posture of a venomous rattlesnake. The tail gives them away - gopher snakes have no rattle. **Visit Midpen's Daniels Nature Center at Skyline Ridge Preserve to meet our friendly ambassador gopher snake.**



A Pond...For Now!

This pond is slowly transforming into a woodland. It will likely take decades, but as the plants growing in the water die and decay into soil, the pond will fill in and become a wet meadow. Shrubs will take root, followed by trees. This slow change from one habitat to another is called "succession," and it happens in all landscapes.



POND → WET MEADOW → SHRUBS → WOODLAND

Disturbances like fire, floods, and grazing animals slow down succession. Prevention of natural disturbances has led to faster succession and habitat loss in some places. Midpen actively restores disturbance where it is needed. Humans managing succession isn't new; for millennia, Native people have used fire to slow succession in grasslands.

The Road More Travelled By

Look carefully at the grassy hillside. Can you see subtle trails crisscrossing the slope? These are paths made by animals for the same reason people make trails - it's easier to walk on a well-trodden path! Animals use our trails, too, mostly when we're not around. Using cameras triggered by movement, Midpen has photographed diverse wildlife on trails, from turkeys and deer to owls, coyotes, and even mountain lions.



Land Shapes Landscapes

What is responsible for the dramatic landscape before you? The story starts with the San Andreas Fault, where two tectonic plates grind past each other. Over millions of years, the pressure between these shifting plates has wrinkled the rock into ridges, forming the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Rainfall collects into waterways like Stevens Creek, carving out valleys as it flows. Where water settles, the air and soil are wet and cool.

The sun amplifies water's influence, defining what plants grow where. You can see this for yourself - look how the dark green forest nestles in cool, shady valleys, contrasting with golden grasslands on the sunbaked hills.

Now humans enter the scene. Humans are brilliant engineers, shaping the environment to our purposes - sometimes helping, and sometimes harming it in the process. In the end, we rely on a healthy environment as much as any other species. We're *all* responsible for the landscapes we call home. **That's why Midpen strives to protect and preserve a thriving landscape for all, humans and non-humans alike.**



Beautiful Blooms



In spring and early summer, Monte Bello Open Space is a treasure trove of wildflowers. These delightful blooms aren't just pretty, they're also important in the food web. Pollinators feed on their nectar and birds and rodents eat their seeds and bulbs. Please don't pick wildflowers or leave the trail to get a closer look. The flowers are happy to pose for photos but don't like being stepped on!

