

BOOK REVIEW
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Secrets of the Oak Woodlands: Plants and Animals Among California's Oaks by Kate Marianchild. 2014. Heyday Books, Berkeley, CA. 192 pages. \$18.00. ISBN# 978-1-59714-262-5.

A wide range of nature enthusiasts will enjoy Kate Marianchild's informative and well-balanced natural history book. *Secrets of the Oak Woodlands* provides insightful ecological life histories of prominent plants and animals living and interacting in one of our state's essential natural communities.

The organization and layout is well designed for naturalists who want to quickly prep for their next outing. As one reads through the text it's easy to connect the ecological dots because all of the species names described in the book are highlighted. This format is useful because it invites us to investigate the oak woodland community members that might not otherwise appeal to us.

Marianchild's articulate yet easy to understand writing style makes the book suitable for armchair readers' to investigative scholars. The science is clear, research up-to-date, and depth satisfying at the level of a college textbook. At the same time she inserts interesting relevant information and builds the readers appreciation for intricately rich oak woodlands.

Topics covered include common animals such as the acorn woodpecker as well as less well known but biologically beneficial organisms such as mycorrhizal fungi. Each subject illustrates individual ecological concepts and how these concepts are interconnected. The reader is educated on the big picture, while enjoying behind the scenes stories.

Integrated into the ecosystem ecology are aspects of human ecology as, for example, Native American uses for plants such as poison oak, and aboriginal wisdom regarding human connections to earth and what it provides us. Marianchild offers explanations for some human natural hazards found in these ecosystems, without vilifying the flora and fauna that have evolved effective means for their survival.

I believe an underlying reason for our current environmental crisis is our disconnection from the earth that supports us. Marianchild's book turns on our natural biophilia. It helps readers strengthen that connection because of the science contained in it, which she makes understandably interesting, and because it helps us see ourselves as a part of nature instead of apart from nature. *Secrets of the Oak Woodlands* is likely to be enjoyed by naturalists, nature docents, academicians, and nature enthusiasts of all types.

—Joe Mueller

Fremontia is the newsletter of the California Native Plant Society.