

Which animals are hiding in the forest? Let's Roll Forest Friends features animals that children are likely to be familiar with and fascinated by. Using the rollers will open up discussions about habitats, promote storytelling and increase understanding of the natural world. They allow children to create detailed tactile patterns and pictures, whilst developing the fine motor skills vital for early mark making and writing.

## Forest creatures on a roll

Children will enjoy trying out the rollers independently, but guiding them through the early stages will help them get to grips with them:

- The easiest way to use a roller is to roll it away from you – creating a long scene or pattern in the dough. Afterwards, if the design is facing sideways, simply turn the piece of dough round so the scene faces the child. They can then use the stamp at the end of the roller to complete the picture.
- The next step is learning to roll across the body. As well as encouraging children to apply equal pressure laterally, this action will challenge them to cross the midline and develop motor skills important for learning to write.



- Talk about how hard the child has to press down with the roller to make the design come out well. What happens to the picture when they press harder or more gently?
- What does the picture feel like when they run their finger over it?
- Explore using the rollers with different substrates, such as clay, kinetic sand, sand dough or cloud dough. This will encourage children to adapt their rolling technique, pressing harder when necessary and developing their motor skills.
- Provide the rollers and dough on a suitable surface for children to explore independently. Outdoors is ideal! Children might even be able to link the bird they stamp with birdsong they hear, or find a real snail nearby.

## Woodland wonders

As children use the rollers, take the opportunity to talk about the different woodland animals:

- What kinds of animals are on the rollers? Can the children find any mammals, birds, insects or molluscs?
- How do the animals move? Which have wings for flying?
- Which of the animals have fur? Which has feathers? Which has a shell?

- Where do these animals live? Do they dig a burrow? Do they hide inside holes in trees (or under bark), or under plants and rocks? Using the rollers will help prompt children's answers.
- What do they eat? Do any of them eat plants, seeds, other animals or a combination? Are there any other animals that like to eat them?
- Do any of these animals lay eggs? Which give birth to baby animals (live young)?
- Do any of the animals sleep for a long time in the winter? (Bats and snails both hibernate.) Some birds fly to a warmer country (or area) in the winter, while others stay in the same place. Have the children seen any birds outside in winter? You might like to talk about how rabbits and squirrels cope with the cold and food being scarce in winter (both having warm fur and squirrels storing up food).
- Can the children match the rolled designs to pictures or figures of these animals?
- When the children have stamped the animal shapes onto their design, encourage them to count the number of animals – such as how many rabbits there are in the burrow.
- Have the children been to a forest or woods? What was it like? Did they see any animals there? Did they spot any burrows?



## Tales in the trees

Make up some simple shared stories about the woodland animals on the rollers:

- What are their names, where do they live and who is in their family?
- What might happen if any of the animals meet each other? Are they friendly or scared?
- Are any of them looking for food, are they hiding from other animals or are they lost? Where might they take any food they find?
- What might these animals do when no one is around to watch them?



## Explore more

- Children can build on their rolled designs by adding extra natural materials to them, such as small sticks, leaves, small fir cones, acorns or pebbles. They might like to combine designs made using several rollers to make a larger woodland picture.
- Use the rollers and dough as part of a forest explorers table, alongside animal figures, notebooks, magnifying glasses, images of woodland animals, books, and natural woodland materials (such as sticks or conkers).
- Visit a forest or any wooded area and see what animals you can spot – such as birds or insects. Record the animals you see using a clipboard or by taking photos. You might like to use this information to make a simple bar chart.



- When you visit some woodland or simply look at trees in and around your setting, what can the children see on the branches? Are there any buds, flowers or leaves – or are they bare? The rollers show both trees in leaf and fallen leaves. Talk about the different seasons and how trees change – and how some keep their leaves or needles all year round.
- Make some outdoor animal art using natural materials that are readily available, such as sticks, cones, leaves, pebbles and grass. You could simply make pictures on the ground then take a photo of them, or you might like to stick them onto large pieces of paper so they can be displayed.



## Books about woodland animals

*Goodnight Forest* by Becky Davies

*The Leaf Thief* by Alice Hemming

*A Walk in the Woods* by Flora Martyn

*Nature Trail* by Benjamin Zephaniah

### *Get talking – useful words*

Mammal, bird, insect, mollusc, wing, shell, tail, fur, fly, dig, jump, crawl, seeds, nuts, berries, nectar, burrow, branch, bark, leaves, sticks, nest.