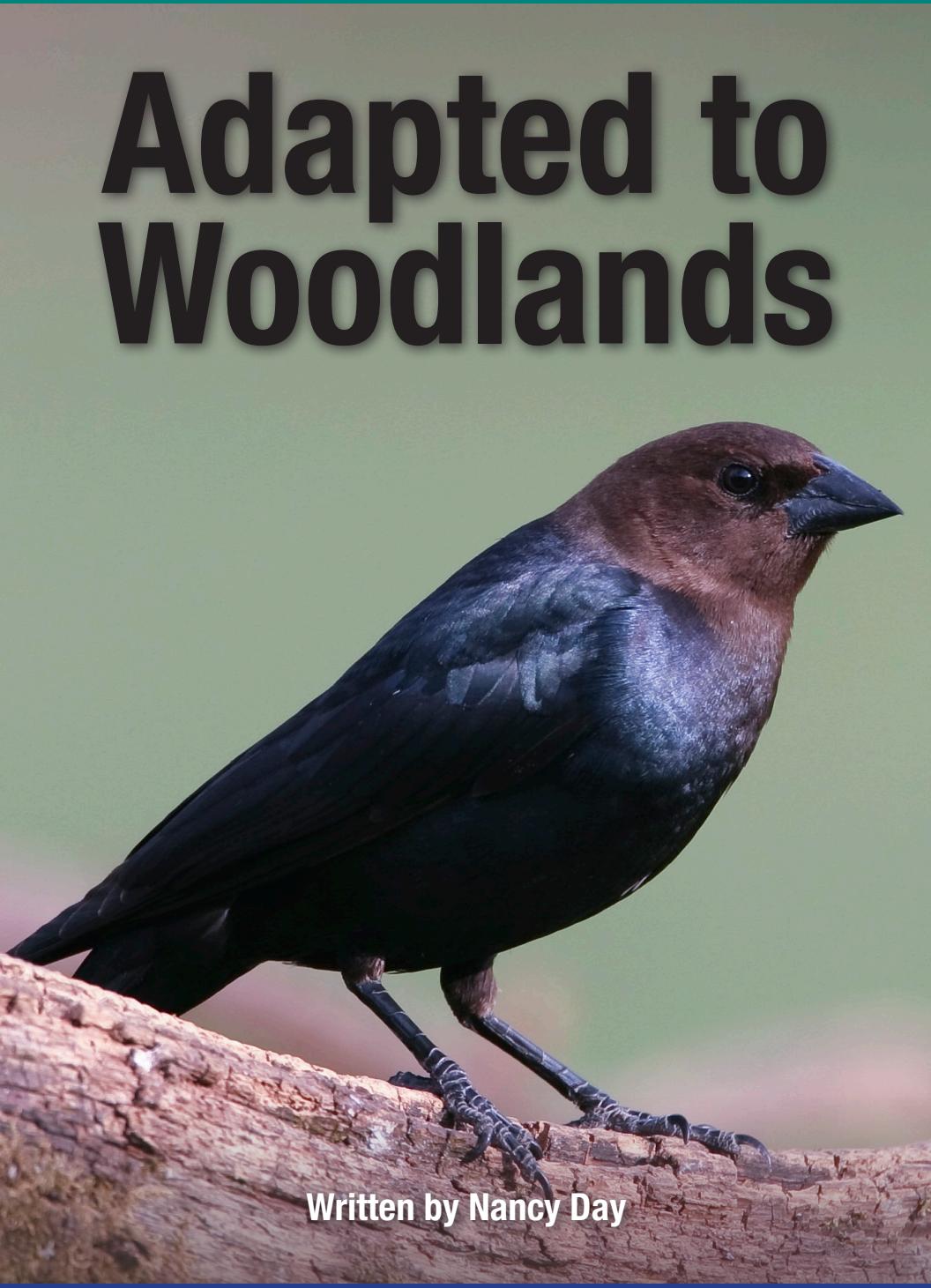
California Connections

Adapted to Woodlands



Written by Nancy Day

California Education and the Environment Initiative
Science Standards 2.2.c. and 2.2.d.

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Ermine

High in the Sierra Nevada, it is spring.

Ermine babies live in a den between rocks.

Their mother goes out to hunt mice, small birds, and sometimes rabbits.

But bobcats or hawks might be hunting for her.

Her brown coat blends with the earth, rocks, and trees. They don’t see her!

She comes back to the den with food.

The babies dig in with their sharp teeth.

In summer, the young ermine learn to hunt.

With their large feet, they can scramble between rocks or up trees.

By mid-summer or fall, they leave the den.

With winter comes snow.

The ermine's brown fur falls out.

A thicker, white coat grows in place of the brown fur!

Now, the ermine blends in with the snow.

Predators cannot see the ermine.

Mice cannot see the ermine coming, either.

The ermine brings food back to its own den.

Mule Deer

In a woodland in Yosemite Valley, mule deer fawns are born in early summer.

Each fawn has big ears like its parents.

It also has big eyes.

These characteristics help the fawn see and hear danger.

The mother must feed on tree shoots, leaves, and bark to make milk.

She hides her baby on the edge of the woods.

White spots on its brown back help the fawn blend in.

The spots look like Sun shining through leaves.

Mountain lions, coyotes, and bears may not see the fawn.

A new fawn is not strong enough to run from danger.

But its mother must leave it alone.

By fall, the white hair is replaced with brown.

Now the young mule deer is brown, like its parents.

Mule deer can run fast—more than 30 miles per hour!

They can leap over fences up to eight feet tall.

They can kick with their sharp hooves.

All these characteristics help mule deer get away from predators.

Cowbird

In a flat woodland near a stream, a cowbird is ready to lay her eggs.

But cowbirds do not make their own nests.

Cowbirds follow animals like cows and eat the insects cows kick up.

They may move on with the cattle before their eggs hatch.

A female cowbird lays each egg in a different bird's nest!

Some bird species reject cowbird eggs.

Other bird species do not seem to notice and treat the cowbird egg like one of their own.

Cowbird eggs look like least Bell's vireo eggs.

They are both speckled, but cowbird eggs are larger.

Vireos raise cowbird babies as their own.

The cowbird egg usually hatches first.

The cowbird hatchling is bigger than the others. It is louder when it begs for food.

Unlike its nest mates, its mouth is red inside.

The host parents think it is blood—a sign the baby needs more food.

They give the cowbird hatchling more food than their own babies.

They take care of it until it leaves the nest.

The young cowbird loses its gray downy feathers.

Females become brownish gray.

Males become dark blue and black with brown heads.

Cowbirds have short bills shaped like a cone.

They have long wings and rounded tails—just like the parents they have not met.

Unit Title: **Alike and Different**
Grade: **2**

Science Standards 2.2.c. and 2.2.d.
Supports ELA Standard: Reading 2.2.4.

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