



# Carried away



Sycamore



Alder



Beech



Oak

# Carried away

## Before you go:

Discuss the life cycle of a tree. Look at different types of trees and their seeds and fruits. Play a game matching trees to their seeds or fruits.

## What do you need?

Check that the woodland you are visiting has a variety of fruits and seeds (autumn in best). Hand magnifiers are useful. Pictures of animals that disperse woodland seeds (optional).

## Activity

Seed dispersal is when seeds, sometimes inside fruits, are carried away from the parent tree. If the seedlings grow close to the parent tree, they will struggle to get enough light, space and water.

Ask the children to collect a variety of seeds and fruits (including cones). Look at the collected items and discuss the differences between them.

Consider what seeds need to grow. Can they meet these needs close to the parent tree? How might they move away? (dispersal). Use hand magnifiers to look closely at the seeds. Do they have wings or hooks? Are they juicy or nut-like?

Some trees use **wind** to scatter their seeds, like sycamore's 'helicopter' wing on its fruit, making it spin as it falls. As it

spins the wind carries it some distance away. Pinecones also have winged seeds in them. Race sycamore seeds by dropping them. Which is faster - one wing or two?

Others have nuts or fruits that **animals** like. The seeds in fruits, like hawthorn, are **eaten** by animals and passed out in their droppings. Nuts, like acorns, are **buried** by animals like squirrels, and some remain unfound and grow. Beechnuts have **hooks** that catch on animal hair. Which is the stickiest seed and what do they stick to?



Gorse and broom are examples of **explosive** dispersal. On a hot day in summer, you'll hear the noise of the exploding pods, throwing the seeds away from the parent bush.

Seeds and fruits dispersed by **water** float, like alder seeds.

Children can write down the type of fruits or seeds they have and then guess how they travel. If it's a seed or fruit dispersed by an animal – guess what animal(s).

## Follow-up

Discuss what might happen if the animals that disperse tree seeds no longer exist. Is there a link between the weight of a seed and the way its dispersed? Do different dispersal methods make a difference to the way the tree or plant spreads? (For example along a river, or downwind from the prevailing wind.)