



More than a Tree

By: Tyler Sibley



White oaks are the most widespread of all oak species, covering over 104 million acres in the United States. White oaks are so much more than a tree standing in the woods. Many hunters seek white oak forests as valuable hunting territory. They know that many of the species they seek – deer, turkey, or squirrels – have grown to depend on the food and shelter white oaks provide.



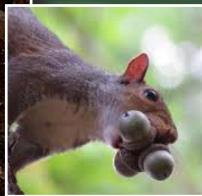
Whitetail deer are known to eat a variety of foods including berries, twigs and forbs. This is great nutrition for deer during warmer months. However, as temperatures drop, berries and green plants become more difficult to find.

This is when acorns come into play.

Unlike frequently found red oak acorns, deer prefer native white oak acorns. This is because white

oak acorns are lower in tannin, making them less bitter and easier to digest than other acorn varieties. White oak acorns are also high in fats and carbohydrates and have a sweet taste making them a high-energy tasty food source to get through the winter.

Turkeys also benefit from white oak trees. Hens rely on nutrient-rich acorns for winter months and breeding season. White oaks also provide valuable shelter for turkeys. Turkeys will nest on the ground but escape roaming predators by roosting in sturdy white oak branches. Young chicks benefit from white oaks as they forage on various insects that live below the trees' bark and within the leaf litter. By offering shelter and a nutritious food source, white oaks help hens lay larger clutches of eggs, and their offspring can access nourishment without straying too far from the nest, increasing survival rates.



Squirrels rely on acorns just as deer and turkey do for winter, but they collect and store their food differently. Squirrels are scatter hoarders. They bury acorns throughout

the forest floor to have food available during times of scarcity. Unfortunately for squirrels, many buried acorns are forgotten or lost. Fortunately for white oaks, this “squirrely” behavior aids in the genetic dispersal of oak trees and contributes to forest regeneration. Squirrels, like turkeys, also use white oaks for shelter. Both gray and fox squirrels seek protection from predators in the dense canopy of trees or inside hollow trunks. They also use leaves as construction materials for nests.



With white oaks providing such ample habitat for game species like deer, turkey and squirrel, it is really no wonder hunters seek these types of forests to search for game. White oaks are an integral part of the native ecosystem of the United States. Next time you're in the woods, take a moment to stop, look and listen to all the wildlife activity in and around white oaks. You will not regret it.

◆ *If you want more information on white oak restoration* ◆
on your farm, contact Tyler Sibley at 334-481-2155