

## **6. Exploring the Forest Floor**

You might be thinking, what's that? It looks like the ground, but you may not realize that the forest floor is an amazing place, and it's a very important place too! Forest floors are an ecosystem all in themselves.

Fallen leaves and leaf litter, plant life, downed trees, stumps and small streams provide habitats for a wide range of creatures. Many animals spend their entire lives on the forest floor and depend on the habitat provided by the forest floor for their survival.

Fascinatingly, the forest floor is where much life begins. Seeds from plants and trees embed themselves into forest floor soils and soon grow into small seedlings, which are an excellent food source for many creatures, such as moose.

The shelter provided by the plant life and the carpet provided by the leaves, fungus and fallen needles, provides shelter and a food source for many small creatures, such as this millipede. OK, well maybe he's not so small. Even insects, such as this millipede, are actually helping the forest by breaking down leaf litter, which then enriches the soil.

In addition, the fallen leaves, in a sense, feed the ground. As they decompose, they recycle essential nutrients back in to the ground. The litter also helps shade and cool the soil, which helps it to retain moisture, which helps break down the nutrients, and carries them back into the soil to be reabsorbed by more forest plants, ensuring that the forest ecosystem continues through time.

Essentially, the fate of the forest, which consists of living and non-living components, lies right here on the forest floor. Nature is an amazing thing, and who knew the forest place was such a fascinating place!