

Biodiversity by Rebecca Lexa

You may have heard a term, “biodiversity”. It means the number of individual species that you can find in a particular ecosystem. This includes animals, plants, fungi, and even microscopic life forms like bacteria. A place that only has a few species has low biodiversity, while a place with many species has high biodiversity.

When it comes to biodiversity, more is better. That’s because the more types of living being you can find in a place, the healthier it is. For instance, let’s say you have a forest with just one kind of tree. A disease that only affects that species gets into the forest, and kills all of the trees. If that disease then spreads to a forest that has six kinds of tree, it may kill all the trees of one species, but the other five will still be there giving shelter and food to local animals.

Because each species is connected to many other species in an ecosystem, even the removal of one type of animal or plant can have devastating effects on everything else there. Part of why Willapa National Wildlife Refuge and other protected areas are so important is because they provide a safe haven for everything found there. And if an ecosystem nearby gets damaged by fire, flooding or other disasters, the protected areas provide a sort of “savings account” of living beings that can repopulate that place as it recovers.

Next time you find yourself at the Refuge, a park or other wild place, see how many different animals, plants and mushrooms you can count!