

## OTHER PHYLO DECK IDEAS

### ***The theme is inspired by a favourite organism or type of organism:***

This is another common request. For example, something to the effect of “I love sharks, and I’d like to make a shark deck!” In this case, there are a few important things to consider here as well. To begin with, if you want to make an organism-centric deck, then making it “playable” can be a challenge. This is because the ecosystem game mechanic is dependent on having a good mix of cards where organisms can connect together well – i.e. their food chain interactions are based on reality (or if we want to be scientific about it, we say that their trophic strategies, habitat, and geographical needs mesh).

As you can easily see, a deck of just sharks would be problematic here, because they are all carnivorous, and so the playable game would also need all the extra cards that can provide the food web support they need (say aquatic plant cards, herbivore fish card, etc). This is still potentially doable, if you choose to focus on specific organisms that **belong to the same location** (i.e. it’s the Hawaiian Shark Deck!), but hopefully you see that it does become more challenging (if not almost impossible) to make a playable game if you want to have sharks from all over the world. For the latter, you would need a wide variety of different food chain level cards that come from all over the world, or ones that happen to be found in many different places. Again, this is potentially possible, but the research you would need to do, to make it all work *and* be scientifically realistic would be significant - more so when you remember that a deck tends to have a limited number of cards.

Because of these considerations, I find the best way to tackle this is to simply call your deck an “Expansion Deck” and limit the deck to a smaller number (like expansion decks often are – say about 9 or so cards). This way, you worry less about it being playable as a stand alone entity, and that it is something that can support a “Starter Deck” or usable, if you choose to also print/purchase with a bunch of other cards from the game.

Interestingly some folks have elected to go this route, and to sort of turn it into a game by including two cards of each organism in the final deck. This way, the deck (whilst not playable as a stand alone in the Phylo ecosystem game sense) can still double as a deck usable with games like “Go Fish” or “Memory.”

### ***The theme is less about a location or about organisms, and more about a specific environmental issue, or possibly some other social science angle, or even about a non-ecosystem related subject:***

This type of deck is a cool and interesting option, and we have had some folks inquired about this. It basically makes use of the fact that the Phylo game has been designed with two core card types. That is: “**species**” cards and “**event**”

cards. One way to think about this, is to realize that the “event card” is really just a card that allows you to introduce specific rules by way of including custom text and instructions. In most Phylo decks, this is seen as cards that explain some sort of environmental effect (like protected habitat, pollution, or oil spill for example), which in turn affects how players can modify the game in progress. For example, these cards when played may help build ecosystems, or help hurt ecosystems. Because of the flexibility found in the “event cards”, focusing the deck on something like an environmental issue should be relatively straight forward. You would still need a list of organisms that represent a playable ecosystem, but then there would be more thought involved in determining the range and type of “event cards” you can include, as well as thinking about how the card instructions would mimic real world outcomes. Where this becomes tricky is to find that sweet spot where these event type cards are not too powerful in terms of game play. For instance, if one of these event cards has such a significant effect that you can essentially guarantee your winning if you happen to pick it up, then that introduces a game design flaw.

Sometimes, event cards might not even be “environmental” in nature, but rather just a card that introduces a new rule. For instance, we have a “Linnaeus Card,” which basically rewards the ability to rummage through a discard pile by fostering learning of an organism’s latin name. We also have an example of a deck that uses these “Event” cards to highlight historical information, as seen in the Voyage of the Beagle Darwin Deck. Overall, the point is that there is a lot of inherent flexibility in the Phylo set up, and a lot will probably depend on how much time you want to spend on the design.

As another example, we have a chemistry flavoured expansion pack (botanicals and their chemicals), which is a nice example of the designer attempting to bring in another science subject into the fold. Here, the mechanic is the inclusion of special plant species cards, which also have a corresponding chemistry card (i.e. a chemical compound derived from that particular plant species). Players can earn more points if they happen to play the chemical card underneath the plant card.

### ***A couple of other pointers:***

Note that these theme ideas are not mutually exclusive. For instance, you may want to make a Salmon ecosystem deck. In effect, it does have a focus on a subset of salmon species, a specific locale, as well as a variety of environmental factors that play into the health of that ecosystem. Another example, is that some museums have been creating decks that focuses on some of their exhibits. Here, the theme is primarily inspired by the specimens they have, but the designers have worked to pick specimens that still fit in terms of realistic food chain interactions. As a result, these decks are good as a playable game, but can also be used as a checklist of things to see in the museum.