

Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

2016 Year in Review



Conservation success stories from the people of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service who work to protect fish, wildlife, plants, and natural habitats of the central and southern California coast.

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About Us

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura, California works to conserve and protect threatened and endangered fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats, across the central and southern California coast. The area is home to nearly 100 federally endangered and threatened species, from the internationally renowned California condor and southern sea otter, to lesser-known species like the California red-legged frog and Ohlone tiger beetle.

It's our job to work with our partners to prevent the extinction of those rare species and support their recovery. Our natural resource professionals work to protect the ecologically diverse resources of our coastline, from the unique coastal dunes and estuaries of Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties to our north, to the agricultural landscapes in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties, and the heavily urbanized areas around Los Angeles to our south.

Working with local communities and conservation partners, we aim to build a future that supports both people and wild places.

*Cover photo: Island foxes on Santa Cruz Island. Photo courtesy of Chuck Graham.
Left: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff with Director Dan Ashe at island fox delisting celebration. Photo by USFWS.*



Pillars of the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office



Scientific Integrity

We pride ourselves in solid science to support decision making with regards to all facets of the Endangered Species Act.

Advancing Our Mission

We are focused on moving the conservation needle forward and facilitating, supporting, and promoting the recovery of threatened and endangered fish, wildlife, and plants, and the habitats upon which they depend.



Telling Our Stories

We are reaching out to our communities as storytellers. We share engaging and impactful stories about the rare fish, wildlife, and plants of the southern and central California coast, their unique ecosystems, and the people who work to save them from extinction.



Celebrating Our People and Our Partners

We are dedicated to empowering our greatest assets - our people and our partners.



Message from the Field Supervisor

As I look back over the past year, I am filled with pride for my fellow U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees and the many conservation milestones our team reached this year. Our successes could not have been achieved without the collaboration and innovation of our many partners and the support of our local community.

In 2016, we celebrated conservation successes and we faced challenges head on. We welcomed Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell, Congresswoman Lois Capps, Service Director Dan Ashe, and National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis, and many conservation partners, to help us tell the story of the remarkable recovery of the Channel Islands fox. We celebrated the removal of three subspecies of island fox from the endangered species list – the fastest recovery of any land mammal in the history of the Endangered Species Act.

Scientific integrity remained at the forefront of our work to identify and recover rare fish, wildlife, and plants. We celebrated our most important assets - our people and our partners. And we amplified our storytelling by producing engaging and impactful feature stories for local, regional, and national publications, and engaged our online community through social media.

The stories featured in our 2016 Year in Review not only provide insights into the daily work of our team, but also demonstrate that our true strength lies in the synergy of our partnerships. We worked alongside our fellow Department of the Interior agencies to move species one step closer to recovery, and we worked with our military partners to enhance habitats for threatened and endangered species on military lands. Zoos and public entities have served pivotal roles in educating the community about our natural world, and non-profit and private organizations have filled crucial voids where additional momentum was needed.

This year, and every year to come, we will remain committed to the recovery of our imperiled fish, wildlife, and plants, and the habitats upon which they depend. I would like to use this opportunity to thank everyone that played a role in our conservation successes this year. Congratulations!

Steve Henry
Field Supervisor
Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY

We pride ourselves in solid science to support decision making with regards to all facets of the Endangered Species Act.

This year, we announced science-based listing decisions for a suite of species in our area, from two Pacific seabirds that evaded the endangered species list due to proactive conservation efforts, to the Channel Islands fox which was saved from the brink of extinction in record time due to remarkable collaboration by island land managers. Let's take a closer look at our findings this year for four island fox subspecies, Scripps's murrelet, Guadalupe murrelet, San Fernando Valley Spineflower, and Santa Cruz cypress.



Scripps's murrelet. Photo by Dave Pereksta.



San Fernando Valley spineflower. Photo by USFWS.



Santa Cruz cypress seed cluster. Photo by USFWS.



Island fox. Photo by USFWS.



Island Foxes on Northern Channel Islands Saved from Extinction: Fastest Successful Recovery of an Endangered Species Listed Mammal in History of the ESA

Island foxes on Santa Cruz Island. Photo by Chuck Graham.

Representing the fastest successful recovery for any Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed mammal in the United States, the Service announced on August 11, 2016, the final de-listing of three subspecies of island fox native to California's Channel Islands.

“The Island fox recovery is an incredible success story about the power of partnerships and the ability of collaborative conservation to correct course for a species on the brink of extinction,” said U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell, [who visited Channel Islands National Park in March with fourth graders](#) participating in the [Every Kid in a Park](#) program to witness fox conservation efforts. “The Endangered Species Act is an effective tool to protect imperiled wildlife so future generations benefit from the same abundance and diversity of animals and plants we enjoy today. What happened in record time at Channel Islands National Park can serve as a model for partnership-driven conservation efforts across the country.”



Left to right: Channel Islands National Park Superintendent Russell Galipeau, former NPS biologist Tim Coonan, NPS Director Jon Jarvis, Service Director Dan Ashe, Institute for Wildlife Studies President David Garcelon, Congresswoman Lois Capps, and The Nature Conservancy staff members Christie Boser, Scott Morrison, and Eamon O'Byrne. Photo by USFWS.

In the late 1990s, endemic island fox populations on San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz and Santa Catalina islands – four of the six Channel Islands they inhabit – plummeted by over 90 percent to catastrophic levels. At the low point, fox populations had dropped from 1,708 to only 15 individuals on Santa Rosa Island, from 450 to 15 on San Miguel Island, and from more than 1,400 to 55 on Santa Cruz Island. The decline was due primarily to predation by golden eagles (which had moved in to fill a niche in the ecosystem that had been vacated by loss of bald eagles due to the pesticide DDT) and a canine distemper outbreak on Santa Catalina Island.



Left: Island fox pup. Photo by USFWS. Right: National Park Service and The Nature Conservancy biologists conduct a health check on an island fox. Photo by USFWS.

Listing of the four Channel Island fox subspecies in 2004 stimulated a focused, partnership-driven conservation effort involving the National Park Service, The Nature Conservancy, Santa Catalina Island Conservancy and Institute for Wildlife Studies. Almost immediately, fox populations began to improve. Today the San Miguel, Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz island subspecies are fully recovered. The fourth subspecies, the Santa Catalina Island fox has now been downgraded from endangered to threatened.

Multimedia

Feature Story: [Evading Extinction: The Recovery of Island Foxes on California's Channel Islands](#)

Video: [U.S. Department of Interior - Channel Islands Fox Delisted](#)

Photos: [Island Foxes of the Channel Islands](#)

Photos: [Scientists Honored for Role in Recovery of Island Fox on Northern Channel Islands](#)

Podcast: [Fish and Wildlife Biologist Robert McMorran on island fox recovery audio interview](#)

Island Restoration Supports Conservation of Two Pacific Seabird Species: ESA Listing No Longer Warranted Due to Conservation Successes

This September, the [Service declared that two Pacific seabird species](#), the Scripps's murrelet and Guadalupe murrelet, no longer warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), due to the efforts of diverse stakeholders in addressing primary threats to the species. As a result, the two species are no longer at risk of becoming endangered in the foreseeable future and will be removed from the ESA Candidate List.

Proactive conservation measures including habitat restoration and invasive species removal by land managers including the National Park Service, The Nature Conservancy, U.S. Navy, Catalina Island Conservancy, Mexican government, and the Grupo de Ecología y Conservación de Islas, continue to benefit Scripps's murrelet and Guadalupe murrelet breeding habitat.

“It is encouraging to know populations of these resilient seabirds can rebound as land managers continue to work to restore balance to the island ecosystems where they breed,” said Steve Henry, Service field supervisor in Ventura.

Landowner conservation and restoration measures include removal or reduction of introduced predatory mammals such as rats, cats, and dogs, as well as other non-native species including sheep, rabbit, pigs, cattle, and goats. Non-native species have been removed from or are not present on the four main islands that support more than 80 percent of the Scripps's murrelet breeding population. Introduced non-predator mammals such as rabbits, pigs, and sheep also have been entirely removed from both Guadalupe and San Benito islands, the only known islands used for breeding by Guadalupe murrelet.

Scripps's murrelets. Photo by David Pereksta.

Read More

[*Audubon Magazine: How Two Secretive Seabirds Evaded the Endangered Species List*](#)

[*Ventura County Star: Threats Fade for Two Pacific Seabirds*](#)

[*Phys.org: Island Restoration Supports Conservation of Two Pacific Seabirds*](#)

Proposed Protections for San Fernando Valley Spineflower in Ventura and Los Angeles Counties

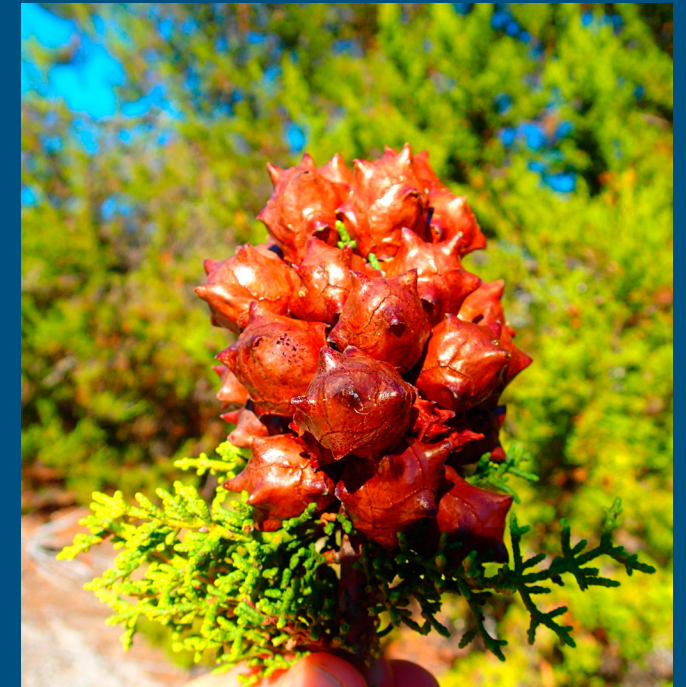
In September 2016, the [Service determined that the San Fernando Valley spineflower](#) is likely to become endangered throughout all or a significant portion of its range within the foreseeable future, and has proposed to list the plant, located in Ventura and Los Angeles counties in southern California, as threatened under the ESA.

In 2015, the Service conducted a thorough assessment of the best scientific and commercial information available regarding existing and potential threats to the plant and its habitat including habitat loss from proposed development, invasive non-native plants and animals, and potential impacts of climate change.

The Service will continue to work with land managers where the species occurs in Ventura and Los Angeles counties and our state counterparts, to protect and conserve this rare plant species and its habitat in addition to proposing ESA protections.



San Fernando Valley spineflower. Photo by USFWS.



Left: Santa Cruz cypress. Right: Santa Cruz cypress seed cluster. Photos by USFWS.

Collective Conservation Efforts and Improved Science Move Santa Cruz Cypress One Step Closer to Recovery

In February 2016, the Service published a final rule to downlist the Santa Cruz cypress (*Hesperocyparis abramsiana*) from an endangered to a threatened species under the ESA. The reclassification reflects ongoing collaborations by stakeholders to reduce threats to the cypress and improve data on tree locations, resulting in an increase in the number of known trees from 2,300 in 1987 to some 33,000-44,000 today. The best scientific and commercial information available on the status of and threats to the Santa Cruz cypress now indicates that it is no longer in danger of extinction.

“As a result of the collective conservation efforts of federal, state, local and private entities, as well as improved science, the Santa Cruz cypress is one step closer to achieving recovery,” said Steve Henry, Field Supervisor of the Service’s Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office. “While there is still a lot of work to be done before it will be fully recovered, with the continued commitment of partners and the public I am sure we will get there.”

Santa Cruz Sentinel: Santa Cruz cypress reclassified as threatened under Endangered Species Act

Healing the Gaviota Coast after the Refugio Oil Spill, Biologists Recount their Experiences

*Biologist documents natural resource impacts along shoreline near Refugio State Beach.
Photo by USFWS.*

The Gaviota Coast in southern California is a precious resource to people and wildlife; largely still in its natural state, a scenic stretch of coastline home to a wealth of biota, sand beaches, intact habitats, and natural drainages that allow the undisturbed flow of water between land and ocean. On May 19, 2015, eyes around the world turned to this stunning stretch of coastline, as newspapers and television screens flashed images of crude oil seeping into the turquoise and deep blue waters of the Santa Barbara Channel.

It has been over a year since an oil pipeline owned by Plains All American Pipeline ruptured near Refugio State Beach near Santa Barbara releasing more than 120,000 gallons of crude oil into a drainage ditch leading to the Pacific Ocean. While the bulk of the oil impacted land, an estimated 21,000 gallons flowed into the channel, and as the hours became days and the days became weeks, impacted miles of coastline and coastal waters.

The spill prompted an immediate response effort by multiple local, state, and federal agencies. State and federal trustee agencies, in coordination with local cities, counties, and other organizations continue to assess impacts from the oil spill on natural resources. Through this process, known as a Natural Resource Damage Assessment, the trustees are working to quantify the injuries to wildlife, habitat, and lost use of those resources, and to develop a restoration plan.

The trustees will ultimately make a claim for funds from Plains All American Pipeline, the party responsible for the spill, to implement restoration projects designed to both restore and compensate for the injured resources and human activities.

Biologists came together to share their stories in the early days of the Refugio oil spill and continue to work together to restore the Gaviota coast in the spill's aftermath.

[*Click Here to Read the Feature Story*](#)



Habitat Conservation Planning Supports Community of Los Osos

Habitat conservation plans, or HCPs, identify and analyze how growth can occur in a way that protects species at risk - in essence, how growth and species protection can be balanced.

While the small community of Los Osos in San Luis Obispo County is less than four square miles, the area provides important habitat for the federally listed Morro shoulderband snail, Morro Bay kangaroo rat, Morro manzanita, and Indian Knob mountainbalm and the Baywood fine sands ecosystem upon which they depend. Three of these species - Morro shoulderband snail, Morro Bay kangaroo rat and Morro manzanita - are found nowhere else on earth.

In preparation for the completion of a wastewater treatment facility that would serve much of the community of Los Osos and allow for a lifting of a development moratorium, the County of San Luis Obispo began working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife to develop a community-wide HCP as part of their application for state and federal incidental take permits for those species identified above.

The Los Osos HCP is a landscape-level planning tool intended to address long-term conservation goals for Morro shoulderband snail, Morro Bay kangaroo rat, Morro manzanita, and Indian Knob mountainbalm while allowing for certain land uses and development to move forward during a permit term of 25 years. The plan would facilitate more efficient and comprehensive conservation land-use planning and regulation, streamline compliance with state and federal permitting requirements, and reduce regulatory uncertainty.

Morro shoulderband snail. Photo by Alice Abela.

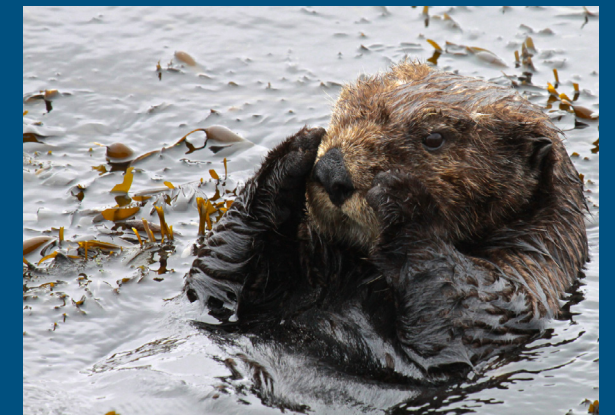


ADVANCING OUR MISSION

We are focused on moving the conservation needle forward and facilitating, supporting, and promoting species recovery. This year, through our Safe Harbor Program, we worked with California State Parks to reestablish California red-legged frogs across four state parks. Working alongside our partners in the southern sea otter conservation community, we identified range expansion as a necessary component to southern sea otter recovery. Our Conservation Banking program is reaching new heights, seeing successful California tiger salamander breeding at La Purisima Conservation Bank, and the establishment of a proposed bank in Santa Clara and San Benito counties. Through a species status assessment, we're helping find out what's happening with the Western monarch butterfly population, so that we can work with our conservation partners to ensure monarchs remain part of our landscape for years to come.



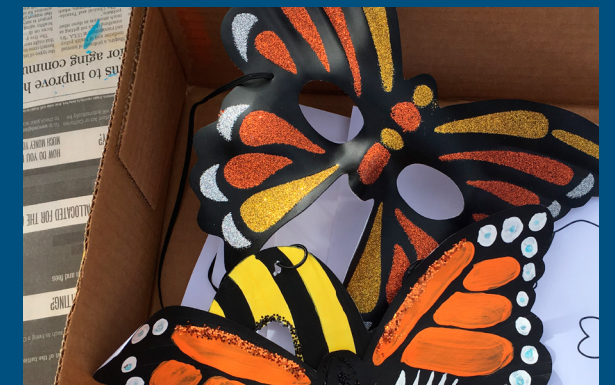
California red-legged frog egg mass. Photo by NPS.



Southern sea otter. Photo by Lilian Carswell/USFWS.



California tiger salamander. Photo by USFWS..



Dia de los Muertos Monarch butterfly crafts. Photo by USFWS.

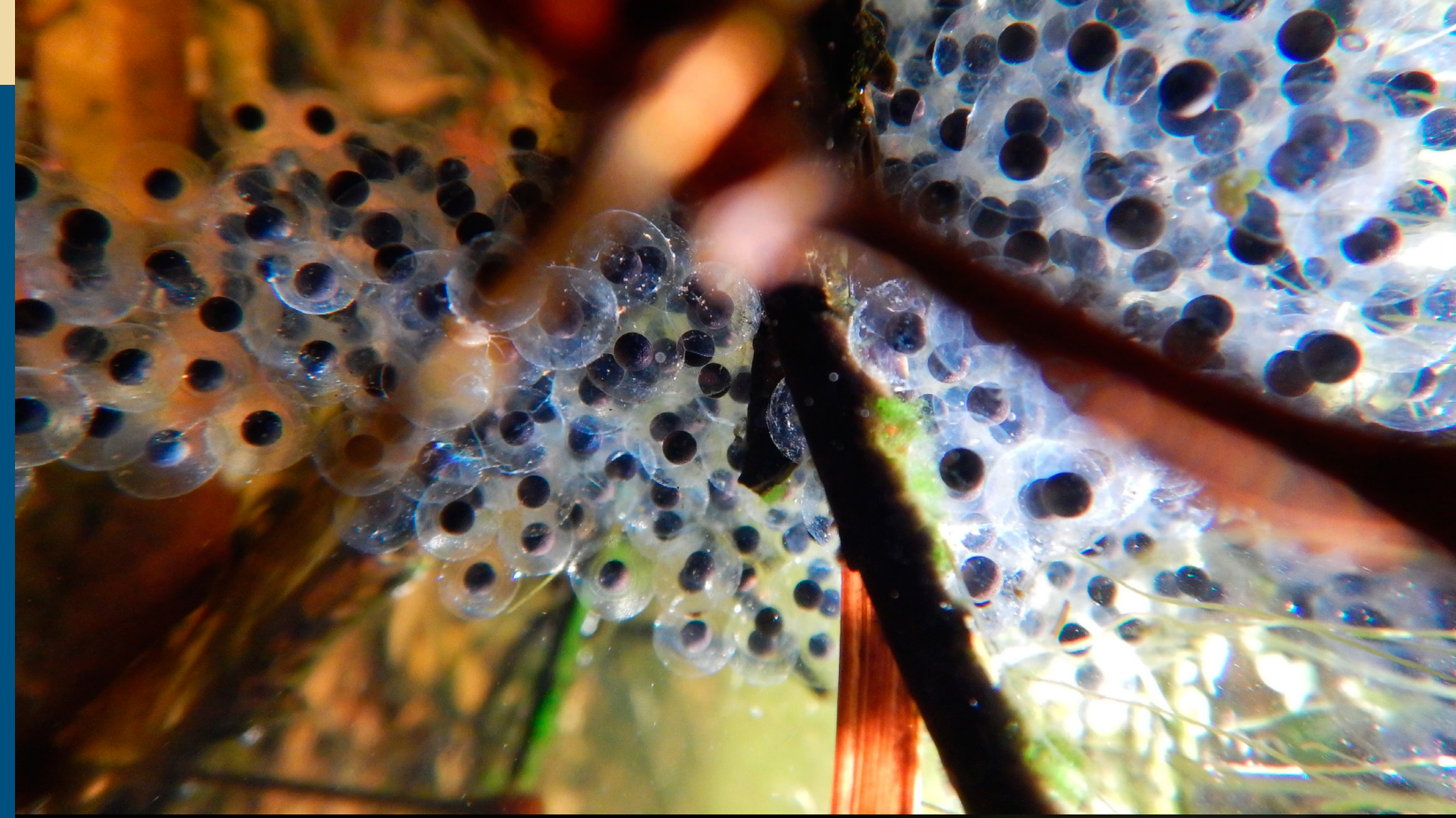
Rare Frogs Have Found a New Home in California State Parks



Left: California red-legged frog egg mass. Right: Egg mass, mature California red-legged frog, and tadpoles. Photos by NPS.

A rare amphibian that has been lost from 70 percent of its historical range has been given a fighting chance to repopulate on state-protected lands in Los Angeles and Ventura counties. The Service and California State Parks have signed a Safe Harbor Agreement, a 50-year voluntary conservation agreement that calls for the reestablishment of California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*) populations across four state parks in southern California, covering more than 16,000 acres of park lands. This species is both federally threatened and a state species of special concern.

“Collaborative, voluntary conservation efforts like this one are key to recovering imperiled wildlife in southern California,” said Eric Morrisette, senior fish and wildlife biologist for the Service in Ventura. “Through the Safe Harbor Program, private and non-federal landowners, like California State Parks, can proactively support species’ recovery by restoring or managing habitat for those species on their lands, with assurances that other land-uses, like visitor recreation opportunities or maintenance activities, are not restricted.”



Multimedia

[Read the Featured Story](#)

[Watch the Video Clips and Photos from the Field](#)

[Ventura County Star: California Opens Parks to Rare Red-Legged Frogs at Risk of Extinction](#)

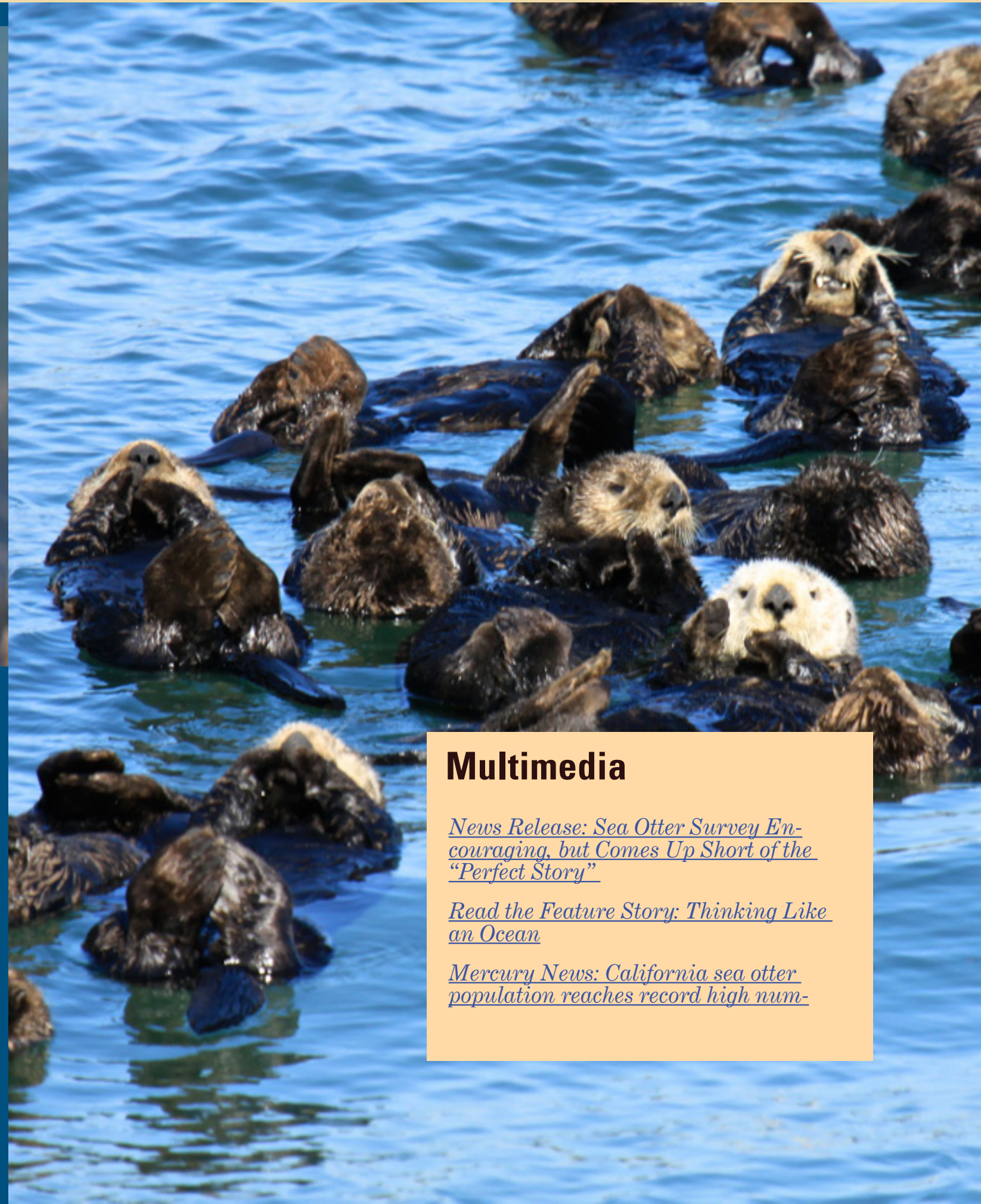
Scientists Say Range Expansion is Essential for Southern Sea Otter Recovery



Left: Southern sea otter. Photo by Lilian Carswell/USFWS. Right: Southern sea otter raft. Photo by Lilian Carswell/USFWS.

For the first time, southern sea otters' numbers have exceeded 3,090, which is the threshold that must be exceeded for three consecutive years in order for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to consider removing the species from Endangered Species Act protections. However, localized population declines at the northern and southern ends of the range continue to be a cause for concern.

“The population index for southern sea otters has exceeded 3,090 for the first time, and that’s encouraging,” said Lilian Carswell, Southern Sea Otter Recovery Coordinator for USFWS, “but sustained population growth will require range expansion, which means that sea otters will somehow have to get past the shark gauntlets near the ends of the current range. Over the longer term, it’s not just sea otter numbers we’re after, but the restoration of ecological relationships in the ecosystems where sea otters and other nearshore species coevolved.”



Multimedia

[News Release: Sea Otter Survey Encouraging, but Comes Up Short of the “Perfect Story”](#)

[Read the Feature Story: Thinking Like an Ocean](#)

[Mercury News: California sea otter population reaches record high num-](#)

Conservation Banking Program Brings More Bang for the Buck

Our Conservation Banking program promotes working landscapes and the economic viability of ranching and agricultural communities, while protecting sensitive habitats and supporting the recovery of rare wildlife. Jeff Phillips assumed a new role as a coordinator for our Conservation Banking program, one of our tools to achieve recovery objectives for our imperiled species. The program is currently developing mitigation policies and species-specific landscape scale strategic mitigation guidance to ensure that mitigation associated with project impacts helps recover at-risk species.

The Zayante Sandhills Conservation Bank in Santa Cruz County had its best year ever in 2016, selling about double the amount of credits this year in comparison to any other year in their ten year history. The conservation bank is nearing full funding of their long term endowment, which will ensure habitat management and conservation easement monitoring in perpetuity.



California tiger salamander. Photo by Adam G. Clause.

The La Purisima Conservation Bank in Santa Barbara County documented successful breeding of California tiger salamanders this past spring. Head to our [Flickr page to watch video](#) of a dipnet sweep of a breeding pond in 2016.

A conservation bank in eastern Santa Clara and San Benito counties has been approved for credit sales. The bank may cover more than 3,000 acres including superb upland habitat and a network of breeding ponds that could support both California tiger salamanders and California red-legged frogs.



Roosting monarch butterflies in Pacific Grove. Photo by USFWS.

Assessing the Status of Monarch Butterflies

Looking ahead, we're supporting a species status assessment of the monarch butterfly. The assessment will identify the species needs, gather information on the current status, threats to the species, and conservation efforts that may influence those threats.

Threats to monarch butterflies, including loss of native milkweed habitats and overwintering sites, are having a devastating impact on butterfly populations and their migration phenomenon. The North American population of monarch butterflies, which occur in every state except Alaska, has declined by 90 percent across the country in the past 20 years, from 1 billion in the mid-1990s to 35 million in 2014.

We've partnered with a number of organizations to help the monarch butterfly. Through the Monarch Joint Venture, we work to conduct research and monitoring, educate and empower citizens to take action, and protect and improve monarch habitat by planting native milkweeds and nectar plants across the country. For more information on monarch butterfly conservation, visit <http://fws.gov/savethemonarch>



Monarch Migration Connects Kids to Culture and Conservation During 'El Dia de los Muertos' Celebration in Southern California

El Dia de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead, is celebrated each November across Mexico and the United States in remembrance of loved ones who have passed away and to celebrate the annual return of their spirits to Earth. During this same time of year, one of the world's most recognizable species - the monarch butterfly - takes a 3,000 mile journey from Canada and the United States to the central highlands of Mexico. Some monarch butterflies migrate west of the Rocky Mountains to coastal California to spend the winter.

In some Hispanic cultures, these miracle migrations represent the souls of ancestors on their spiritual journey.

Monarch butterflies that overwinter along California's central coast serve as iconic reminders of El Dia de los Muertos tradition for Hispanic communities within the region. This year, Curren School in Oxnard, Calif., a coastal town in Ventura County north of Los Angeles, partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to host El Dia de los Muertos Monarch Butterfly Festival to celebrate the migration of the monarch butterfly and to educate the public about the risks facing the iconic species.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff with Curren School principal and vice-principal and staffmember from the office of Congresswoman Julia Brownley. Photo by USFWS.



Multimedia

[Read the Feature Story: USFWS Pacific Southwest Region Highlights](#)

[Photos: El Dia De Los Muertos Monarch Butterfly Celebration at Curren School](#)

[Video: The Service's Hazel Rodriguez talks to students about El Dia De Los Muertos and the monarch butterfly](#)

[El Latino Central Coast Newspaper: Students in Oxnard Celebrated Ancestors and Butterflies](#)

Top: Monarch butterfly. Bottom: Curren School elementary school student at Dia de Los Muertos crafts table. Photos by USFWS.



TELLING OUR STORIES

We are reaching out within our communities as storytellers. We share engaging and impactful stories about the rare fish, wildlife, and plants of the southern and central California coast, their unique ecosystems, and the people who work to save them from extinction.

This year, we produced more than 30 multi-media feature stories about the multi-faceted Endangered Species Act, from the remarkable recovery of the Channel Islands fox, to the collaborative, voluntary reestablishment of federally threatened California red-legged frogs on state park lands. Our stories were featured nearly 100 times in local, regional, national, and international broadcast, print, and online media outlets.



Our stories reached thousands of followers through local, regional, and national social media pages, and that number continues to grow as we continue to produce more engaging, evergreen content.



We connect kids, parents, teachers, and community members with nature every day. This year, our Schoolyard Habitat Program has extended to more than 16 schools and more than 10,000 students, with a specific focus on underserved schools in our local communities. By engaging volunteers, students, parents, and teachers, schools have planted more than 13,000 native plants as part of the program, specifically focusing on the plight of the Monarch butterfly and the importance of pollinators to our everyday life.

Our new partnerships with non-traditional community groups like the Salvation Army and Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast are opening doors to new opportunities to connect people of all ages, backgrounds, and experiences with their natural world.

In the News

[Audubon Magazine: How Two Secretive Seabirds Evaded the Endangered Species List](#)

[Ventura County Star: Threats Fade for Two Pacific Seabirds](#)

[KEYT Central Coast News: Refugio Oil Spill Restoration Planning Underway \(Video\)](#)

[Inside Edison: Condor Rescued in Recovery Program Takes First Flight in 30 Years](#)

[Santa Cruz Sentinel: Santa Cruz cypress reclassified as threatened under Endangered Species Act](#)

[Santa Barbara Independent: Island Fox Back from the Brink](#)

[Southern California Public Radio: Fastest Mammal Recovery Ever May Get Channel Island Foxes Off Endangered List](#)

[Ventura County Star: Endangered Island Foxes Break Record for Fast Recovery](#)

[Los Angeles Times: Channel Islands Foxes are Doing So Well Officials Want to Take Them Off the Endangered Species List](#)

[Central Coast Public Radio: Some Channel Island Fox Populations Could be Removed from Endangered Species List](#)

[Washington Post: These Adorable Foxes Once Nearly Extinct Have Made a Record Breaking Comeback](#)

[E&E News: California Island Foxes Trot Toward Delisting](#)

[Courthouse News: Channel Island Foxes Recovering, Feds Say](#)

[Associated Press: California Island Foxes Removed from Endangered Species List](#)

[MongaBay International Environmental News: Recovery of Island Foxes a Historic Success; Officials Recommend Removing Them from the Endangered Species List](#)

[Santa Barbara News Press: Endangered No More; Fed Urge Change for Island Fox](#)

[El Latino Central Coast Newspaper: Students in Oxnard Celebrated Ancestors and Butterflies](#)

[National Public Radio: Once Nearly Extinct California Island Foxes No Longer Endangered](#)

[The Guardian: Shooting deaths of sea otters in California prompt investigation](#)

[Ventura County Star: California Opens Parks to Rare Red-Legged Frogs at Risk of Extinction](#)

[Ventura County Star: Secretary of the Interior Visit Santa Cruz Island, Calls Fox Recovery a Model](#)

[Monterey County Weekly: How Two Volunteers Changed Our Understanding of Sea Otters](#)

[KCRW: Who's Dealing with the Wildlife Data?](#)

[KEYT Central Coast News: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Asking Public to Help Survey Brown Pelicans \(video\)](#)

[Santa Barbara Independent: Count Pelicans for Science](#)

[Vimeo: Saving the Salamanders \(video\)](#)

[Ventura County Star: Eight Scientists Named Wildlife Champions for Island Fox Recovery](#)

[Ventura County Star: Native Endangered Species Day at the Sycamore Canyon School Garden](#)

[Los Angeles Times: Island Foxes Removed from Endangered Species List](#)

[The Guardian: Rare Island Fox Taken Off Endangered List After Record-Breaking Recovery](#)

[Reuters: California's Rare Island Fox Returns from Brink of Extinction](#)

[Huffington Post: These Tiny Island Foxes Just Broke an Awesome Record](#)

[Wall Street Journal: California Island Foxes Recover from Brink of Extinction](#)

[Washington Post: These Adorable Foxes, Once Nearly Extinct, Have Made a Record-Breaking Comeback](#)

[Southern California Public Radio: Channel Islands Foxes to be Removed from Endangered Species List \(audio\)](#)

[Time Magazine: These Foxes Faced Extinction. Now, They're Making an Amazing Comeback](#)

[Buzzfeed: These Island Foxes Have Officially Bounced Back from Extinction](#)

[Christian Science Monitor: Endangered No More, California's Island Foxes Make a Surprising Rebound](#)

[Ventura County Star: Channel Islands Foxes Removed from Endangered Species List](#)

In the News

[Nature World News: Making a Comeback, California Island Foxes are No Longer Extinct](#)

[Huffington Post: Someone's Shooting Sea Otters in California, and Officials Want Answers](#)

[UPI: California Officials Offer \\$10K Reward in Hunt for Sea Otter Killers](#)

[Los Angeles Times: Three Sea Otters That Washed Up On California's Central Coast Were Fatally Shot](#)

[Time Magazine: Someone is Shooting Sea Otters in California](#)

[Mercury News: Three California Sea Otters Shot and Killed in Santa Cruz County](#)

[E&E News: FWS Proposes Protecting California Flower Once Through Extinct](#)

[Ventura County Star: Ventura County Plant May Get Added Protection](#)

[KCLU: Rare Plant Only Found in Ventura, Los Angeles Counties Proposed for Federal Protection](#)

[Santa Clarita Valley News: Feds Seek Protection for Rare Flower that Grows on Newhall Ranch](#)

[Science Friday: The Comeback Kits, Saving California's Island Foxes](#)

[Christian Science Monitor: California's Sea Otter Population Makes a Comeback](#)

[Ventura County Star: Latest Count Finds More Sea Otters Along California Coast](#)

[Mercury News: California's Sea Otter Population Reaches Record High Number](#)

[Monterey County Herald: California Sea Otter Population Reaches Record High](#)

[Phys.org: Island Restoration Supports Conservation of Two Pacific Seabird Species](#)

[High Country News: Sea Otters on the Rise, But Shark Bites Stall Range Growth](#)

[KCLU: New Plan Released to Try to Save Endangered Salamanders Only Found in Santa Barbara County \(audio\)](#)

[Noozhawk: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Spells Out Ways to Save California Tiger Salamanders](#)

[Ventura County Star: Girl Scouts, biologists team up to help endangered bird](#)

[California Sportsman Magazine: SoCal Biologist Dedicated to Getting Kids Outside](#)

[Santa Barbara Independent: Bird Lovers United to Count Brown Pelicans](#)

[San Luis Obispo Tribune: San Luis Obispo Receives Conservation Awards for Protecting Endangered Plant](#)

[KEYT Central Coast News: Mobile App Developed to Simulate Conservation](#)

[KCLU: New Video Game Called Groundbreaking Efforts to Educate People About Endangered California Condors](#)

[Noozhawk: Free Mobile App Developed on Conservation Practices Used to Rescue California Condor from Extinction](#)

[Take Part: Play a Game, Save a Species](#)

[Ventura County Star: Save a Condor, Save the World](#)

[Ventura County Star: Condor Chick Hatches in Ventura County and is Captured on Live Broadcast](#)

[KEYT Central Coast News: California Condor Chick Hatches on Live Camera \(video\)](#)

[Washington Post: Watch a Rare Wild Baby California Condor Emerge from its Shell](#)

[CBS Los Angeles: California Condor Hatches Live Online](#)

[Live Science: After Their Egg is Stolen, Condors Raise Foster Chick](#)

Technology Connects People Around the World with Condors in the Wild

The [hatching of a California condor chick](#) was broadcast live to thousands of viewers via a livestreaming webcam in the wilderness of Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. For the first time in history, anyone with an internet connection had the opportunity to watch a newly hatched California condor chick in the wild via a live video camera. On the morning of April 4, 2016, eyes around the world were glued to livestreaming footage from a cliffside nest at [Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge](#) in Ventura County, California, as the chick made its entrance into the world, emerging from its shell alongside its condor parent.

Multimedia

[Nest video clips and photos](#)

[Condor Cam Complete Journey to Hatch Date Video](#)



Background: California condor parent with egg at Koford's Ridge. Insert: Wildlife biologist sets up camera equipment for nest entry. Photos by USFWS.

Seeking the Public's Help in Solving Wildlife Crimes

In partnership with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) we [put out a request for information](#) that would help lead to the arrest and conviction of the person(s) responsible for the shooting deaths of three southern sea otters in late July/early August in Santa Cruz County.

The three male sea otters, two sub-adults and one adult, were found dead between the Santa Cruz Harbor and Seacliff State Beach in Aptos, between August 12 and 19. Southern sea otters are protected as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act. They are also protected under Marine Mammal Protection Act and by California state law. Killing a southern sea otter is punishable by up to \$100,000.00 in fines and a possible jail sentence.

[The Guardian: Shooting deaths of sea otters in California prompt investigation](#)

A fourth otter carcass was discovered on 20 August with a suspected gunshot wound, Ashley Spratt of the Fish and Wildlife Service said on Wednesday. "Finding several gunshot sea otters at the same general location during such a short time frame is very unusual," said Spratt. "We don't know why these otters were shot, but what's important to note is that killing or harassing federally protected wildlife is a crime."

Connecting Sports Fans to Condor Conservation

Sports fans across the country had [mixed reactions](#) when the Los Angeles Clippers unveiled their new mascot Chuck the Condor at a game against the New York nets in March 2016. We saw the opportunity to share with Clippers' fans why we think they'll learn to love condors as much as we do.

[Read the story on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Open Spaces Blog: California's Newest Condor Wears a Basketball Jersey](#)



Southern sea otter. Photo by Lilian Carswell/USFWS.



Chuck the Condor of the Los Angeles Clippers with National Wildlife Refuge System staff Joseph Brandt, Mike Brady, and Polly Wheeler. Photo by Ashley Spratt/USFWS.



Indian knob mountainbalm. Photo by Connie Rutherford/USFWS.

Prescribed Burns at Former Fort Ord Restore Rare Plant Communities and Support Clean-Up Operations

Why burn? [Prescribed burning at Fort Ord](#) is conducted as part of Military Munitions Response Program, which not only facilitates clean-up of munitions, but also includes management for a diverse range of wildlife and plants. Fort Ord is home to a rare maritime chaparral community of plant species, including a number that are federally listed under the Endangered Species Act, including the threatened Monterey spineflower and endangered Monterey gilia. Some plants in this ecosystem depend on fire for regeneration.

“Prescribed burning is a necessary part of clean-up operations. Prescribed burning is not only beneficial to restoring habitat for a variety of plant species, it also makes it safe for our technicians to safely enter impact areas to locate and remove explosive hazards that still remain from decades of military training and use,” says William Collins, Environmental Coordinator for the Fort Ord Base Realignment and Closure Office.

[Click here for more photos.](#)

Click the hyperlink above to read senior fish and wildlife biologist Lena Chang’s story.

Left: Monterey spineflower. Photo by Dave Pereksta. Right: Prescribed burn at former Fort Ord. Photo by U.S. Army.

Rare Plant Population Rediscovered by Botanists in San Luis Obispo County

For botanists, [rediscovering a very rare plant](#) in a location it had not been spotted for decades is cause for excitement. The Indian Knob mountainbalm (*Eriodictyon altissimum*) is a shrubby plant in the borage family only known to exist within maritime chaparral communities in San Luis Obispo County along the central California coast.

Biologists and botanists came together this spring to survey for several populations of the plant where they had not been seen in decades – in one location, since 1985.

“Very little is known about the plant by scientists; however, it appears this particular plant is more inclined to reproduce by sprouting new stems rather than from seed germination,” botanist Connie Rutherford explains. That means that the plant reproduces by stretching its limbs horizontally, which then get covered by rock or substrate and take root. Some of their horizontal branches can extend 20 to 30 feet underneath the substrate.

Click the hyperlink above to read botanist Connie Rutherford’s story.

[Click here for more photos.](#)



Surveys Show a Silver Lining for Rare Smith's Blue Butterflies

With a wingspan of only one inch, [Smith's blue butterflies are a challenge](#) to spot with the naked eye. Despite their small size and rarity, the attractive bright blue coloring of the males and bright orange and brown coloring of the females never fails to catch the attention of senior fish and wildlife biologist Jake Martin. Martin works for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to help recover threatened and endangered wildlife, and has studied the butterfly for more than 10 years.

“Much of my work involves thinking and writing about how human activities affect the Smith's blue butterfly; it is always refreshing to get out and see them behaving naturally in relatively undisturbed habitat,” Martin says.

Click the hyperlink above to read senior fish and wildlife biologist Jake Martin's story.

Smith's blue butterfly. Photo by Diane Kodama/USFWS.



Vector takes a break from the search for the Morro bay kangaroo rat. Photo by Chris Kofron/USFWS.

Wildlife Scent Detection Dog Leads the Search for Elusive, Endangered Morro Bay Kangaroo Rat in San Luis Obispo County

Last spotted in 1986, the [Morro bay kangaroo rat has eluded biologists for more than three decades](#). While some in the conservation community believe this tiny native mammal may have gone the way of the dodo, two local biologists have reason to believe that a few isolated colonies may still exist in the remaining patches of coastal dune scrub along California's central coast near Los Osos in San Luis Obispo County.

To aid in the search for the mysterious, nocturnal burrowing mammal, biologists have turned to alternative survey methodology.

“To enhance our chances of finding the Morro Bay kangaroo rat, if it still exists, we combed all of California for a wildlife sniffer dog to lead the field search,” said Dr. Chris Kofron, senior fish and wildlife biologist.

Click hyperlink above to read senior fish and wildlife biologist Chris Kofron's story.



*California condor #20 (AC-4) flies free above Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge.
Photo by Beatrix Schwarz.*

California Condor AC-4 Returns to the Wild After 30 Years

A 35-year-old male California condor that served a pivotal role in returning condors to the skies above California for the past 30 years [was returned to the wild by biologists](#) at Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge in Kern County, California.

The condor, known as AC-4, was captured on August 7, 1985, by a team of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) biologists at Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge as part of an effort to prevent extinction of the species. He was one of 22 California condors - the last remaining on Earth - captured between 1983 and 1987 to breed in captivity as part of the Service-led California Condor Recovery Program.

“Watching this California condor, who has been so instrumental to recovery of his species, rejoin the wild flock, is an emotional and historic moment,” said Joseph Brandt, lead condor biologist with Service. “It’s like seeing him come full circle.”

Click the hyperlink above to read the full story.

[Click here for more photos.](#)



Top: Service biologists and volunteer pread the tail feathers on AC-4 to for an ID photo. Photo by USFWS. Bottom: Pasadena Young Birders Club, along with conservation partners at Bitter Creek to view release of California condor. Photo by Anthony Prieto.





Top: Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast with Service and Navy biologists after deploying nest platforms at Point Mugu. Bottom: Biologist Lara Drizd and one of the girl scouts put the finishing touches on securing the nest platform. Photos by USFWS.



Young Women in Science Join Biologists to Help Endangered Wildlife in Ventura County

Last winter, troop members of the Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast [muddied up their first pair of waders](#) with Service biologist to help create nesting habitat for an endangered marsh bird in coastal lagoons in Ventura County. The girls and their parents joined Service and U.S. Navy biologist to launch hand-made nest platforms at low-tide throughout the shallow lagoons at Point Mugu to encourage nesting of the federally endangered light-footed Ridgway's rail, a secretive marsh bird whose numbers have dwindled since the 1980s due to habitat loss along the southern California coast. Last winter, the Girl Scouts built 10 nests using palm fronds and wood platforms with the help of Service and Navy biologists at Camp Arnaz, a Girl Scouts camp near Ojai.

“Our hope is that this hands-on project, which directly supports the recovery of a local endangered species, will inspire these young girls to pursue careers in the sciences and become active stewards of these unique coastal environments and species,” said Mary Root, the Service's Coastal Program coordinator in Ventura. “It's so rewarding to see young women interested in science, and actively making a difference for wildlife in our local community.”

U.S. Navy biologist Martin Ruane placed wildlife cameras inside the nests to monitor their activity this nesting season, which should begin in late February to early March and run through April. “The girls willingness to get muddy, installing the rafts, and see this project to completion, was great. Now it is up to the rails to decide how they want to use these rafts, hopefully to nest or raise their young. Even if they use them to stay safe during high tides or roost at night, it will still be a success, as that too will help with their recovery at Point Mugu.”

Multimedia

[*Watch this video of Girl Scouts and Biologist Placing Nest Platforms at Point Mugu*](#)

[*Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast*](#)

[*Ventura County Star: Girl Scouts, biologists team up to help endangered bird*](#)

Left: Two girls take in the view of the Pacific Ocean from Santa Cruz Island overlook. Right: These kids are ready for their boat ride to the island aboard Island Packers. Photos by USFWS.

Ventura Families Explore Santa Cruz Island for the First Time

This summer, [families served by the Salvation Army Community Center in Ventura](#) boarded the Island Adventure, a large catamaran, headed for Channel Islands National Park on Santa Cruz Island, accompanied by Service biologists and National Park Service park rangers. Around 40 children and parents toured the island while learning about its many endemic plants and animals, as well as conservation efforts by land managers to conserve and restore the island ecosystem.

Service biologists wanted to provide an opportunity for the group to connect with nature in a way that would leave a lasting impression. The group hiked the trails and used binoculars to identify native birds like the Pacific-slope flycatcher and the endemic island scrub-jay. For many of the children, seeing the island foxes so close was their favorite part.

Ten-year-old AJ Graves from Port Hueneme said, “I’m glad I came and saw everything!” Maya Lazos, a mom who accompanied her two daughters Kaya and Lela on the trip, said that she never imagined getting the chance to visit the Channel Islands. “I had never been on a boat before today,” said Lazos.

[See more photos from the trip here.](#)



CELEBRATING OUR PEOPLE AND OUR PARTNERS

We are dedicated to empowering our greatest assets – our people and our partners.

Faces of the Fish and Wildlife Service and Science Woman Campaigns

Through our “Faces of the Fish and Wildlife Service” and “Science Woman” campaigns, we shared the insider’s scoop about the people who carry out the important work of protecting and conserving fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats along the central and southern California coast. This ongoing campaign highlights integral members of our team, as they share in their own words what makes them tick, and how they came to be part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service family.



Lena Chang
Senior Fish and Wildlife Biologist

What led you to a career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?

As a volunteer for a wildlife rehabilitation center, I was too often seeing the direct human impacts on wildlife and knew I wanted to be a part of conservation on a larger scale. To me, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was the ultimate conservation agency, so I went back to school to earn a degree in science with the goal of working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I started work with the Service as a part-time Student Trainee while in school and eventually became a full-time permanent employee.

– Lena Chang, senior fish and wildlife biologist. [Read more about Lena here.](#)

How did you get interested in conservation?

My story is incredibly cliché. I went to Sea World when I was five years old and fell passionately in love with the magnificent creatures that were there. From that moment on, I knew that I wanted to spend my life working with and protecting animals. As an undergraduate student, I volunteered with the Sacramento Zoo and my desire to work with animals grew into a lifelong dedication to helping protect them as well as the ecosystems on which they depend.

– Collette Thogerson, Assistant Field Supervisor. [Read more about Collette here.](#)



Collette Thogerson
Assistant Field Supervisor

Who is your conservation hero or mentor, and why?

I recently had the opportunity to study the accomplishments of former First Lady Lady Bird Johnson. Mrs. Johnson enacted her vision for Americans to take pride in nature and conservation. Mrs. Johnson stepped outside the traditional role of First Lady to lobby for environmental regulations including cleaning up roadways, restoring urban areas with native plants and wildflowers, and establishing and protecting National Wilderness Areas and Parks.

– Chris Diel, senior fish and wildlife biologist. [Read more about Chris here.](#)



Chris Diel
Senior Fish and Wildlife Biologist

Fish and Wildlife Biologist Michael Glenn Nominated for Sense of Wonder Award

This year, on his tenth anniversary with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Glenn was honored by the agency with the regional nomination for the Rachel Carson Sense of Wonder Award, which recognizes individuals who embody the storytelling legacy of Rachel Carson, who more than three decades ago inspired an entire generation to become stewards of our environment.

Glenn smiles as he fondly reminisces about the past ten years and what the nomination means to him. His memory bank overflows with stories upon stories of children, from kindergarteners to new college grads, finding their sense of wonder, in nature. A spark runs through each of them, ignited by an experience or moment in the great outdoors.

“Building a life-long appreciation for nature begins through childhood experiences. It’s remarkable how fortunate we are to live in such a unique part of the world here in southern California,” Glenn said. “By giving opportunities for kids to learn about our co-inhabitants – from the bugs on the plants to the birds in the skies – we can ignite a passion for wild things and wild places that carries on throughout their lives.”

His peers would describe Glenn as both a respected biologist and a kid at heart with an enamored fascination for the creepy crawlies, and furred, feathered, and scaly critters, with which we share our world.

[Read the full story by public affairs specialist Ashley Spratt here.](#)

Multimedia

[California Sportsman Magazine:
SoCal Biologist Dedicated to Getting
Kids Outside](#)

[See more photos of Mike’s work with
kids here.](#)



Left: Outreach specialist Michael Glenn. Right: Native pollinator garden and shorebird lesson. Photos by USFWS.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Honors Team that Saved Foxes on the Northern Channel Islands from Extinction

This spring, the Service [honored our partners](#) at The Nature Conservancy, Channel Islands National Park, Institute for Wildlife Studies, for their remarkable teamwork spanning more than a decade to save island foxes on the northern Channel Islands from a seemingly inevitable fate.

Among the Recovery Champion [award winners honored](#) for their island fox recovery work include David Garcelon of the Institute for Wildlife Studies, Lotus Vermeer, Christina Boser, Eamon O'Byrne, and Scott Morrison of The Nature Conservancy, and Tim Coonan, Kate Faulkner, and Russell Galipeau of Channel Islands National Park.

“Each of these team members, and the organizations they represent, set a vision to bring these island fox subspecies back from the brink,” said Steve Henry, field supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura, during a ceremony in May at Channel Islands National Park. “Because of their tireless dedication to finding a way to save these subspecies, island foxes on San Miguel, Santa Rosa, and Santa Cruz Islands have recovered to self-sustaining levels.”

[Learn about each of the Recovery Champions here.](#)

Recovery Champions Russell Galipeau, Kate Faulkner, Tim Coonan, Christie Boser, Lotus Vermeer, Scott Morrison, David Garcelon, and Eamon O'Byrne. Photo by Ashley Spratt/USFWS.



Western snowy plover chicks. Photos by Santa Barbara Zoo.

New Partnerships with Santa Barbara Zoo and Coal Oil Point Reserve Aids in Western Snowy Plover Rehabilitation and Release

Partnerships between the Service, land managers, and private organizations help support management of important habitat for rare wildlife, like the western snowy plover.

Thanks to a new partnership between the Service, the Santa Barbara Zoo, and the University of California-Santa Barbara, abandoned or injured western snowy plover chicks now have [a new home-away-from-home](#) to get back on their feet before they are released back to the wild at Coal Oil Point Reserve to join their plover peers.

This year, the Santa Barbara Zoo received authorization under a migratory bird rehabilitation permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to acquire and rear injured or abandoned western snowy plovers, before releasing them back into the wild.

[Watch the video of plover chick's being released at Coal Oil Point Reserve.](#)



California brown pelicans. Photo by David Pereksta.

Service Joins Forces with Audubon and Cornell to Lead Citizen Scientists in Coast-Wide Brown Pelican Surveys

An [innovative partnership forged](#) with Audubon California and Cornell Lab of Ornithology led to a first of its kind citizen science survey of brown pelicans this spring and fall in California, Oregon, Washington, and Baja Mexico.

During spring and fall surveys, citizen scientists from across the West coast joined together to count California brown pelicans to help conservationists determine the health of the iconic species. Data collected from these surveys, which will now be held annually, will help scientists and researchers understand how threats to the species, like changes in weather patterns and prey availability, could impact pelican populations over the long term.

“Crowdsourcing data is an excellent way to encourage the public’s love of brown pelicans and get bird lovers out doing what they love — birdwatching,” said Brigid McCormack, executive director of Audubon California, National Audubon Society’s lead office on the survey. “These volunteers are giving us an incredibly detailed view of how this species is doing in the light of threats from climate change and habitat loss.”

Left: California brown pelican. Photo by David Pereksta. Right: School group observes birds at Ventura Harbor. Photo by Ashley Spratt/USFWS.



Read More

[*Santa Barbara Independent: Bird Lovers United to Count Brown Pelicans: Two hour birding blitz was first of its kind and will aid conservation of an iconic species*](#)

Service Presents Conservation Awards to City of San Luis Obispo and Neil Havlik for Natural Resource Stewardship and Endangered Plant Conservation

The Service [recognized the City of San Luis Obispo and former Natural Resources Manager Neil Havlik](#) for outstanding stewardship of natural resources, and in particular for dedicated efforts to help prevent the extinction of the federally endangered Chorro Creek bog thistle (*Cirsium fontinale* var. *obispoense*).

“Successful conservation and preventing the extinction of endangered plants and animals can only be achieved by working alongside our cities, counties and local governments. We have a strong partnership with the City of San Luis Obispo to protect the unique natural resources of the central California coast and I look forward to our continued collaboration,” said Chris Kofron, senior fish and wildlife biologist.



Chorro Creek bog thistle. Photo by USFWS.

Read More

[San Luis Obispo Tribune: San Luis Obispo Receives Conservation Awards for Protecting Endangered Plant](#)

PARTING THOUGHTS

“It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know the sense of wonder and humility.”

“Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life.”

“Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts. There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature -- the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.”

Rachel Carson

“Keep your eyes on the stars and your feet on the ground.”

“Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”

“It is only through labor and painful effort, by grim energy and resolute courage, that we move on to better things.”

Theodore Roosevelt



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