



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

## *Year in Review 2017*

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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*A California red-legged frog sits motionless at McClure pond on Sparling Ranch near Hollister, California. Ashley Spratt/USFWS*



**People / 19**

Our most valuable asset is our people. Read about a few members of our local staff whose fervor and dedication for endangered species conservation and recovery is awe-inspiring.

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Through personal engagement we continue to grow relationships with our neighbors, building a conservation community where we work, live, and play.

*ON THE FRONT COVER:  
Western snowy plovers at  
Malibu Lagoon State Beach.  
Chris Dellith/USFWS*



# A Year in Review

We pride ourselves in solid science as we work with our partners to move the conservation needle forward for the benefit of the fish, wildlife, plants, habitats, and people of the central and southern California coast. This year, we have many successes to celebrate.

For the first time in nearly 70 years, we saw western snowy plovers nesting on beaches in Los Angeles County, a testament to the perseverance of land managers who work to educate beachgoers and implement on-the-ground restoration.

Along with our state partners, we rescued a population of rare fish from near certain extinction from the damaging effects of wildfire. We then released them back into the wild where they have since been documented successfully breeding.

We worked alongside volunteers within our community to document bird and marine mammal mortalities along our coastline, which provided critical data during a domoic acid event and continues to help us understand the long-term impacts of the Refugio oil spill.

With our partners at the University of California, we broke ground on a restoration project to convert a former golf course into a productive wetland, which will not only provide habitat for wildlife, but will provide a place for visitors to enjoy and explore nature.

We worked diligently and collaboratively with a private landowner to develop and implement vigorous conservation measures for a plant species once thought to be extinct and currently a candidate for listing under the ESA.

And, we approved the first Conservation Bank bordering San Benito and Santa Clara counties, which will permanently protect more than 2,000 acres of habitat for two rare amphibian species while a family's ranching legacy lives on.

At the end of a robust year of conservation, we can be proud that our passion and perseverance made a difference for the living things that call this beautiful stretch of coastline home. It is because of the tenacity, grace, and enthusiasm of our team, that I am so proud to work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Thank you.

*Stephen P. Henry*  
Stephen P. Henry

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[fws.gov/ventura/newsroom](https://fws.gov/ventura/newsroom)

# Conservation in Action

## Endangered Southern California fish saved after population threatened by fire

One hundred and fifty-one unarmored threespine sticklebacks were rereleased into the wild in Los Angeles County in April 2017 after a summer fire forced an emergency rescue of the endangered fish.

“These fish already face an uphill battle in the fight against extinction. By rescuing these fish from near-certain death, we gave them a fighting chance against the odds,” said Chris Dellith,

a senior fish and wildlife biologist with the Service in Ventura. “Finally being able to release them back into the wild was a meaningful moment for us all.”

In June 2016 the Sand Fire burned more than 41,000 acres adjacent to Soledad Canyon, near Santa Clarita, California, threatening a population of unarmored threespine sticklebacks with ash and sediment flow from impending winter rains, which

*“By rescuing these fish from near-certain death, we gave them a fighting chance against the odds.”*



*Eric Morrissette (l), a senior fish and wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, takes notes on water quality from Jennifer Pareti, an environmental scientist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), as Abram Tucker, a scientific aid with the CDFW, watches. Robyn Gerstenslager/USFWS*



*An unarmored threespine stickleback swims in new habitat after release.*  
Photo courtesy of Tim Hovey/CDFW

create a toxic environment for the fish. A team of biologists and scientists from the Service and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) conducted an emergency rescue of the fish in October 2016 knowing that the next rain could wipe out the population entirely.

“We knew that either we do something and pull those fish out of there, or the next rain we get is going to just wash debris and ash down [the canyon] and kill them all,” said Tim Hovey, a senior environmental scientist, specialist, with the CDFW’s South Coast Region Inland Fisheries Program.

The rescued unarmored threespine sticklebacks were transported to the CDFW’s Fillmore Fish Hatchery for safe keeping. A creek in the Angeles National Forest was identified as suitable habitat and the team determined it was time to return the fish to the wild.

*“We are hopeful that we will be able to find more sites like this to help achieve the recovery goals.”*

“Finding sites that can sustain unarmored threespine sticklebacks are few and far between in the [Santa Clara River] watershed,” said Eric Morrissette, a senior fish and wildlife biologist with the Service in Ventura. “We are hopeful that we will be able to find more sites like this to help achieve the recovery goals.”

Unarmored threespine sticklebacks, which are native to southern California, are listed as federally endangered under the Endangered Species Act, and are an endangered and fully protected species by the state of California.

They are a unique freshwater subspecies of threespine stickleback, which are typically common in marine environments.

The team will continue to monitor the unarmored threespine sticklebacks reintroduced into the wild and hope the fish will soon breed and move toward creating a self-sustaining population.

Read the feature story:  
<https://go.usa.gov/xnk65>

Visit the photo gallery:  
<https://flic.kr/s/aHskVKpiME>

IN THE NEWS!



## Salinas children restoring Monterey's coastal dunes

Seven-year-old Mairenee delicately places the tiny coastal dune plant into the sand with care not to damage its fragile roots. In her eyes one can see determination, admiration, and even hope in returning this small patch of earth back to its natural state.

“I like that we’re helping save the plover. They can run so fast while they’re finding food. We’re going to help them have more food with the plants. But it’s sad that there are less of them than some of the other animals,” she said.

Mairenee joins more than 30 of her classmates on an early spring morning in 2017 at Monterey State Beach as part of the Return of the Natives volunteer brigade, a non-profit organization dedicated to dune restoration run by California State University, Monterey Bay. The mission of Return of the Natives

is to bring nature closer to people, and people closer to nature, through hands-on experiences.

“Our biggest goal is to get people out in their community, helping with habitat restoration, helping clean up their local parks - giving them that [feeling of] ownership that where we live is a very special place,” said Marina Maze, program coordinator with the Return of the Natives Restoration Education Project.

In 2015, Return of the Natives received a big boost with nearly \$74,000 in funding from the Service’s Coastal Program, allowing every second and third grade class at Santa Rita to contribute to the dune restoration planting projects.

Service fish and wildlife biologist Shawn Milar works with landowners to implement voluntary habitat restoration and conservation projects



*Second graders from Santa Rita Elementary School follow Return of the Natives Program Coordinator Marina Maze at Monterey State Beach.*  
Ashley Spratt/USFWS

in the greater Monterey region. By establishing partnerships with local agencies and organizations, like CSU Monterey Bay and the Return of the Natives, he leverages resources to support habitat conservation planning and carrying out on-the-ground restoration.

“The plovers don’t ask for much,” said Milar. “They need simple beach and dune habitat to carry out their daily and annual life-cycles of feeding, resting, and producing young. They just need the space to do so, without the impacts of predators and human disturbance.”

As part of the Return of the Natives program, college students and volunteers teach the children about the western snowy plover, Smith’s blue butterfly, and other plants and wildlife that they are helping by planting coastal dune plants at Monterey State Beach.



*Coastal dune plants at the Return of the Natives Greenhouse.* Ashley Spratt/USFWS



*U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Shawn Milar lends a helping hand to a second grader from Santa Rita Elementary School.*  
Ashley Spratt/USFWS

By involving the entire community through both public and school planting events, Return of the Natives is committed not only to propagating native plants to restore the dune ecosystem of Monterey Bay, but to growing future generations of environmental stewards.

Milar said, “On the surface, helping something that needs help, like the plover, makes people, including children, feel good and gives hope.”

*Read the feature story:*  
<https://go.usa.gov/xnkzX>

*Visit the photo gallery:*  
<https://flic.kr/s/aHskRFeoal>

*Watch the video:*  
<https://youtu.be/yUU8UCp-y2E>

## Where cattle graze and salamanders roam

*Sparling Ranch Conservation Bank a win-win for ranchers, developers, wildlife*

Amidst the rolling grasslands and oak woodlands of Santa Clara and San Benito counties lies Sparling Ranch, just outside the small town of Hollister, California. On warm summer days, herds of cattle graze on the sloping hillsides.

During nighttime winter rains, small, brightly-colored amphibians called California tiger salamanders leave the protection of ground squirrel burrows to make the trek to stock-ponds that dot the landscape. There, they breed with their mates and keep company with another rare amphibian, the California red-legged frog. As their names suggest, both species are endemic to California, and both are protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

At Sparling Ranch, cattle, salamanders, and frogs peacefully coexist, and will continue to for years to come. Cattle ranching and healthy habitat for these native, rare amphibians prove to go hand in hand, explains U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) biologist Jeff Phillips.

“California tiger salamanders historically used naturally occurring ponds in valley bottoms to breed. But those valley bottoms also became attractive to people, and over time, many of the ponds were drained permanently and bulldozed over to make way for houses or farms,” Phillips explains. “Ranching in the foothills, however, provided large, contiguous open spaces, including grassland and chaparral habitat ideal for salamanders. The stock ponds that were built by ranchers became suitable breeding grounds for the salamanders and frogs that were pushed out of the valleys.”

Through the establishment of the Sparling Ranch Conservation Bank, more than 2,000 acres of valuable habitat will be permanently protected for California tiger salamanders and California red-legged frogs, including 14 breeding ponds, while the Sparling family continues to raise and graze cattle on their land.

Tom and Ed Sparling are cousins and reminisce about the history amidst these hills, where their families have ranched, hunted, and fished for six generations. Their great-great grandfather was the infamous T.S. Hawkins, who traveled hundreds of miles by wagon from Missouri to California and originally settled the land at the turn of the century.

“It’s been a good thing,” Tom says of establishment of the bank. “We’re keeping the property in the family. By treading lightly on the land, not overgrazing, and developing water, we were already managing the land in a way that was good for these species.”

A herd of cattle kicks up dust underneath a beautiful old bay tree as Tom parks his truck a few hundred yards from McClure pond. According to biologists, McClure pond is one of the most productive California red-legged frog ponds in the area.

In exchange for permanently protecting the land and managing it for these species, the Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife approve a specified number of species credits that the conservation bank may sell to project developers in surrounding areas to mitigate project impacts on federally protected species as required under the ESA.

Sparling Ranch is just 50 miles south of the bustling Silicon Valley. For developers in the Hollister area and beyond, the Sparling Ranch Conservation Bank provides a simple, economical opportunity to save both time and money while ensuring their project doesn’t negatively impact a species’ chance at recovery. Developers with projects in designated service areas stretching from Alameda County southward to Kern County may be authorized to purchase credits in the bank.



*Tom Sparling (left) and Ed Sparling (right) are among more than six generations of Sparling family members who have run Sparling Ranch near Hollister, California, since the turn of the century. Ashley Spratt/USFWS*





*This mid-winter view shows the grasslands that dominate Sparling Ranch, with interspersed drainages supporting oak woodland.*  
Photo courtesy of Steve Rottenborn

Michael Anderson is a property developer and established South Bay Conservation Resources to work with landowners and state and federal officials to identify high quality habitat for rare wildlife that could be preserved as part of regulatory compliance for property development. Anderson's team is developing Santana Ranch, a master planned community in Hollister with a variety of homes, parks, and a school, and will be the first to purchase credits in the conservation bank.

"We saw there would be an increasing need for conserving California tiger salamander and California red-legged frog habitat, so we searched for properties with high-quality habitat until we found Sparling Ranch," Anderson says.

Phillips coordinates the Service's Conservation Banking program along the central California coast and says that conservation banks can achieve strategic conservation over a large area of the landscape. Land conservation opportunities can be sought out in the most valuable habitat for recovering the species and conserved by selling credits to offset impacts to less important habitat by development projects elsewhere in the species' range.

"If you're a housing developer, you don't typically specialize in biology or ecological restoration," Phillips says. "Developers that I've worked with have appreciated conservation banks as a mitigation option, because they can simply purchase credits and know their project is in compliance with the ESA, and get back to their work," he explains.

Read the feature story:  
<https://go.usa.gov/xn89H>

Visit the photo gallery:  
<https://flic.kr/s/aHsm6TjCUn>



*A large California tiger salamander larva being measured during a monitoring survey on Sparling Ranch.*  
Photo courtesy of Jeff Wilkinson

## Over \$3M in federal grants support community-focused coastal restoration effort

The University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB), the Service, and an array of conservation partners broke ground in April 2017 to officially mark the start of a planned ecological restoration of a former golf course in Goleta.

The Service's Endangered Species Recovery Land Acquisition Program granted the state of California and the university \$500,000 toward acquisition of the property. An additional \$3 million in matching funds from the Service's National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grants Program was awarded to assist with land acquisition as well as planning, design and the restoration itself.

Funds from the Endangered Species Recovery Land Acquisition Program are appropriated by Congress to help in the acquisition of land and water resources crucial to the recovery of threatened or endangered species. Monies from the National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grants Program come from boaters and anglers who pay a federal excise tax on their sport fishing equipment and fuel for their boats. Both funds are designed to assist states and other agencies in the shared mission to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the benefit of the surrounding community.

"We're honored to work alongside conservation partners like UCSB," said Steve Henry, Ventura FWO field supervisor. "Without their persistent and genuine commitment to our shared cause of conservation, projects like this might not come to fruition. I'm happy to take part in this groundbreaking and am humbled by the people whose herculean efforts have brought us here today, and who will see this project through, for the benefit of the local community."

UCSB is working to revive and preserve wetlands on the upper Devereux Slough, which some 50 years ago was filled with soil to make way for Ocean Meadows Golf Course. With the integration of adjacent uplands, the 136-acre parcel now known as North Campus Open Space (NCOS) will ultimately open to the public coastal habitat and trails extending three miles along the Ellwood Devereux coast by connecting several existing preserved properties. Its restoration will see it become part of a 650-acre expanse of coastal habitats now being preserved, and opened for public access, in perpetuity.

The project has additional public support at regional and state levels. To date, UCSB has secured grants totaling more than \$15 million to help restore the estuarine and adjacent mesa ecosystem.

*"We're honored to work alongside conservation partners like UCSB. Without their persistent and genuine commitment to our shared cause of conservation, projects like this might not come to fruition."*



*North Campus Open Space, the site of an ecological restoration of a former golf course near Santa Barbara. Photo courtesy of Matt Perko/UCSB*

“The grants each have a slight permutation about what their priorities are, but it’s neat how the project as a whole is complex enough to have all those angles — this is truly a multi-benefit project,” said Lisa Stratton, the director of ecosystem management at UCSB’s Cheadle Center for Biodiversity & Ecological Restoration (CCBER) and part of the NCOS Project Committee. “It’s unprecedented to have the ability to bring back almost 40 acres of coastal estuarine wetland. Most of them have been turned into airports and uses you could never undo. With the crowding of urban areas, these open spaces are also important for their psychological and spiritual value to human health.”



Steve Henry, Field Supervisor of the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office, speaks during the groundbreaking ceremony. Ashley Spratt/USFWS

Visit the photo gallery:  
<https://flic.kr/s/aHskTJ3mtQ>



Federal, state and local agencies break ground on the University of California, Santa Barbara North Campus Open Space restoration project. Ashley Spratt/USFWS



## Rare, tiny shorebird nests on Los Angeles County beaches for first time in nearly 70 years

For the first time in nearly 70 years, western snowy plovers are nesting on Los Angeles County beaches.

The first nest was found on April 18 on Santa Monica State Beach, followed by discovery of a nest on Dockweiler State Beach on April 27, and two nests on Malibu Lagoon State Beach on April 28 and May 4. The nests were discovered by monitors with Los Angeles Audubon and The Bay Foundation.

Following their discovery, Service biologists installed small wire cages around each nest to protect the eggs from predators and human disturbance.

“This is a sign that, against all odds, western snowy plovers are making a comeback, and we really need the cooperation of beachgoers to help give them the space they need to nest and raise their young,” said senior fish and wildlife biologist Chris Dellith

with the Service’s Ventura FWO. “I’m hopeful that we can find a balance between beach recreation and habitat restoration, which will allow humans and shorebirds like the western snowy plover to peacefully exist along our coastline.”

*“I’m hopeful that we can find a balance between beach recreation and habitat restoration.”*

Although western snowy plovers use beaches in Los Angeles County for roosting during the winter, the last documented active nest in the county was in 1949 at Manhattan Beach.

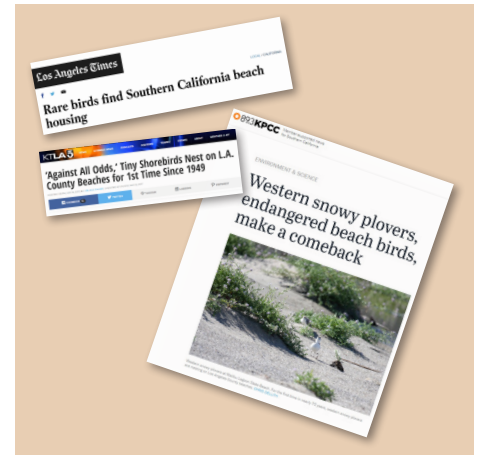
The Pacific coast population of western snowy plover inhabits the coastline from Baja California, Mexico, north to Washington. Plovers are about six inches long and weigh up to two ounces. Breeding and nesting season extends from March to September. They lay their eggs in small depressions in the sandy area of beaches with easy access to the water.

The Pacific coast population of western snowy plover was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1993, because of habitat loss, impacts from non-native predators, and other factors. At the time of listing, the California population was estimated to be about 1,300 adults. In 2016, the population was estimated to have increased to a little more than 1,800 adults.



Western snowy plover eggs on Santa Monica State Beach. Chris Dellith/USFWS

### IN THE NEWS!





*Western snowy plovers at Malibu Lagoon State Beach. Chris Dellith/USFWS*

Following the plover's listing under the ESA, numerous conservation partners have come together to support plover recovery, including restoring habitat and managing nesting areas to minimize disturbance to the birds.

In Los Angeles County, the plovers have benefitted from a variety of conservation partners including California State Parks, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, The Bay Foundation, Los Angeles

Audubon, Santa Monica Bay Audubon, the City of Santa Monica, the Los Angeles County Department of Beaches and Harbors, Cooper Ecological Monitoring, and Ryan Ecological Consulting.

The original Santa Monica State Beach nest was located in a 3-acre area being restored to a healthy coastal ecosystem by The Bay Foundation <santamonicaabay.org> and City of Santa Monica to improve natural shoreline habitat.

Watch "*The Snowy Plover and You*" video:

<https://vimeo.com/215107829>

## Walking the beach in the name of science

Type the word “beachcomber” into any web browser and a variety of information appears: quaint bed and breakfasts along the California coast, a pub in Oregon, or even the 1954 movie, “The Beachcomber,” about a mismatched group of Europeans living on remote islands in the Indian Ocean. You will also find the definition of the word according to dictionary.com, which, somewhat surprisingly, is “a person who lives by gathering salable articles of jetsam, refuse, etc., from beaches.”

In 1997 the Moss Landing Marine Laboratories (MLML) and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary offered up a new definition of beachcomber when, along with other state and research institutions, they began the Beach Coastal Ocean Mammal/Bird Education and Research Surveys (COMBERS) program. The program enlists the help of trained volunteers who comb the beach not in search of seashells or other trinkets, but instead look for deceased marine mammals or birds.

While this may not be everyone’s ideal day at the beach, the basic scientific information gathered by these volunteers contributes to long-term data that biologists from nongovernmental and government



Service biologist Lena Chang, far right, discusses BeachCOMBERS protocols with volunteers. Robyn Gerstenslager/USFWS



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Lena Chang surveys Hollywood Beach in Oxnard, California. Robyn Gerstenslager/USFWS

organizations can use to determine the overall health of a marine sanctuary or coastline. The program is essential to understanding “normal” rates of bird and mammal deposition, so that when a natural or human-caused event kills birds and mammals, scientists can understand the size and scope of the mortality event.

“The data contributes significantly to documenting and quantifying impacts to marine wildlife such as, starvation and unusual mortality events, wildlife disease outbreaks, marine debris interactions including entanglement mortalities and plastic ingestion research, harmful algal bloom-related mortalities, and oiled wildlife,” said Erica Donnelly-Greenan, a marine ecologist and program supervisor who manages the BeachCOMBERS program once a week as an MLML, San Jose State University Foundation employee. Donnelly-Greenan added that the data has also been used in research projects and contributed to data for MLML graduate students, including her own.

Service fish and wildlife biologist Kendra Chan surveys Hollywood Beach in Oxnard, California. She uses her marine biology education background and identification booklets provided to each volunteer team when she encounters deceased wildlife.

“I got involved because I think it’s really important to know what’s happening on our local coastline, and I really support citizen science efforts that promote professional scientists like myself and other citizens to work together to monitor the coastline,” Chan said.

Read the feature story:  
<https://go.usa.gov/xn9FM>

Visit the photo gallery:  
<https://flic.kr/s/aHsm5G7fXs>

## From the beach to the mountains: Bishop Paiute Firstbloom program

From the sandy beaches of Ventura County to the wilds of Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, the Bishop Paiute's Firstbloom science program inspires young tribal youth to be stewards of their environment while celebrating their tribal culture with local fish and wildlife biologists. The Firstbloom program provides environmental education to fourth and fifth grade students and strives to provide hands-on opportunities for children to learn about native ecosystems while encouraging use of our public lands.

This summer young tribal leaders adventured with local Service fish and wildlife biologists during a camping trip in Ventura County.

While students learned about the coastal resources and endangered species that make the California coast so unique, a team of local biologists learned about the rich history of their tribal culture. The group camped overnight at Ventura's local state beaches to learn about shorebirds and our coastal ecosystem, and had the once in a lifetime experience of seeing California condors in the wild at Hopper Mountain NWR.

Visit the photo gallery:  
<https://flic.kr/s/aHsm2nh8SF>



*Inspired by their first sighting of wild California condors, Firstbloom students plant juncus and dogbane, versatile plants important to the Chumash tribe, a local tribe that holds special significance for California condors. Hazel Rodriguez/USFWS*



*Service biologist Jenny Marek leads a beach walk. "I love the challenge of explaining complex ecological processes in a way that will hopefully capture the imagination of some of these kids so they may feel a connection to the natural world," Marek said. Hazel Rodriguez/USFWS*

## Pasadena teams up with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to celebrate monarch butterflies at Dia de los Muertos Festival

The Service joined the City of Pasadena, Friends of Washington Park, and the Audubon Society to celebrate one of the most recognizable species of wildlife in all of America – the monarch butterfly at the Dia de los Muertos Monarch Butterfly Festival in October 2017. The monarch butterfly plays a significant role in the cultural tradition of Dia de los Muertos, an annual celebration honoring the memory of loved ones who have passed away.

Throughout the day, people celebrated the monarch butterfly with food, live music, arts and craft activities about monarch biology, native pollinators and plants, and educational stations about the monarch butterfly life cycle and migration. Children created an “ancestor’s tree” by writing the names of loved ones on the wings of paper butterflies and had the opportunity to get their hands dirty by adding plants and seeds to Washington Park’s native pollinator garden. The garden was designed and built by students, Friends of Washington Park, and Service biologists to provide habitat for the monarch butterflies, pollinators, and other wildlife.

Monarch butterflies undertake one of the world’s most remarkable and fascinating migrations, traveling thousands of miles over many generations from Mexico, across the United States, to Canada. In Hispanic and Latino culture, the monarch butterflies represent the spirits of ancestors who are returning to Earth for their annual visit.

Monarch butterflies are in trouble. Threats, including loss of native milkweed habitats and overwintering sites, are having a devastating impact on their populations and the 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. The Service is now in the process of considering the monarch for listing as endangered or threatened.

of environmental problems that also pose risks to food production; the spectacular natural places that help define our national identity, and our own health. Conserving and connecting habitat for monarchs will benefit many other plants and animals, including critical insect and avian pollinators, and future generations of Americans.



Mayor Terry Tornek and Friends of Washington Park group award U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists Mike Glenn (far left) and Lara Drizd (far right), and Master Gardener Kristy Brauch for their efforts to conserve the monarch butterfly. Hazel Rodriguez/USFWS

Milkweed provides vital habitat for monarch butterflies to lay their eggs, and for their caterpillars to eat. Planting local native milkweed versus tropical milkweed also provides leaf material during time periods appropriate for the monarch butterfly’s life cycle and migration further supporting conservation in our region of North America.

The state of monarch butterflies reflects the health of the American landscape and its pollinators. Monarch butterfly declines are symptomatic

Read the full story:  
<https://go.usa.gov/xn8Ft>

Visit the photo gallery:  
<https://flic.kr/s/aHsm7LFjNA>





A mother and daughter at the Dia de los Muertos Monarch Butterfly Festival in Pasadena. Hazel Rodriguez/USFWS

## People from across the globe flock to western monarch butterfly grove in Pismo Beach

Each winter, monarch butterflies west of the Rocky Mountains begin their flight to the California coast to roost amidst groves of eucalyptus, Monterey cypress and Monterey pine. The Monarch Butterfly Grove at Pismo Beach is one of the largest monarch overwintering sites in California.

To celebrate the journey and bring awareness to recent monarch butterfly declines, California State Parks hosts Western Monarch Day each February. This year Service biologists joined the celebration to educate the public about threats to monarch butterflies and how to support monarch conservation in their own backyards.

Hazel Rodriguez interviews Service biologist Lara Drizd during the annual Western Monarch Day celebration to learn why thousands of butterflies and people flock here each winter, and how you can support the monarch migration.

Watch the video:  
<https://flic.kr/p/RH6JXM>

Visit the photo gallery:  
<https://flic.kr/s/aHskU1czaZ>



Monarch butterflies warm their wings.  
 Hazel Rodriguez/USFWS

## Service releases Candidate Conservation Agreement to promote conservation of San Fernando Valley spineflower

In November 2017, the Service completed a Candidate Conservation Agreement (CCA) for the San Fernando Valley spineflower, a plant species in southern California that has been proposed for listing as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The CCA is a voluntary conservation agreement between the Service and Newhall Land and Farming Company that plans measures to address threats and conserve the species, and monitor the effectiveness of those measures.

“The on-the-ground measures outlined in the CCA will go a long way toward furthering conservation of the San Fernando Valley spineflower by establishing two new self-sustaining populations and protecting important habitat within the species’ range,” said Cat Darst, Assistant Field Supervisor of the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office. “We appreciate our long-term partnership with Newhall Land and Farming Company and look forward to the progress that will be made toward conservation of the species.”



*San Fernando Valley spineflower.* Colleen Draguesku/USFWS

The San Fernando Valley spineflower CCA describes a strategy to establish new, protected populations of the plant within its historical range and increase the resiliency of existing populations. Newhall Land and Farming Company will voluntarily conserve an additional 1,498 acres of its property for the benefit of the spineflower and carry out conservation activities within portions of these lands and within a portion of the Petersen Ranch Mitigation Bank. Spineflower introduction will occur on a total of at least 10 acres within the conservation areas. The conservation actions will result in at least two new, self-sustaining spineflower populations across the range of the species.

“FivePoint is proud to partner with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to further conserve the San Fernando Valley spineflower,” said Emile Haddad, FivePoint Chairman and Chief Executive Officer. “This agreement continues our efforts on Newhall Ranch to conserve natural resources, and expands on our commitment to the spineflower.” FivePoint is the Aliso Viejo-based parent company of Newhall Land and Farming Company.

*Read the full story:*  
<https://go.usa.gov/xnp8r>

## Annual southern sea otter population survey

*Despite small population dip, species moves a step closer to recovery*



*A southern sea otter settles down to rest in a small patch of feather boa kelp.*  
Lilian Carswell/USFWS

Biologists with the Service work alongside conservation partners to conserve and protect the southern sea otter, a federally listed threatened species found in California. Scientists with our sister agency, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), calculate a population index annually through a range-wide field survey to inform and guide species conservation and management.

According to data released this September by the USGS and partners, the three-year average of the total counts of southern sea otters was down from last year's high, although it exceeded the Service's delisting threshold for a second straight year. Researchers surveyed sea otter populations along the mainland coast, from Pigeon Point in the north to Gaviota State Park in the south, and also the distinct population at San Nicolas Island in the southern California Bight.

"Conservation efforts over the past century have resulted in the southern sea otter's growth from a tiny remnant population of about 50 animals to the much larger one we see today, where the population index has exceeded 3,090 for the second consecutive year, said Lilian Carswell, Southern Sea Otter Recovery Coordinator for the Service. "That growth has been very encouraging, and we hope to see similar successes at the range ends as strategies evolve to overcome threats from shark bite mortality. Range expansion is essential not only for long-term resilience of the subspecies, but also for restoration of the nearshore marine ecosystems where southern sea otters historically occurred."

Detailed survey results and maps are available online <<https://go.usa.gov/xnnJ8>> in the "Spring 2017 California Sea Otter Census Summary."

Read the full story:  
<https://go.usa.gov/xn8tC>

## Federal and state wildlife officials monitor higher than usual bird and marine mammal strandings along Southern California beaches

Wildlife officials and members of the public saw higher than usual numbers of stranded or dead marine mammals and birds along Santa Barbara County and Ventura County beaches in early summer 2017. The Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the USGS National Wildlife Health Center worked together to document the size and scope of affected wildlife and mortalities. Stranding reports included loons, grebes, cormorants, California brown pelicans, and California sea lions. Marine mammals and birds showed signs of poisoning from domoic acid, which is a naturally produced toxin caused by a marine algae that can create large algal blooms commonly known as red-tide.

### IN THE NEWS!



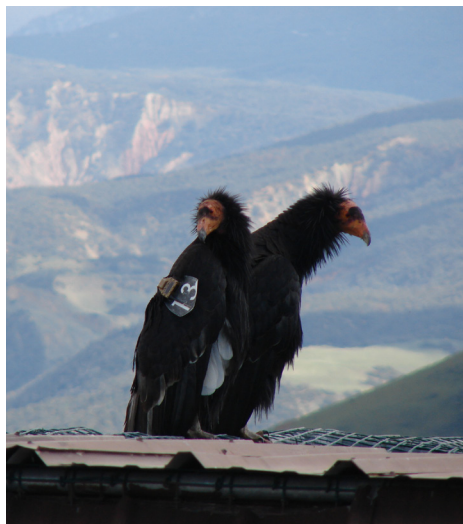
## California Condor Recovery Program

*Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex*

### California condor cam connects people around the world with condor family in the wild

For the third year in a row, people across the globe had the opportunity to get up-close-and-personal with an endangered California condor chick through livestreaming video of a California condor nest this past spring and summer. The chick and its parents live in the remote mountains near Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in Ventura County, California.

“We are excited to share with the world another view into a California condor nest, and allow the public a glimpse into the day-to-day activities of these amazing birds,” said Joseph Brandt, supervisory wildlife biologist with the Service’s Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex.



*California condors #513 and #206, whose nest and chick were featured in this year’s livestreaming nest camera.*  
Stephanie Herrera/USFWS Intern

“The livestreaming nest camera allows people from around the world to personally connect with these magnificent and endangered birds, and learn what is needed to save them.”

“Webcam viewers will see the rich social interactions of these intelligent birds, such as the two adults sharing parental duties, and their interactions with each other and the chick,” said Dr. Estelle Sandhaus, director of conservation and research at the Santa Barbara Zoo. “Condor chicks actually engage in ‘play,’ by pouncing on and grabbing feathers and sticks, for instance. It’s a thrill to watch the chick grow, learn, and play under the watchful eyes of its dedicated parents.”

Last year’s livestreaming video of a California condor chick hatching gained worldwide attention – nearly 1 million views from 150 countries and 19 million minutes, or 36 years of watch time.

“Nest cameras like this one were first used as a management tool to help biologists monitor the nests for problems, like lead poisoning and micro trash ingestion, so that we could intervene on behalf of the chicks if needed,” said Brandt. “After watching the footage we realized that it was also an incredible opportunity to show the world just how caring and attentive condor parents can be, not to mention the comical behaviors of the chicks.”

Conservation efforts toward the recovery of the California condor are achieved only through partnerships amongst federal, state and private agencies. The Hopper Mountain NWR nest camera is made possible through the financial and technical support of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Santa Barbara Zoo, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund, and Friends of California Condors Wild and Free.



*California condors #513 and #206 with their chick, #871, as seen from the livestreaming nest camera.* USFWS

#### IN THE NEWS!



# Celebrating Our People

**O**ur Faces of the Fish and Wildlife Service campaign shares 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.

We asked Hazel, Nicholas, and Raphaela to tell us about their conservation heroes. Read on to hear what they had to say.

## **Hazel Rodriguez**

*Information & Education Assistant*

“One name comes to mind from growing up near the Everglades in Miami: Marjory Stoneman Douglas. Marjory was an influential writer and activist, and quite possibly, the savior of the Everglades. She was known to be energetic and was quite the hoot according to her close friends (I can relate). She lived to be 108 years old.”

*Read more about Hazel here:*

<https://go.usa.gov/xn9Kk>





**Nicholas Rothfus**  
*Administrative Assistant*

“My conservation heroes are all of the volunteers in the Ocean Resources Enhancement and Hatchery Program. I was introduced to the program in 2013, and have worked with them ever since. The hatchery provides juvenile white seabass to 13 grow-out facilities operated by volunteers throughout Southern California. The fish are held at the grow-out facilities until they are ready for release - typically at around eight to 10 inches in length. In 2015 I was credited with recovering the oldest tagged fish in the program, providing more than 15 years of valuable data about the local seabass population.”

*Read more about Nicholas here:*  
<https://go.usa.gov/xn9kr>



**Raphaela Ware**  
*Fish and Wildlife Biologist*

“There are so many people who have inspired me throughout this journey. Jane Goodall is one of my earliest inspirations; being a strong female scientist and conservation activist, who took an unconventional path and has been such a successful conservationist. I also consider Todd Boonstra at the Bowdoin National Wildlife Refuge to be a great mentor; for so willingly taking me under his wing and shared his kindness, knowledge, and experiences. He opened my eyes to the application of everything I’ve learned and helped merge my education with experience. I continue to be grateful for Rick Cantu from the National Conservation Training Center and the many peers and friends I made during my fellowship. My professors, colleagues, and friends at Humboldt State University continue to inspire and teach me in the field of science.”

*Read more about Raphaela here:*  
<https://go.usa.gov/xn9kT>

# Celebrating Our Community

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service honors local conservation heroes

The Service is dedicated to empowering our local communities and our partners. We are proud to work alongside organizations like Santa Barbara Zoo, Coal Oil Point Reserve, and Island Packers in our mission to save threatened and endangered fish, wildlife, and plants along the southern and central California coastline, and we look forward to what we can achieve together in years to come.

This year, the Service honored these three conservation partners whose collaboration and innovation has supported the conservation of rare

wildlife and brought awareness to the threats facing animals native to the southern and central California coast.

“Our true strength lies in the synergy of our partnerships,” said Steve Henry, field supervisor of the Ventura FWO.

*Read more about our 2017 conservation heroes:*

<https://go.usa.gov/xn9Fb>



### Santa Barbara Zoo

The Santa Barbara Zoo, while home to more than 140 exotic and native species, places special emphasis on outreach, education, and research that benefits local, rare wildlife. Zoo CEO Rich Block champions the Zoo’s commitment to local conservation efforts.

“As all accredited zoos and aquariums are required to engage in research and conservation work that benefits wildlife, it was so clear that the Santa Barbara

Zoo should be involved in the conservation of local species of special concern, especially those that are threatened or endangered,” said Block. “Being situated in one of the world’s biodiversity hot spots, the Zoo can capitalize on its location to participate in meaningful and productive ways to help ensure a future for many of these protected species.”

Over the past two decades, the Zoo has partnered with the Service on research and recovery for federally threatened or endangered species, from the California red-legged frog and island fox to the California condor and western snowy plover.

*In the photo: (l-r) Santa Barbara Zoo Conservation and Research Associate Devon Pryor, Director of Conservation and Research Estelle Sandhaus, CEO Rich Block, and Curator - Birds and Records Rachel Ritchason accept an award from Ventura FWO Field Supervisor Steve Henry (center). Ashley Spratt/USFWS*



### Island Packers

Over the past four years, the Service has worked with Island Packers to collect valuable information about California brown pelicans that will help inform future conservation and management actions for this beautiful seabird. We honored Educator Coordinator Andrea Mills and the Island Packers team for not only their role in the collection of this important data, but also their role as storytellers who share stories of conservation success to the many visitors who visit the Channel Islands National Park and tour the Santa Barbara Channel each and every day.

*In the photo: Ventura FWO and Hopper Mountain NWRC staff with Island Packers staff.  
Robyn Gerstenslager/USFWS*

### Coal Oil Point Reserve

We honored UCSB's Coal Oil Point Reserve for many decades of active management and conservation efforts to promote the recovery of the federally threatened western snowy plover. Sands Beach at Coal Oil Point Reserve provides important breeding and wintering habitat for the federally threatened western snowy plover. While the area is open to the public all year, portions of the dry sandy beach are closed off to reduce disturbance from visitors near the wintering and nesting plovers. Docents of Coal Oil Point Reserve keep a watchful eye on the nesting birds and educate visitors about what activities to avoid while enjoying the beach.

Activities like kite-flying and dog-walking, can disturb these nesting birds, causing the adults to abandon their nests and leave their eggs or chicks vulnerable to foxes, crows, ravens and other predators.

“Coal Oil Point Reserve offers one of the few places where plovers can be safely observed while nesting, with docents keeping a close watch on both visitors and the birds. People who experience this rare opportunity become ambassadors for the plovers,” said Reserve Director Cristina Sandoval.

*In the photo: Cristina Sandoval (l), director of Coal Oil Point Reserve, and Jessica Nielsen, conservation specialist, accept an award from Ventura FWO Field Supervisor Steve Henry. Ashley Spratt/USFWS*





## Connecting People to Nature

We connect kids, parents, teachers, and community members with nature every day. This year, we reached 5,200 people at more than 60 local community presentations or events. By engaging volunteers, students, parents, and teachers, and community groups, we're educating the next generation of conservation stewards. Our partnerships with non-traditional community groups like the Salvation Army, Girls Girl Club, Big Brothers

Big Sisters, Bishop Pauite Firstbloom Program, 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.

## Connect with Us

STAY CONNECTED!



@VenturaFWO



@USFWSVentura



*Service biologist Lara Drizd leads some of the young ladies of the FirstBloom on a nature walk providing an immersive learning experience allowing the girls to touch, smell, and listen to the nature that surrounds them. Hazel Rodriguez/USFWS*

*Public affairs specialist Ashley Spratt tests the conservation knowledge of kids and adults at the Women in Science festival at the Libbey Bowl in Ojai, California.*  
Robyn Gerstenslager/USFWS



*Wildlife biologist Jenny Marek talks about western snowy plover conservation at the Earth Focus Environmental Film Festival at the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood, California.*  
Hazel Rodriguez/USFWS





*A student from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ventura County spots a seabird during a Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office-led nature walk.*  
Robyn Gerstenslager/USFWS



*Students from Curren Elementary School in Oxnard, California learn about native plants, like this purple sage, during a Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office-led nature walk.*  
Robyn Gerstenslager/USFWS

*ON THE BACK COVER:  
Monarch butterflies warm their wings.  
Hazel Rodriguez/USFWS*

