



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

2020 Year in Review

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

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Nipomo Mesa lupine. Courtesy Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo



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Based in Ventura, our biologists and natural resource professionals work across the southern and central California coast in Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, Santa Barbara and Ventura counties; portions of Los Angeles and San Luis Obispo counties; and the northern Channel Islands.

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ON THE COVER: Ohlone tiger beetle. Courtesy Alex Jones/UCSC

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A Year in Review



2020 was a year of challenge and uncertainty as communities navigated an international pandemic, engaged in crucial dialogue around racial injustices, and braved catastrophic wildfires across the West. For our agency, the health and safety of our people through the COVID-19 crisis remained a priority. I'm proud of how seamlessly we transitioned to "virtual" operations, continuing to carry out our critical mission to protect rare wildlife, plants, and their habitats, and serve the American people. We engaged in important conversations about inclusivity and agency culture and crafted a vision to promote a Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office that is relevant to and reflects the diversity of the communities in which we serve.

Despite the unprecedented challenges faced by humanity this year, we have victories – both large and small – to celebrate in the world of conservation. We celebrated the Endangered Species Act as a mobilizer for conservation action with the proposed removal of the San Benito evening primrose from the endangered species list and the proposed downlisting of the Morro shoulderband snail from endangered to threatened status.

In Santa Cruz County, we spearheaded the first ever adult translocation of Ohlone tiger beetles in the world to save their species from extinction. Along the San Luis Obispo County coastline, a team of women scientists made headway to save the critically endangered Nipomo Mesa lupine and the enchanting dune ecosystem it inhabits.

We joined state and federal partners to prepare a restoration plan for the Gaviota coast, bringing us one step closer to restoring this beautiful stretch of coastline damaged by the Refugio Beach oil spill.

We helped permanently protect hundreds of acres in Santa Barbara County, preserving a ranching legacy while securing important habitat for endangered salamanders and other wildlife.

We promoted public recreation and shorebird conservation at Surf Beach in Santa Barbara County, supporting a plan to provide increased beach access to the local Lompoc community while promoting the recovery of one of California's tiniest shorebirds.

As wildland fires swept across the state, we worked with resource agencies and land managers to monitor and assess potential impacts to rare wildlife and their ecosystems, from the majestic California condor to the enigmatic arroyo toad.

And finally, we used virtual platforms to bring nature and environmental education to our local communities.

As we embark on a new year, I'm grateful for the countless acts of resiliency, adaptation, compassion, and innovation that helped us navigate the uncharted waters of 2020, and I encourage us all to carry those acts with us as we step into 2021.

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Adult Ohlone tiger beetles have a striking iridescent green coloring. Courtesy Alex Jones/University of California, Santa Cruz

Insert: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Chad Mitcham was among the team that spearheaded a first-of-its-kind adult translocation of Ohlone tiger beetles in Santa Cruz County in March 2020. Courtesy Lynn Overtree

Emerald Predators

Ohlone tiger beetles find their way home with the help of local scientists

Their metallic emerald bodies appear iridescent in the sunlight as they scurry across bare earth following winter rains at a preserve near Soquel in Santa Cruz County.

For the first time in over a decade, endangered Ohlone tiger beetles roam the preserve and await their chance to pounce on unsuspecting prey.

“The excitement in the air is palpable,” says Chad Mitcham, fish and wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, after releasing 43 Ohlone tiger beetles to their new home in Santa Cruz County.

Service biologists Mitcham and Mark Ogonowski spearheaded the first-ever translocation of adult tiger beetles in the world, with the help of local land managers and tiger beetle experts from across the country. The goal: a self-sustaining population of the rare beetles in an area of Santa Cruz County where they’ve been absent for more than a decade.

“The danger with any rare species is that any of the populations could be wiped out for any number of reasons in a given year,” Mitcham explains. “Its overall range would significantly decline with the loss of any one cluster.” For a species whose remaining suitable habitat is estimated at 200-300 acres, the threat of extinction is real.

Entomologist Dick Arnold may have been the last person to see an Ohlone tiger beetle at the preserve

near Soquel more than a decade ago.

“Unfortunately, the habitat conditions changed over time as more and more of the areas nearby got developed,” he said. As someone who’s studied rare insects for more than 40 years, Arnold says he’s delighted at the possibility of re-establishing a population where they’ve been extinct for more than 10 years.

A re-established population in this location - if it becomes self-sustaining - is critical for the tiger beetle’s long-term survival, explains Tara Cornelisse, a senior scientist with the Center for Biological Diversity. She has studied Ohlone tiger beetles for more than a decade and helped train local resource managers to assist with the unprecedented translocation.

“It provides an insurance population for the species,” she says.

Ohlone tiger beetles likely inhabited a larger area before development around Santa Cruz reduced the extent and connectivity of their habitat. Populations lost from isolated sites may not be recolonized naturally, increasing the species’ overall risk of extinction. The translocation project aims to give the beetle some help.

“The idea started back in 2016 as a conversation with Grey Hayes, a rangeland ecologist active in Ohlone tiger beetle conservation,” explains Ogonowski. “Grey thought

translocating beetles to properly managed sites where they used to occur could be successful and put us in touch with the experts who have made this project possible.”

Sixteen males and 27 females were hand-collected one-by-one using nets and vials from three locations in the county where tiger beetle populations are known to be stable. The animals were placed in ice chests and transported to the preserve, where land managers from the Center for Natural Lands Management have been working since last fall to prepare the area for its new inhabitants. The litter layer of dead grass and leaves was removed by raking, weeding, and hand-pulling vegetation to create the bare ground habitat Ohlone tiger beetles need to survive.

They require open, bare areas to stalk their prey, and they lay their eggs in tiny burrows in the ground.

“Tiger beetles evolved during the Pleistocene era with megafauna that grazed the landscape from mammoths and mastodons to giant ground sloths and bison - the same lands that were later burned by Native Americans and then grazed by dairy ranchers in the early pioneer era,” says Tim Hyland, who manages state parks in Santa Cruz County, where some Ohlone tiger beetles find safe haven. “All of these historical activities allowed the tiger beetle to flourish. The tiger beetle is an embodiment of coastal prairies that rely on disturbance.”

conservation in action

Aptly named for the Native American tribe with which they co-existed for millennia, Ohlone tiger beetles have ferocious predatory instincts. With excellent vision, they lie still on the bare ground and stealthily pounce on ants and flies that enter their line of sight.

“They’re like green jewels with jaws like the fangs of a saber tooth tiger,” Cornelisse says. “People are delighted when they see them.”

They’re also an important part of the food chain, and are prey for a variety of animals from birds and toads to lizards and dragonflies, Arnold explains. “Anytime you start to lose species in a food chain, it weakens the whole system,” he says. “You don’t know how many can be lost before the whole food chain collapses.”

In 2001, due to habitat loss, invasive grasses, and lack of natural disturbance, the Ohlone tiger beetle was designated as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. While the designation secured protections for the beetle, proactive management and recovery efforts would be required to bring the species back from the brink.

“A lot of rare species like the Ohlone tiger beetle have plans to help them recover, but it takes a proponent and community involvement to move the recovery forward and put the plan into action,” says Kelli Camara, technical program director for the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County. “Without Chad and Mark at the helm, we wouldn’t be doing any of this.”

The beetles were transferred to the site near Soquel from Glenwood and Moore Creek Preserves and natural reserve lands on the University of California, Santa Cruz campus.

Today, rotational livestock grazing, prescribed burns, non-native vegetation removal, and even mountain biking trails all play key roles in the survival of the Ohlone tiger beetle.

Matt Timmer, natural resource manager with the Land Trust of

Santa Cruz County, manages the 200-acre Glenwood Preserve in Scotts Valley. Glenwood Preserve was established more than two decades ago to protect habitat for Ohlone tiger beetles and other rare plants and animals as mitigation from impacts of a housing development.

At Glenwood Preserve, Ohlone tiger beetles thrive in pastures grazed by cattle. The cattle form paths that create bare ground where the tiger beetles spend most of their time as adults.

“Historically, these grasslands would have consisted of perennial bunch grasses and forbs with patches of bare ground. With the arrival of European settlers, livestock, and non-native grasses, that system has changed over time,” says Timmer. “Today, we’re using grazing to try to mimic historical conditions, like the large herds of ungulates that once roamed the area, to create more suitable habitat for the beetle.”

The University of California, Santa Cruz created two preserves on campus through a habitat conservation plan put in place to mitigate impacts to Ohlone tiger beetles and other federally protected wildlife from a faculty and staff housing development. Some of the now-preserved lands are used for academic research, grazing, and recreation, and provide much-needed habitat for Ohlone tiger beetles to carry out their life cycle.

“Santa Cruz County has a lot of open space that people use and appreciate – people are already in love with this area,” says Alex Jones, who manages the University’s reserve lands. “We should celebrate the tiger beetle and Endangered Species Act as one of the reasons we have so much open space here in Santa Cruz. Conservation of tiger beetles has allowed for some of this open space to exist.” Jones recruits university students to conduct Ohlone tiger beetle surveys, a source of key data to further conservation of the species.

Wilder Ranch State Park boasts one of the more stable Ohlone tiger



beetle populations in the county, a testament to successful ongoing management activities, from prescribed burns to the creation and management of mountain biking trails.

“There’s an inherent conflict between mountain bikers and beetles. They both come out in the spring, and one is generally faster than the other,” says Hyland.

California State Parks, however, has found an approach that seems to benefit both bikers and beetles. By re-routing bikers from known breeding areas, beetles are given the space to mate without threat of disturbance and mountain bikers in turn help create new bare ground trails used by the beetles to hunt their prey.

“Now, when I run into mountain bikers on the trail, they are usually excited to hear about how the beetles are doing,” says Hyland.

If this initial translocation proves successful, additional beetles may be translocated from Wilder State Park to the preserve near Soquel to further augment the new population.



Left: Tara Cornelisse observes an Ohlone tiger beetle collected in a vial from the University of California, Santa Cruz's preserve lands. Right: Local Santa Cruz land managers and species experts join forces to collect Ohlone tiger beetles for the first-ever adult translocation of this species. Courtesy Lynn Overtree

More than 100 species of tiger beetles are known in the U.S. and Canada alone; five species of these mythical-looking micro-fauna are listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Barry Knisley has been studying tiger beetles for more than 40 years, and says, "Like so many organisms, there is clearly a decline. We're losing habitat as development and urbanization and human activity progress. As we lose natural areas, we're losing tiger beetles."

Knisley played a role in securing ESA protections for several species of tiger beetle across the United States and perfected larval translocation to boost dwindling populations. One of his most fruitful recovery successes was developing the methodology to translocate more than 100 northeastern beach tiger beetle larvae from Martha's Vineyard to Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge in Massachusetts, which, as a result of the larval translocation, now boasts an estimated population of more than 4,000 adults.

"There's good evidence that larval translocation works, and now we'd like to see if adult translocation can also be successful," says Knisley, who consults on the Ohlone tiger beetle adult translocation project in Santa Cruz. "We do know, unlike vertebrate animals, that tiger beetles can rebound genetically and biologically if the habitat is suitable. If we double the number of sites, we have a chance."

Camara and others involved in the project say they are hopeful and optimistic for the future of Ohlone tiger beetles. "The first step is raising awareness. Then, we want to maintain or increase existing populations. Then, we can begin to move them to other extirpated sites," she says. "Setting small, short-term goals helps us move closer to recovery."

The team continues to monitor the new arrivals at their new home, and early observations appear promising. In the hours and days following release, the beetles were observed hunting and mating.

"No one knew what to expect, but we knew what we wanted to see happen. Hunting and mating are exactly that," Mitcham says. "It's a very good sign."

Mitcham and the rest of the team remain hopeful that this first-ever translocation will be the first of more to come, steps that will bring this enigmatic species one step closer to recovery. "They're ambassadors for insect conservation and the health of the prairies, and they're worth saving," he said.

Partners include Dr. Richard Arnold and Dr. Barry Knisley, California State Parks, the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Center for Biological Diversity, City of Santa Cruz, Center for Natural Lands Management, and the University of California, Santa Cruz.

A Magical Place

Women scientists partner to save critically endangered Nipomo Mesa lupine and last of California's dunes

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service botanist, Kristie Scarazzo stoops to the ground to eye a short, hairy little plant with hand-like leaves. She's at the base of a towering sand dune that provides the lupine and her shelter from the whipping wind, blowing sand, and bright sun.

"The dunes are magical," says Scarazzo. "They are like no place else on earth. When I am out here my heart rate goes down and I forget all about myself. There is a vast, peaceful calm."

Sometimes, after a long day in the field, she still sees the vivid yellows, hot pinks and purples, cream whites, and sage greens of the wildflowers that pepper these dunes in the early spring when she closes her eyes. It's a transformative experience.

Today Scarazzo is surveying for Nipomo Mesa lupine, an endangered plant that is endemic to the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes that extend along the coast, west of the small agricultural town of Nipomo, in rural, southwestern San Luis Obispo County. This member of the legume family grows no taller than eight inches and has purple and pink-colored blossoms. Its entire geographic range extends only two square miles and it occurs no place else on earth.

Scarazzo is working with a collaborating team of scientists and stakeholders to develop

and implement a draft recovery plan for the species, which is a long-term strategy designed to save it from extinction. There is only one population, comprised of two colonies; one of which was established by the team via experimental outplanting. Data suggests that the population is hovering at around 1,000 individuals in any given year. However, the population is vulnerable to stochastic events, such as drought because it is so small and restricted geographically.

"We are much more powerful working as a collaborative team," Scarazzo says.

Lindsey Roddick is a senior restoration ecologist for the Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County that's part of the team who has been paramount for collecting survey data and conducting research on the lupine in support of its recovery. She coordinates with landowners and other team researchers to maximize potential benefits for the species.

"As a land trust, we collaborate with private landowners to maximize our conservation impact. Without the support of the private landowners and local stakeholders, we wouldn't be where we are today for Nipomo Mesa lupine," Roddick says. She worked with private landowners and managers like Conoco Phillips and a cattle rancher to establish a seasonally timed grazing plan

for weed management and for most of the grazing to occur outside the lupine growing season. The fostering of this working relationship has been one of the most important things for the species' recovery.

During the summer and fall, cattle grazing hoof punches (marks made in the ground by cattle hooves) provide an essential disturbance to help the lupine thrive and the cows nip the veldt grass down before it can go to flower and reproduce.

"The cattle grazing has really helped level the playing field and helps ensure that the annual lupines reach maturity and set as much seed as possible," Roddick says. "We use many methods to protect the Nipomo lupine from invasive species. Every tool in the toolbox is necessary to ensure their success whether it be hand pulling, grazing, or grass-specific herbicide to further combat the spread of veldt in areas occupied by the lupine."

"Displacement from invasive perennial veldt grass is the biggest challenge facing the Nipomo Mesa lupine today," Scarazzo explains. It was introduced in the 1950s as a forage and to stabilize the dunes. And this grass, native to South Africa, has succeeded in doing exactly that. It outcompetes native coastal dune scrub species for critical resources and prematurely stabilizes the dynamic ecological dune processes that are essential



The Nipomo Mesa lupine, an endangered plant that is endemic to the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes, grows no taller than eight inches and has purple and pink-colored blossoms. Its entire geographic range extends only two square miles and it occurs no place else on earth. USFWS

Insert: The Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes extend along the central California coast, west of the small agricultural town of Nipomo, in rural, southwestern San Luis Obispo County. There lives one of the last remaining coastal dune ecosystems in California. USFWS

for this ecosystem to function.

“Soil stabilization is the opposite of what these dunes need,” says Lisa Stratton, director of the Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration at University of California, Santa Barbara who is also on the lupine recovery team. “This dynamic ecosystem is active and requires periodic disturbance to stay healthy; the plants within these dune communities are adapted to that regime.” Nipomo Mesa lupine requires open patches within coastal dune scrub habitats that are created by the wind and moving sand.

Stratton works with graduate

students to better understand the lupine’s life history and ecological requirements and she’s been leading research on the species’ seed germination, seed banking, and propagation since 2012.

Stratton and her team learned that the seeds require scarification with sand paper, which mimics the scraping caused by wind-blown sand on the outer surface of the seeds and makes it easier for them to sprout in otherwise suitable habitats.

“We’re getting to the point where we know the best microclimate conditions and timing for outplanting in the wild,” Stratton says. “If we can continue to

secure grant funding, we can disperse the seeds we’ve been bulking and establish several more new occurrences throughout the species’ historic range.” Stratton worked with Roddick and the Service to establish an experimental population at the Land Conservancy’s Black Lake Ecological Area and it has been viable since 2015.

Scarazzo, Roddick, and Stratton have developed an unbreakable bond to save the Nipomo Mesa lupine and its dune habitat for generations to come. They’ve all been inspired by the activists and scientists who came before them that worked to preserve and better understand these dunes, especially



Kathleen Goddard Jones.

“There are thousands of miles of seacoast in California, but there are only a tiny few places where sand dunes still build, still move unfettered. Still hold their wild enchantment,” said Goddard Jones in her biography, *Defender of the Dunes*, by Virginia Cornell (2001).

Goddard Jones passed in 2001 and spoke of the same enchantment with the dunes that others speak of today. “It’s almost as if she is still with us,” says Scarazzo. “We share the same joy when we see the dune wildflowers each spring and know that Goddard Jones walked along many of these same trails. Her spirit is very much still here.”



Left: Members of the Nipomo Mesa lupine recovery team survey for the plant on cattle-grazed land in San Luis Obispo County. The orange markers indicate early signs of lupine in spring 2019. USFWS

Right: Dr. Lisa Stratton is the director of Ecosystem Management at the Cheadle Center for Biodiversity and Ecological Restoration at University of California, Santa Barbara, and is a key member of the Nipomo Mesa lupine recovery team. Courtesy Lisa Stratton



“I hope that when I’m 92, I’ll still be trudging around these dunes like Kathleen did, encouraging the next generation of people to protect them,” says Roddick.

In the 1960s, Goddard Jones’ power of persuasion and unwaveringness to educate the community about the dunes inspired others to join her cause when development of a nuclear power plant threatened their development. She later championed the establishment of several state and county parks, designation of a dunes National Natural Landmark in 1974, formation of the Black Lake Ecological Area in 1991, and assisted with the formation of the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes National Wildlife Refuge in 2000.

“We wouldn’t have known what we’d lost if it wasn’t for Kathleen,” says Connie Rutherford, a retired botanist with the Service who

pioneered early work on Nipomo Mesa lupine.

For Scarazzo, it’s also personal. “As a mother, I am concerned about my six-year old’s connection with nature,” she says.

“Everything I do is not only for the plants themselves, but also for her. I want to know that I did my ultimate best to preserve wild things and wild places for her and her children’s children to see, feel, hear and smell because our interactions with the environment are vital to our existence and to our health. The Nipomo Mesa lupine and its habitat are so unique and it is really like nothing I’ve ever experienced before.”

Surf's Up!

Celebrating public recreation and shorebird conservation at Surf Beach in Santa Barbara County



The Western snowy plover is a tiny shorebird with a grey back and dark patches on either side of the neck, behind the eyes and on the forehead. USFWS

In a way that truly embodies the spirit of Californians who banded together to pass the Coastal Act 44 years ago, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Vandenberg Air Force Base, California Coastal Commission, and the community of Lompoc came together this year to amend a closure policy to provide increased beach access to their closest beach, Surf Beach in Santa Barbara County.

Managed by Vandenberg Air Force Base, Surf Beach is home to tiny shorebirds that have been tirelessly fighting for survival after years of habitat loss and human activity. Western snowy plovers, often confused with the much more common sanderling, are a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act and have benefited from protections from human disturbance during the critical summertime breeding season at Surf Beach.

To preserve this important nesting habitat, Vandenberg enacted a beach policy, setting aside portions of Surf Beach that would close to public recreation to allow the birds space to nest and breed. The policy stated that if 50 trespass violations were recorded during the nesting season then the beach would close to the public for the remainder of the season. Unfortunately for the residents of Lompoc, these beach closures occurred almost every summer between 2012 and 2018. This year, the community spurred a landmark decision by Vandenberg and the Service to discontinue beach closures as a result of the 50-violation limit policy.

“Vandenberg Air Force Base and the California Coastal Commission are listening to the community, recognizing Surf Beach’s history and importance to Lompoc, and improving the beach and local access to it, all while protecting the Western snowy plover,” said mayor of the city of Lompoc, Jenelle Osborne.

“Participation from the City, the County, Vandenberg Air Force Base, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was very impressive,” said Larry Simon, federal consistency coordinator with the California Coastal Commission. “It showed that everyone wanted to pull together and figure out a good solution.”

Western snowy plover numbers have seen an upward trend in recent years, hovering around 2,200 birds across their Pacific coast range, an indication that conservation efforts, like habitat restoration and fencing to protect breeding habitat, is paying off. Nesting effort and success has increased base-wide since conservation efforts for the Western snowy plover began on Vandenberg in 1993.

What makes Surf Beach so special? “You go to a Los Angeles or San Diego beach that’s crowded, developed and has beach grooming, and you may only see crows and gulls,” said Jessica Nielsen, conservation specialist at Coal Oil Point Reserve in Santa Barbara



Birdwatching is only one of many different recreational activities that beachgoers can enjoy while sharing the beach with plovers. USFWS



Through a multi-faceted conservation strategy, plover populations have been seeing an upward trend. Courtesy Ron LeValley/USFWS

County. “And then you go to Surf Beach or Coal Oil Point Reserve, and you’re going to see a diversity of birds and other species that you won’t find at beaches that are less healthy.”

Dan Robinette, senior biologist at Point Blue Conservation Science, adds that, at Surf Beach, “We have, for the most part, natural dunes.” These rare, coastal dunes shielded from large human disturbances are exactly what snowy plovers need to lay their eggs and raise their hatchlings.

This year, the community of Lompoc can celebrate access to this unique coastal beach, as well

The sanderling is a common shorebird that is often confused with the Western snowy plover because of their proximity and appearance. However, sanderlings lack the dark coloration around the head and shorter beak of their more uncommon doppelgänger. USFWS

as a growing population of Western snowy plovers - a testament to the sacrifices they’ve made to promote the tiny bird’s recovery.

“When members of the public are aware of the rare species with which they share their shores, it can benefit both the plovers and beachgoers,” said Lena Chang, senior

fish and wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura. “This knowledge can help create a balance between enjoying your beaches and understanding why some protections are necessary for rare species to continue to exist in our coastal ecosystems.” Chang, along with Vandenberg, the City of Lompoc, and the California





Surf Beach in Santa Barbara County is home to a diverse variety of plants and wildlife including the federally threatened Western snowy plover. Courtesy U.S. Air Force

Coastal Commission work together to embrace public use of Surf Beach while sharing the shores with the plovers.

“Coexisting with snowy plovers on our public beaches creates a wonderful learning opportunity,” she said. “Citizens are great advocates for rare species and effective educators in their own communities.”

Biologists from Vandenberg will continue to monitor the plover population this breeding season. If numbers decline due to human

disturbance, the policy change could be re-evaluated and closures could go back into effect in future years, which is why public education is so crucial to maintaining a balance between public recreation opportunities and conservation of these tiny shorebirds.

The Service offers the following tips for beach goers and their friends, to help protect Western snowy plovers during breeding season:

- Keep your distance from Western snowy plovers to avoid disturbing them.

- Respect posted signage and fencing that identifies closed nesting areas.

- Take trash with you when you leave, or place trash in covered trash bins.

Authors: Chase Brewster, Hope Cupples, Robert Heim, Tara Jagadeesh, Renee Albrecht from the University of California, Santa Barbara and Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office public affairs

How California condors and other wildlife weather wildland fires



An adult and juvenile California condor.
Courtesy Loi Nguyen



The Dolan Fire in Monterey County burns in areas of Big Sur known to provide habitat for federally endangered California condors, one of the world's largest and most critically imperiled birds. Courtesy Kate Novoa and Connie McCoy

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with land managers and fire response agencies across California to monitor potential impacts of wildland fires on rare wildlife and plants.

“While it’s still too early to understand the long-term impacts of the wildfires on rare wildlife, the primary short-term impact is loss of their habitat,” said Chris Dellith, senior fish and wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Some ecosystems are fire-adapted and require fire to be maintained; in some cases, native plants require fire regeneration as part of their life cycle.

Unfortunately, some wildlife may not find refuge from wildfire and may be injured or killed. But many will escape and find unburned areas for shelter and food, while others may withstand the fire underground. Some amphibians may seek haven in small-mammal burrows or pond bottoms.

“Fortunately, we are near the end of nesting season and most migratory bird hatchlings have fledged and can fly away to evade approaching fires,” said Dellith.

The Lake Fire in Los Angeles County burned areas near habitat for the federally endangered arroyo toad and unarmored three-spine stickleback. Service biologists provided recommendations to the U.S. Forest Service to minimize impacts of fire response efforts on potential listed species in the area, provided those measures do not hinder response efforts to protect human health and safety. Those measures include avoiding use of fire retardant and cutting of fire breaks in riparian areas and streams.

Fires may also have indirect effects on listed species. For example, slopes denuded of vegetation may become prone to debris flows during subsequent rain events.



Joe Burnett of the Ventana Wildlife Society uses a tracking antenna to detect California condors after the Dolan Fire swept through portions of their habitat in Big Sur. Courtesy Trey Kropp

As large soaring birds, adult California condors have the ability to avoid fires by flying away from them. USFWS

work with our dedicated partners, the Ventana Wildlife Society and Pinnacles National Park, toward our ultimate goal of recovering the California condor in the wild,” said Steve Kirkland, condor field coordinator with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Ventana Wildlife Society reported that three of the five condor chicks in the fire area survived, including “Iniko,” a chick who was named by the public while viewers around the world watched this chick and its parents on a live-streaming camera. The fire burned just ten feet below the nest cavity, yet Iniko managed to survive.

“We were not optimistic as we hiked through the fire’s devastation. To find Iniko alive and well is simply a miracle,” said Joe Burnett, biologist with Ventana Wildlife Society.

In addition to finding Iniko, chick #1033 was rescued from a cliff’s

“If sediment and ash become mobile due to rain, that could have a devastating impact on habitat for these species,” Dellith said. Debris that enters streams may suffocate or crush fish and amphibians and can degrade aquatic habitat.

In 2017, federal and state partners successfully rescued and released unarmored three-spine stickleback in the Angeles National Forest after the Sands Fire and pending rains threatened their habitat.

Three California condor chicks survive Dolan Fire

As the Dolan Fire swept through portions of Big Sur along the central California coast, we worked with our partners at Ventana Wildlife Society and Pinnacles National Park to monitor the status of these critically endangered birds.

“The California Condor Recovery Program has faced setbacks in the past, but we will continue to

nest that was directly in the path of the fire's advance. Working quickly, a field team from Ventana Wildlife Society and Pinnacles National Park saved the chick and delivered her to the Los Angeles Zoo where she will spend the next year until ready to be released back into the wild and reunited with her flock.

"We could see that the fire was burning toward 1033's nest and offered to help rescue her while there was still a chance," said Alacia Welch, Acting Condor Program Manager at Pinnacles National Park. "To see the fire burn over her nest just a few days later, really made me feel glad that we took action when we did."

Unfortunately, Ventana Wildlife Society reported that two condor chicks, chick #1022 and chick #1029, did not survive the fire, and nine free-flying condors remain missing.

The survival of Iniko and the two other chicks is a testament to their strength and provides hope for the future of their species. These survivors will go on to help grow the California condor population in the wild.

"While the loss of these wild birds is discouraging, we will release nine more captive-reared birds later this fall, and we are hopeful the remaining wild chicks will strengthen the overall California condor population," said Kirkland.

Thanks to the continued efforts of the Condor Recovery Program partnership, releases of new condors raised in captivity will occur despite the loss at the Big Sur Condor Sanctuary. A cohort of nine condors will be transferred to central California this month and seven of these will be released in San Simeon, California and the other two at Pinnacles National Park.

"We are so thankful to have such supportive partners to allow the

important work we do to continue on while rebuilding as soon as possible," said Kelly Sorenson, Ventana Wildlife Society executive director.

Changes in fire regimes are less likely to impact condors because of the birds' mobility and ability to fly away from fires. And as the condor population continues to grow and their range continues to expand, catastrophic fire events like this one are less likely to have a significant impact on their recovery.

"My heart is broken because for more than 20 years I have devoted my life to these birds," said Burnett. "To lose any is a tragedy but we will rise from the ashes and rebuild the condor's sanctuary and continue our mission to recover this species."

After the fires subside, we'll work with our partners at the U.S. Forest Service, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California State Parks, and other land managers to better understand the impacts of the wildfires on our federally-protected species over the long-term.



Baby condor "Iniko" first seen after the Dolan Fire burned through the nesting territory in Big Sur, California. Courtesy Ventana Wildlife Society



A federally endangered arroyo toad (top) and unarmored threespine stickleback (bottom). USFWS



Smoke cloud from the Lake Fire in Los Angeles County. Courtesy CalFire

Preserving a conservation legacy for future generations in Santa Barbara County

The rolling hills of the Santa Barbara backcountry offer a pristine backdrop of undeveloped, contiguous lands that provide a safe haven for wildlife and a way of life for generations of Californians. From orchards and vineyards to cattle ranches and preserved open spaces, these lands make Santa Barbara County one of the most picturesque and serene places on Earth.

Above ground, cattle lazily graze the hillside, while below ground, small yellow and black salamanders rest after mile-long treks to meet their mates in the vernal pools and stock ponds that dot the landscape after winter rains.

Family-run ranches and neighboring open spaces serve a vital role for the local economy, and their preservation is vital for the survival of the native wildlife that find respite on their lands, from the majestic bald eagle to the enigmatic California tiger salamander. The pressures of a growing human population and development continue to threaten this way of life.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is committed to “working with others to preserve fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats, for the continuing benefit of the American people.” We can not achieve this mission alone, and we recognize that conservation successes require

partnerships with local communities to promote voluntary stewardship on non-federal lands.

In 2020, in partnership with the Santa Barbara Land Trust, we helped secure federal and state funding for a permanent conservation easement on 644 acres of ranch land, protecting a multi-generational ranching legacy and the wildlife their ranch supports, in perpetuity.

This partnership serves as a model as we embark on similar partnerships with other willing landowners across the county. These grant programs provide landowners with financial compensation that

Rolling hills of Santa Barbara County.
USFWS



Adult California tiger salamander: USFWS

supports their livelihoods while preserving the open spaces wildlife need to thrive.

In recent years, we developed two conservation plans for cultivation activities to support growers and the communities they feed, while balancing the needs of rare wildlife in the area. These plans cover more than 100,000 acres and help make Endangered Species Act regulations less cumbersome for local farmers and landowners while ensuring their activities do not hinder the recovery of rare wildlife, based on the best available science about those species' needs.

These conservation plans, along with federal funding programs, help restore trust with local communities while bringing endangered wildlife one step closer to removal from the Endangered Species list.

As we look ahead, we will continue to collaborate within the communities in which we serve to preserve a conservation legacy and way of life for future generations of Californians in Santa Barbara County.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist Rachel Henry holds a California tiger salamander during a salamander survey. USFWS

“Goldilocks” plant once believed in danger of extinction now no longer threatened in the wild

A small, annual plant with bright yellow flowers once thought to be in danger of extinction is being found more commonly in the coast range in California’s San Benito, Monterey, and Fresno counties, prompting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to propose removing it from the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife and Plants.

“Whenever we can propose the delisting of a species due to ESA-inspired partnerships and improved science, it is a good day,” said the Service’s California-Great Basin regional director Paul Souza. “Thanks to the efforts of the Bureau of Land Management over the course of three decades, our scientific understanding of the San Benito evening primrose has improved and habitat for the plant has been restored and protected.”

The Service listed the San Benito evening primrose as threatened under the ESA in 1985 due to ongoing threats of motorized recreation activities and commercial mining operations. Since then, the Service has worked to use the best available scientific information to inform our decisions regarding species’ classification on the Federal List of Threatened and Endangered Wildlife and Plants.

“The Endangered Species Act is a mobilizer that brings resources to the table to help the scientific community and land managers better understand how our local ecosystems – plants, wildlife, and their habitats – are faring,” said Steve Henry, field supervisor with the Service in Ventura. “As a result of ESA protections, we were able to gather the best available science regarding the species, including how its threats have changed over time. This resulted in a proposal to delist the species.”

At the time of listing, the San Benito evening primrose was documented in only nine locations in a small area of San Benito County. Annual surveys for the species have since found more than 100 areas across multiple watersheds in portions of San Benito, Monterey, and Fresno counties.

“The San Benito evening primrose is a unique California species that thrives in the absence of competing vegetation. It occupies a bit of a ‘goldilocks’ niche, surviving best in areas with serpentine soils and moderate disturbance, which are unsuitable to many other species,” said Todd Lemein, Service botanist. “What you may observe growing above ground may only be

a small fraction of what lies within the soil seed bank.”

The primary threats to the species at the time of listing no longer threaten the plant’s survival in the wild. The threat of motorized vehicle recreation was reduced partially due to a 2008 finding from the Environmental Protection Agency that found motorized vehicle use exposed riders to a higher than acceptable risk of naturally-occurring asbestos at the Bureau of Land Management’s Clear Creek Management Area in San Benito County. This finding resulted in a temporary prohibition of vehicle use where San Benito evening primrose was known to occur. In 2014, formal restrictions on motorized vehicle use were included in the BLM’s Resource Management Plan to protect human health.

“The recovery of San Benito evening primrose is the culmination of 35 years of planning, protection, restoration, survey, monitoring, and scientific research,” said Ryan O’Dell, natural resource specialist with the BLM Central Coast Field Office. “Endangered species recovery is a worthy goal, and it is achievable.”

The San Benito evening primrose is a small, annual plant with bright yellow flowers once thought to be in danger of extinction. It is now being found more commonly in the coast range in California's San Benito, Monterey, and Fresno counties. Courtesy Ryan O'Dell/ Bureau of Land Management



San Benito evening primrose at Clear Creek Management Area. The plant grows only in specific areas of the serpentine landscapes. Courtesy Ryan O'Dell/Bureau of Land Management

Draft restoration plan to support recovery of natural resources following Refugio Beach oil spill

Dolphins in Santa Barbara Channel. Courtesy NRDA

The Refugio Beach Oil Spill Trustee Council (Trustees) for natural resources impacted by the May 19, 2015, oil spill near Santa Barbara have made publicly available a draft Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan for the Refugio Beach Oil Spill. The draft plan identifies projects that will help restore wildlife and habitats and compensate the public for lost recreation as a result of the spill.

“The restoration projects proposed in this plan will bring us one step closer to restoring habitat for fish, wildlife and plants with which we share this exceptional stretch of coastline, from the brown pelican to the tiny Western snowy plover,” said Jenny Marek, deputy field supervisor with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura. “This plan reflects the dedication of multiple agencies, organizations, and the communities whose trust

resources were impacted by this oil spill.”

The plan also describes impacts of the spill to birds, marine mammals, subtidal and shoreline habitats, impacts to human-use, and proposed restoration projects. The trustees represent federal and state agencies authorized to assess, recover, and restore natural resources impacted by the spill. Plains All-American Pipeline has agreed to pay \$22 million in restoration damages.

“The Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan for the Refugio spill cumulates five years of dedication and hard work by the natural resource trustees. The natural resource damage assessment process ensures that the trustees choose the best and most appropriate restoration projects to fund,” said Dr. Michael

Anderson, Resource Restoration manager for CDFW-OSPR. “Public feedback is also key to better understand the community’s desires for compensation following the spill.”

“As the assessment released today shows, the Refugio Beach oil spill impacted coastal and marine fish and habitats important to Santa Barbara’s ecosystems and the communities that rely on them,” said Jennifer Steger, Pacific Region Supervisor in NOAA’s Restoration Center. “We encourage stakeholders to submit comments to help us ensure we have the best plan to restore these resources and look forward to working with agencies and partners on projects once a final plan is approved.”

Rare butterflies in Santa Barbara County represent unique lineage, new research finds

New genomic research has uncovered that *Euphilotes* butterflies in northern Santa Barbara County, once believed to be the federally endangered El Segundo blue butterfly, represent a divergent lineage. While the two butterflies share similar features, habitat, and life histories, genomic research has found that butterflies on Vandenberg Air Force Base are genetically unique from the El Segundo blue butterfly. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with Vandenberg Air Force Base to better understand this divergent lineage and develop a conservation strategy for the butterflies on the installation.

The El Segundo blue butterfly was listed as endangered under the ESA, and by 1998 was believed to exist only in southwestern coastal Los Angeles County. In 2004, a butterfly sharing the same morphological features and coastal dune habitat, and believed to be El Segundo blue butterfly was discovered on Vandenberg Air Force Base in Santa Barbara County.

“What’s fascinating about this discovery is that it demonstrates how the ESA is a mobilizer in so many ways,” said Cat Darst, assistant field supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura. “In this case, it mobilized conservation and research to understand more than we possibly could have imagined

about *Euphilotes* butterflies on Vandenberg Air Force Base. While this finding indicates butterflies on base are not the federally-listed entity, we can proactively continue to implement measures for their conservation.”



El Segundo blue butterfly. USFWS

Five-year reviews reveal new information, the importance of collaboration for conservation

Every five years the Service conducts status reviews of federally protected species to determine if a listed species should be removed from the list or warrants a change in protection status – from threatened to endangered or vice versa.

“Each five-year review evaluates the status of the species under the Endangered Species Act, and brings to light new information, new trends, new research, improved understanding of species ecology and sometimes suggests new areas to focus research and recovery efforts,” said Todd Lemein, a botanist with the Service in Ventura, California. The bulk of this information comes from conservation organizations,



Hickman's potentilla. USFWS/Todd Lemein

consultants, other agencies, academics and on-the-ground researchers and field biologists who dedicate much of their time to understanding and recovering the species.

In 2020, Lemein completed status reviews for five federally protected plant species from Monterey to Mendocino counties. While analyzing stacks of paperwork might not sound that exciting, Lemein compiled and analyzed some noteworthy restoration, research and recovery efforts to complete each review, which broadens the base of knowledge about each species and ultimately helps inform future research needs and recovery planning.

The Scotts Valley polygonum is found on a small space of land, just one mile wide, in Santa Cruz County. “This is one of the most endangered species I’ve worked with,” says Lemein. “We are working with local botanists, land trusts, botanical gardens and a developer to restore and hopefully increase the last remaining colony of this rare plant.”

Once thought to only exist on the Monterey peninsula, an occurrence of the Monterey clover - an endangered species – was found 200 miles north in Mendocino County

in a different habitat. “When listed [under the ESA] this species was considered a strict fire follower,” said Lemein. “However, the new discovery in an area without a recent burn history suggests that the species is more of an opportunist disturbance follower. This is an exciting species since we are learning more about it as we discover new populations.”

Hickman’s potentilla occurs on a small patch of private land in Monterey County and on National Park Service land in San Mateo County where the Service is working with the Golden Gate National Recreation Area to develop a long-term management plan that includes invasive species control, habitat restoration, seed collection and out-planting.

“The status reviews are only as good as the information that we have available,” said Lemein. “Planning ahead in order to meet recovery goals and research needs is an important part of the work we do and we’ve been fortunate in that the Service is able to provide funding to partners for each of these species’ recovery, and we are even more fortunate to have an expanding group of great partners with the same goals.”

A path forward for people and plovers at Oceano Dunes

The coastal dunes of San Luis Obispo County, California are home to a diverse range of unique plants and wildlife and provide a dynamic and picturesque landscape for the outdoor adventurer, from campers, hikers, and birders to swimmers, surfers, and off-highway vehicle riders.

This bustling area of human activity is also home to the Western snowy plover, a federally threatened shorebird that lives and breeds within the coastal dune ecosystem from Washington to Baja California, Mexico. California State Parks' Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area in San Luis Obispo County supports one of the largest breeding populations of Western snowy plovers in the state, and this population is a known contributor to the range wide Western snowy plover recovery effort.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has worked with California State Parks and other partners to

recommend management practices to promote successful Western snowy plover breeding at Oceano Dunes.

During the nesting season from March to September, California State Parks designates a 300-acre seasonal closure for Western snowy plovers to nest. A predator program manages common predators like ravens, coyotes, and skunks, and dedicated staff monitor every bird through a banding program to track their breeding success and survival.

Tracking of banded plovers shows that plovers originating from and banded at Oceano Dunes are returning to breed there and in other sites in California. In 2019, banded adults from Oceano Dunes were also observed at sites from Washington to Baja California during the breeding season.

Recovery goals for the Western snowy plover include an average of 3,000 breeding adults across the range maintained for 10 years; a

yearly average productivity of at least one fledged chick per male maintained for five years; and long-term protection and management of breeding, wintering, and migration areas developed and implemented to maintain sustainable populations. As of 2019, the overall population of Western snowy plovers across the range hovers around 2,200 breeding adults.

On average, from 2009 to 2019 more than 100 adult plovers were documented breeding at Oceano Dunes, accounting for approximately 14 percent of the Western snowy plover breeding population reported from sites across San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties and nearly 6 percent of the range wide breeding population. The average productivity rate over the same period at Oceano Dunes also exceeded the target productivity rate identified in the recovery plan of one fledgling per breeding male.

In November 2020, the Service



Western snowy plover. USFWS/Lisa Cox

released for public input a draft habitat conservation plan and environmental assessment that balance recreation with conservation of native wildlife and plant species within Pismo State Beach and Oceano Dunes SRVA. The draft plan guides conservation and management efforts over the next 25 years and takes a strategic approach to continue Oceano Dunes' contributions to plover recovery and ensure activities at Oceano Dunes SVRA fully comply with the Endangered Species Act.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For decades, we have worked with a broad range of stakeholders to seek a balance between public recreation and conservation of these remarkable shorebirds at Oceano Dunes SVRA.

Western snowy plover conservation at Oceano Dunes



Overview

The coastal dunes of Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA) provide a scenic landscape and an abundance of activities for outdoor enthusiasts. They are also home to a unique variety of plants and wildlife including one of the largest breeding populations of federally threatened Western snowy plovers in the state of California.

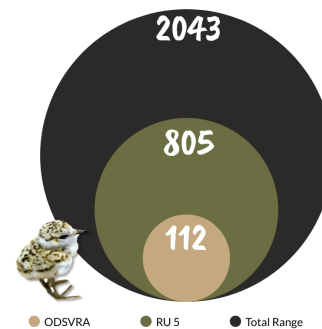


For management purposes, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service divided the geographic range of the Western snowy plover into six Recovery Units; Oceano Dunes SVRA sits in Recovery Unit 5, which includes Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo Counties.

The recovery goals for Western snowy plover include reaching 3,000 breeding adults, 1,200 of these in Recovery Unit 5, with a productivity rate of one fledgling per breeding male.

Plover Population Distribution

Average Number of Breeding Adults from 2009-2019



Average % Contribution of ODSVRA to RUS

13.9%

Average % Contribution of ODSVRA to Total Range

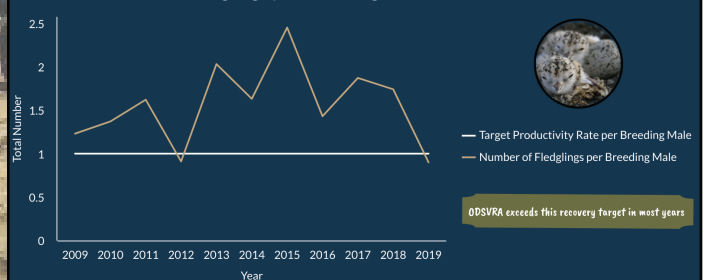
5.5%

Average % Contribution of RUS to Total Range

39.4%

Plover Breeding Success

Number of Plover Fledglings per Breeding Male in ODSVRA from 2009-2019



Other Listed Species Found at ODSVRA





#WomenInScience



Top left to right: Amy Duggal Agee, Nicole Weprin, Danielle Fagre. Bottom left to right: Rachel Henry, Kristie Scarazzo, Jennifer Strotman. USFWS

Women in Science

Meet the women of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura, California. Every year, we honor the instrumental contributions of remarkable women to our ultimate mission: the conservation and protection of rare fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

In this video series, you'll hear what inspired these women to pursue careers in conservation, and what advice they have for young women today.

Did you know that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has an important connection to one of the most notable female conservation heroes: Rachel Carson, who, as one of the first female scientists and government leaders, revolutionized America's interest in environmental issues?

Watch the videos on Flickr:
<https://flic.kr/s/aHsmEGxbPw>

“I served in the United States Navy, and it was during my travels that I realized that not many countries have a wildlife agency dedicated toward the conservation of wildlife and their habitat, and that’s what makes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service so special and why I’m glad to be a part of it.”

Amy Duggal Agee, wildlife biologist

“We need more women and diversity in science because that’s what society looks like. We’ve been able to make breakthroughs and move this entire field forward. It makes the science better because everyone comes to it with their own experiences.”

Nicole Weprin, wildlife biologist, Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex

“A lot of the conservation challenges we face today are not limited by data or more research. What we really need is to put the best available science into action... We need more women in science and one of the major reasons is it makes better science. We might think of a different solution to a problem or a different way to approach a question. If you’re thinking about this as a career path, I can guarantee you it is a very rewarding one and will bring you a lot of joy. We need you!”

Danielle Fagre, wildlife biologist

“It’s more than just an endangered species to me. It’s a link between me and private landowners, and it gives me the chance to connect with the community. Now, when I work with these landowners and we get conservation on the ground... Knowing that that hillside will always be there for my son to look at, that’s what gets me up in the morning. Doing good for not only the community, the state, the world, but for my son.”

Rachel Henry, Habitat Conservation Plan coordinator

“My earliest memories of botany are from my childhood. I grew up in rural Pennsylvania in a very small town and our house backed up to an open space wild land area, and I just remember spending all of my time outside in the yard. To me as a child, the plants were my friends, and they had distinct personalities... I didn’t realize I wanted to study botany until the age of 25. I dropped out of school and moved to Humboldt. Where we live in California is amazing and we harbor some of the greatest diversity on the planet, and I was in awe and that had a profound effect on me.”

Kristie Scarazzo, botanist

“It took me a long time to find my place in the science world because I didn’t have the confidence to pursue science... it doesn’t happen for everyone when they’re four or 15. It happened to me when I was 21 years old, injured out of the Army, having to rethink my entire life plan. Sometimes it takes a while, but you always kind of default to that ‘one thing’ and the one true linear thing in my life has always been animals and the outside. I couldn’t be where I am today without solid mentors, being brave, being socially awkward, and jumping out and asking someone to please help me not only to overcome my shyness and dyslexia, but to embrace it and let it work to my advantage.”

Jennifer Strotman, wildlife biologist

Faces of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

“I recognized during my undergraduate education that I want to influence wildlife conservation on a broadscale, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is at the forefront of protecting and recovering species. Futhermore, I am very excited to work in the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Field Office because I grew up in Santa Cruz, California, and I have a special love for the species of the central and Southern California coastline.”

- Kirby Bartlett, fish and wildlife biologist

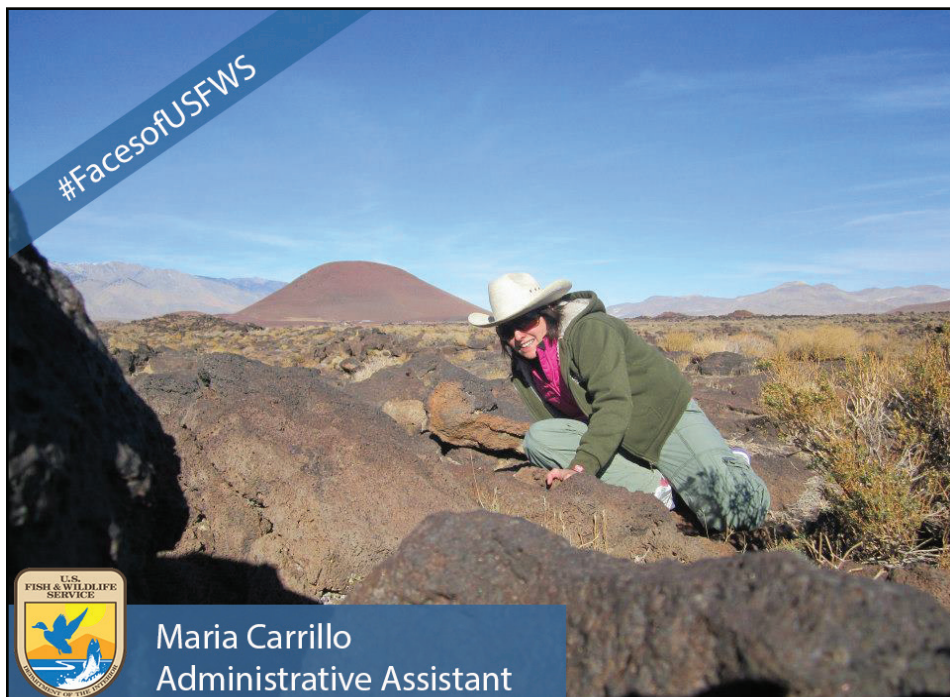


“I grew up in Ojai, playing in the creeks and hiking the Los Padres National Forest. It’s a pretty special place to get to experience childhood and it taught me to love being outside. After a few botany classes and a study abroad in Costa Rica, I was hooked on field biology.

I feel very happy to have been able to join the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service team to direct my life’s work towards helping conservation and recovery efforts.”

- Sarah Termondt, fish and wildlife biologist





“I have many conservation heroes—the people that go to work every day protecting our public lands. Jim Quiring, who was the visitor director at Mount St. Helens, remains my friend and mentor. I think of him like the John Denver of naturalist interpretation.

I currently have a fascination with the California tiger salamander. Amphibians seem to have superpowers for me, living in water and on land.”

- Maria Carrillo, administrative assistant



“I grew up in a semi-rural island community in northeast Florida, so as a kid I spent much of my time outdoors. This exposed me to wildlife almost daily and I became interested in learning about the natural world.

I learned about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service while in college and decided the Service was where I wanted to work: our agency is the premier federal conservation organization, and my own interests in conserving and perpetuating the same biodiversity I grew up with are strongly aligned with the Service’s mission.”

- David Sherer, fish and wildlife biologist

Faces of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



Olivia Beitelspacher
Public Affairs Specialist

My job is to share stories and communicate with different audiences about the amazing work being done at the Ventura FWO to protect endangered species. I also get to perform outreach and engage with local communities.

I switched my major from Creative Computation to Environmental Studies and was looking for an internship with a federal land management agency. I applied

for an internship with the Student Conservation Association and got to spend a summer as an interpretive ranger at Grand Teton National Park.

The following summer I applied to another SCA internship and was fortunate enough to get to participate in the Service's Directorate Resource Fellowship Program (DFP). Through the DFP I had the opportunity to spend a summer in Anchorage, AK

making outreach and educational materials about invasive species. It was such an incredible experience! I love the Service's mission and all of the people I met during my DFP, and I admire their passion and dedication to their work. It made me realize that USFWS is the agency that I wanted to work for.

- Olivia Beitelspacher, public affairs specialist



“My goal is be a role model, mentor, advisor, and adaptive leader. I hope to provide a positive leadership and collaborative work ethic, whereby assisting to achieve the Service’s conservation goals!

I have seen firsthand the direct human impact to our beaches, marine life, and lands across the globe and knew I wanted to give back. One of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s greatest strengths is their grassroots focus, with emphasis in conservation, and the ability to be a part of something larger than ourselves.”

Dan Hurth, administrative officer

***Find more of our
Faces of USFWS
profiles on Flickr:
[https://flic.kr/s/
aHskH1yxVv](https://flic.kr/s/aHskH1yxVv)***

What's Your Passion?



Top left to right: Michael Glenn, Ashley McConnell, and Karen Sinclair. Bottom left to right: Daniëlle Fagre and Lena Chang. USFWS

Now more than ever, it is important that we take time to focus on the things that bring us joy, whether that's cooking our favorite dish, spending time outdoors, or channeling our inner-artist!

Join us as staff from the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office share their passions in a new video series called "What's Your Passion?" We hope that these videos will inspire you to explore your own passions and share them with us!

Watch the videos on Flickr:
<https://flic.kr/s/aHsmRdaV1U>

“I wanted to share one of my favorite California native plants with you. That plant is a California fuschia. It’s one of my favorites because it’s beautiful, easy to grow, and requires almost no water, and provides tons of nectar for hummingbirds.”

Michael Glenn, wildlife biologist

“There’s something pretty magical about a place like Sequoia... being out, listening to the sounds of the birds, insects, animals... And to think that we’re only about three hours away from Los Angeles, and you’re in this beautiful, magical part of the world.”

Ashley McConnell, public affairs supervisor

“I’m really passionate about art, it’s one of my favorite hobbies. You’re not born naturally good as an artist, it just takes lots of practice. I also enjoy science, and like to ask questions, so I have a fun exercise for you. What’s around your house that you can draw, and what questions can you ask?”

Karen Sinclair, wildlife biologist

“I’m excited to share some of the critters I’ve seen in my backyard. I’ve enjoyed learning that I don’t have to go far to see some really cool animals... I hope you get out and find some cool critters in your own backyard!”

Danielle Fagre, wildlife biologist

“I spent many weekends during COVID running up this mountain. It’s always hard but it’s always worth it... I’m always looking for snakes and stopping to see the birds. I so love this time alone in nature, reflecting on things I’m truly grateful for.”

Lena Chang, senior wildlife biologist

Celebrating our partners

This year we recognized Michelle Staedler, formerly of the Monterey Bay Aquarium, for 34 years of service to conservation.

Her contributions to sea otter research and conservation have had tremendous range and depth: helping to shape MBA’s nascent rehabilitation program; implementing cooperative research efforts throughout the sea otter’s range; contributing her own research; serving as an advisor to the non-profit organization, Sea Otter Savvy; and mentoring countless young researchers. Most importantly, she has been a



Michelle Staedler, sea otter conservationist. USFWS/Lilian Carswell

strong force for cooperation and cohesion in the world of sea otter research and conservation.

We are grateful to Michelle for her dedication, hard work, and generosity in sharing her expertise.

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