



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

# Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

## Central and Southern California Coast

### Stories from the Field

Summer 2023 Newsletter

We invite you to read and share our stories about the native and rare wildlife of the southern and central California coast, and the people who work to ensure they and their natural habitats remain part of our landscape for years to come.



# Conservation in Action

## Nick Stanley's journey to leadership

During his childhood summers in Fort Worth, Texas, Nicholas Stanley would regularly get woken up by his grandmother for full days of fishing. She would strap down five long cane poles on top of her minivan and drive them to wherever the fish were biting, and she and Nick would sit along the riverbank for hours until they had caught their limit before heading home to have themselves a delicious fish fry. He fondly credits his grandmother for inspiring him to fish, chase bugs, and embrace the landscapes and wildlife around him at an early age.

Following these warm memories, Nicholas, who goes by Nick, attended Grambling State University, a historically Black university in Louisiana to pursue a career working with animals. After learning about the university's wildlife program and being taken under the wings of dedicated mentors, Stanley soared into a conservation career. This trajectory would eventually bring him into various leadership roles at national wildlife refuges across the U.S.

Today, Nick serves as the project leader for the Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex in California, home to the California Condor Recovery Program. The National Wildlife Refuge System is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and provides habitat for wildlife and public recreation opportunities for visitors far and wide.

[Read his story.](#)



Nick Stanley, Project Leader of the Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex, home to the California Condor Recovery Program. Credit: Vanessa Morales/ USFWS.

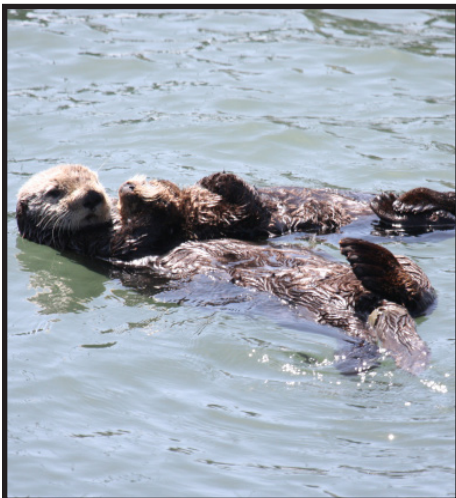
# Conservation in Action

## Condor 550: Ready for the spotlight

Hiking through Pinnacles National Park in central California, you may be lucky enough to see the shadow of a massive wingspan or even catch a glimpse of a California condor soaring through the skies. The park is home to several endangered California condors, including condor 550, the condor featured in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife's new poster commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act. [Read on to learn about her remarkable story.](#)



Condor 550. Photo courtesy of Tim Huntington/Ventana Wildlife Society.



Mother sea otter and pup. Credit: Chris Dellith/USFWS.

## Hearing community perspectives on potential sea otter recovery efforts in Northern California and Oregon

Earlier this summer, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service hosted 16 public open houses in coastal communities across Oregon and northern California to gather input on potential sea otter recovery efforts in Northern California and Oregon. The open houses provided a space for communities to speak with Service staff about the concept of sea otter reintroduction and share their perspectives, concerns, and feedback around possible next steps and the potential reintroduction process if a proposal were to move forward.

Learn more about the open houses and sign up to receive updates here: [Exploring Potential Sea Otter Reintroduction.](#)

Right: Visitors talk with subject matter experts about sea otter conservation at community open houses. Credit: Vanessa Morales/USFWS.



# Conservation in Action

## **A reminder on ethical wildlife viewing: Please don't harass the sea otters**

Recently, a female southern sea otter displaying highly unusual aggressive behavior with surfers and kayakers in Santa Cruz, California has attracted a lot of attention. Wildlife officials professionally trained in sea otter conservation and behavior are attempting to capture the sea otter for her own safety and the safety of humans recreating in the area, but in the meantime we have seen a significant increase in human-caused disturbance to sea otters in Santa Cruz and other areas along the Central California coast, including jet skis and small watercraft getting far too close to resting sea otters.

Unfortunately, all that extra attention from the public could be harmful or even lethal to sea otters in the area. Getting too close can interfere with the animal's ability to forage and get essential rest, ultimately affecting the animal's overall health.

## **We ask that everyone please adhere to the following guidelines for the safety of both people and southern sea otters:**

- Be alert: Be aware of your surroundings and alert to nearby wildlife when recreating.
- Maintain a safe distance: If a sea otter notices you, you are likely too close and should back away.
- Keep at least 60 ft. (or five kayak lengths) away, passing by parallel rather than pointing directly at any animals and moving slowly but steadily past rather than stopping.
- Slow down: Take caution in areas where sea otters are known to be present. Watercraft should slow down around kelp forests, where sea otters often rest but can be difficult to see. Be aware that a sea otter may come up from underwater unexpectedly.
- Keep pets leashed: Keep pets on a leash on and around docks and harbors, and never allow interactions, even if the animals appear to be playing. Look for a designated pet beach as an alternative.
- Never feed sea otters: Feeding otters can cause them to become aggressive which could result in their removal from the population and placement in an animal care facility.

[Read the story here.](#)



Southern sea otters at Moss Landing. Credit: Lilian Carswell/USFWS.

# Conservation in Action



Ventura marsh milk-vetch. Credit: USFWS.

## **A plant once thought to be extinct gets roadmap to recovery**

Good news alert! The final Recovery Plan to guide conservation efforts for the Ventura marsh milk-vetch was published this year. The species was believed to have become extinct by the 1960s but was rediscovered in Ventura County in 1997 by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist.

Since its rediscovery, several attempts have been made to reestablish the species at various locations, including at the UCSB North Campus Open Space. The North Campus Open Space was previously a golf course and is being restored to a coastal estuarine system with associated wetlands and upland habitat. The restoration of this coastal wetland system will help move rare species like the Ventura marsh milk-vetch towards recovery by providing habitat and year-round educational and recreational opportunities for the local community.

Recovery plans are based on the best available science on what species need to persist into the future. These plans outline recovery actions aimed at reducing threats and promoting long-term viability. We are committed to working with partners to continue the recovery of this rare, federally endangered plant!

# Our People

## Meet our summer interns!

### Felicia Aasand

"I really wanted to do something in environmental science because I was recreating outdoors a lot from hiking and backpacking to snowboarding. I wanted to help conserve the ecosystems and the animals within them because I was always out there enjoying them. My degree is in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences. It's kind of amazing how specific it is, but also exactly what I was looking for this whole time.

You're never too old, it is never too late, everyone is on their own timeline. You don't have to go down the same path as everyone else. If you want something, make that change in your life. I am so grateful to be a Kendra Chan Conservation Fellow. Although I never met her, I feel so connected to her, and grateful to have been chosen to carry on her legacy."

[Read Felicia's interview here.](#)



Felicia Aasand, Kendra Chan Conservation Fellow. Credit: Andrew Dennhardt/USFWS.



Ayanna Browne, Pathways intern. Photo courtesy of Ayanna Browne.

### Ayanna Browne

"I am from the U.S. Virgin Islands and was one of those kids who always wanted to be outside. I grew up around a lot of nature, but not knowing much about it. My family had a lot of pets, so I decided I wanted to be a veterinarian. I didn't only want to help pets, though. I wanted to be a wildlife veterinarian until I realized vet school wasn't for me. I decided I wanted to be outside rather than in an office or clinic, so I changed my path. For me, [diversity in conservation] is important because it allows me to feel comfortable. When you see someone that looks like you, you start to open up more and not feel like you have to keep your guard up all the time when communicating. [Interning at] Kern was a prime example of showing how well we can all just work together no matter what."

[Read on here.](#)

### Imani Russell

"I am a biology intern working on the BeachCOMBERS project, which helps us understand the health of our coastlines through citizen science. I am compiling and analyzing data from different formats and sources. I am trying to standardize it to keep it consistent moving forward so that we can do self-contained analyses. My grandpa was a biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and used to take my cousin, nana and me to the desert and would show us different places he worked including national wildlife refuges. I was able to experience a lot of nature when I was young. I didn't understand the magnitude of what I was looking at back then but always appreciated it. Once I got to college, I still loved animals, so I wanted to study animal behavior, conservation and ecology. My grandpa was my early inspiration!" [Read the interview here.](#)



Imani Russell, Pathways intern. Photo courtesy of Imani Russell.

# Our People



Fish and wildlife biologist Erin Arnold is featured as part of the Service's Women in Science campaign. Credit: Vanessa Morales/USFWS.

## Celebrating women in science

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.

In honor of International Day of Women and Girls in Science and our #ScienceWomen, we highlighted wildlife biologist Erin Arnold in our latest Women in Science video! In this video, Erin discusses how the strong women in her life, especially her mom, helped set her on a path towards conservation and gives advice to inspire future generations. [Watch the video here.](#)

# Field Feats



Hopper Mountain NWR Staff. Credit: Vanessa Morales/USFWS.

## CondorKids at the Santa Barbara Zoo!

In early June, staff from the Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge Complex and the Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office connected with 300 third graders and teachers over two days at the Santa Barbara Zoo. This visit was a culminating field trip for the students after completing the CondorKids curriculum in their classrooms during the school year. The children experienced different facets of condor biologist and refuge staff work by learning about telemetry, bird identification, condor behavior, and how to use a spotting scope through stations set up around the zoo.



Senior biologist Joseph Brandt shows a student a model condor egg. Credit: Vanessa Morales/USFWS



Communications specialist Vanessa Morales discusses the importance of native plants with kids. Credit: USFWS.

## Spreading the word about monarchs

The Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office attended Ventura's first Pollinator Palooza in late May and the city of Oxnard's Insect Festival which were attended by families curious to learn about the monarch! Staff discussed plant anatomy with visitors who looked through the microscope, handed out native wildflower seeds, and discussed western monarch migration patterns to spread awareness about monarch conservation!



Wildlife biologist Daniel Cisneros talks about plant anatomy. Credit: Vanessa Morales/USFWS.



Wildlife biologist Christie Boser speaks to 10th graders at Channel Island High School. Credit: Vanessa Morales/USFWS.

## Community connections at Channel Islands High School

We had a great time presenting about careers with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the Channel Islands High School! Wildlife biologist Christie Boser and communications specialist Vanessa Morales spoke with students in the Marine Science Academy and answered questions about their experiences and unique journeys to the Service. We appreciated the opportunity to present to students in our community who are the future generation of conservation professionals! The students will continue to be visited by staff from the Ventura FWO to learn more about being a wildlife biologist and other careers and programs within the Service.



# Field Feats

## Seed collection for Lyon's pentachaeta

We recently partnered with staff at the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SAMO) to collect seeds of the federally endangered Lyon's pentachaeta (*Pentachaeta lyonii*) for use in restoration and recovery efforts!

Ventura FWO botanists Mark Elvin and Ken Niessen each spent a day with SAMO staff, interns, and biotechs collecting seeds at two locations on SAMO property. These seeds will be bulked, or multiplied, to increase the amount of existing seed. The seeds will then be used in an attempt to create a new population of Lyon's pentachaeta and enhance existing populations. Our botanists hope that there will be enough remaining seed to put some in a long-term seed storage bank. Recovery efforts like this seed collection and bulking are critical in directing Lyon's pentachaeta to recovery!



Lyon's pentachaeta. Credit Mark Elvin/USFWS.



Botanist observes Lyon's pentachaeta in the field. Credit: Mark Elvin/USFWS.

# Field Feats



Ventura FWO geographer, Fernando Lara, talks about condors with a visitor at the Santa Barbara Zoo. Credit: Vanessa Morales/USFWS.

## Día del Niño at the Santa Barbara Zoo

Mariachis, dancers, singers, California condors, and Puddles the Blue Goose came together to celebrate Día del Niño at the Santa Barbara Zoo! Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office staff discussed California condors with children and their families who eagerly asked questions after seeing condors in the zoo's condor exhibit. Ventura FWO staff also expressed the importance of national wildlife refuges such as Bittercreek NWR and Hopper Mountain NWR in the recovery of California condors and shared how people can help condors. We enjoyed celebrating the importance of children in our society and reminded them that they play a big part in the future of wildlife conservation!

## Oxnard Native Plant Festival

We were busy planting the wildlife conservation seed at the Native Plant Festival at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center Corporation in mid-February! We discussed how native plants like white yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) help pollinators like the monarch butterfly thrive! Our botanist spoke with participants about botany and our mission and invited budding scientists to view the yarrow under the microscope!



Ventura FWO staff smile behind their booth at the Oxnard Native Plant Festival. Credit: Vanessa Morales/VFWO

# Field Feats

## Dunes Conservation Coalition

More than 100 biologists, engineers, and educators came together for a regional conference showcasing research and restoration on coastal dunes in California and Oregon. The hybrid conference shared papers on invasives removal, techniques in native species restoration and public outreach around dune and shorebird health. Field trips were hosted in Florence, Oregon, Mendocino in northern California, and the central coast of California. We seized the opportunity to meet new colleagues outside of our own specialties, to walk outside and appreciate the restoration that has resulted in beautiful native coastlines, and to practice enhanced communication to further the recovery of our coastal dune systems.



Dunes Conservation Coalition team members. Credit: USFWS.

# Field Feats

## Cooperative Agreement to recover Verity's dudleya

In 2013, the Springs Fire killed more than 90 percent of existing Verity's dudleya (*Dudleya verityi*) plants over its entire small range near Camarillo, California. Natural recovery of this federally threatened species is almost nonexistent because the species relies on lichens for germination and survival. These lichens have not yet grown back especially due to years of intervening drought.

In June, Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office botanists Mark Elvin and Ken Niessen helped @Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SAMO) botanists rediscover Verity's dudleya survey locations that were established to monitor the species' status after the fire. In a cooperative agreement, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service, SAMO, and the @Santa Barbara Botanic Garden will resurvey these locations, provide supplemental water, and improve conservation seed banks to help ensure that this species avoids extinction.

"Currently, only about 1,000 living individuals of Verity's dudleya are known to remain after the devastating Springs Fire of 2013," says Ken Niessen. "With cooperation between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partners, efforts are being made to preserve remaining plants so that the species has a chance to persist until the lichens needed for germination and growth can re-establish. This is critical to the survival of the species, which is vulnerable to another catastrophic fire, drought, and other effects of climate change."



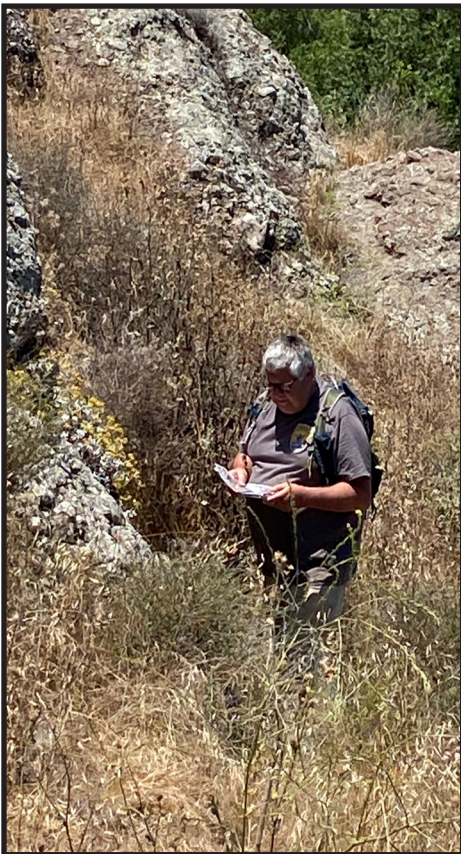
Verity's dudleya. Credit: Ken Niessen/USFWS.

# Field Feats

## Monitoring Verity's dudleya

Our botanists joined partners from the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and California State University Channel Islands to monitor the recovery of Verity's dudleya (*Dudleya verityi*), a federally threatened plant that blooms in late spring. While out in the field they discovered that the winter rains have allowed the species to begin recovering from the 2013 Springs Fire that burned its entire range and subsequent drought that threatened its existence.

"We are grateful to our partners that collaborate with us to promote the conservation and recovery of listed species," said Mark Elvin, botanist. "This work could not be completed without the generous support of participating biologists and landowners."



Senior botanist Ken Niessen monitors for Verity's dudleya. Credit: Mark Elvin/USFWS.



Flower in bloom. Credit: Mark Elvin/USFWS.



Monitoring for Verity's dudleya. Credit: Mark Elvin/USFWS.

# Field Feats

## Volunteer Work Days at Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge

In March, staff from Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge, Friends of the California Condor Wild and Free, and Ventura FWO joined volunteers to clear two miles of overgrown trail leading to a condor monitoring observation point during a volunteer workday at the refuge. Volunteer work days are organized monthly to support the refuge and invite volunteers from the community to get involved.



Refuge staff Louie and volunteer Maria smile after a Volunteer Work Day at Hopper Mountain National Wildlife Refuge. Credit: Vanessa Morales/USFWS.



Federal wildlife officer Nik Rockney-Finger and Ventura FWO staff Vanessa Morales and Fernando Lara in front of the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes NWR sign. Credit: Louie Ocaranza/ USFWS.

## Protecting listed shorebirds at Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes National Wildlife Refuge

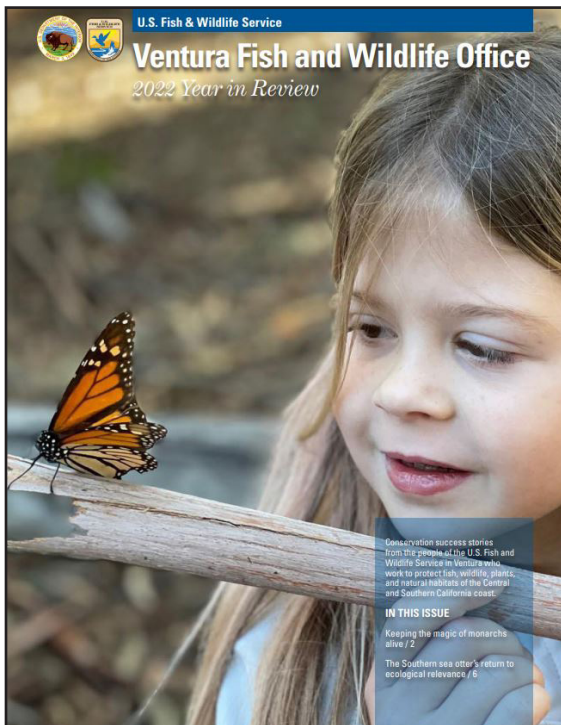
Refuge manager Louie Ocaranza and Federal wildlife officer Nikolas Rockney-Finger worked together to place educational signs along the beach at Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes National Wildlife Refuge to inform visitors that the area is being used by federally threatened Western snowy plovers during their nesting season from April to October. They installed 16 signs over nearly two miles of beach at the dunes. They also educated new hires Fernando Lara and Vanessa Morales from the Ventura FWO with their vast knowledge of the refuge and its wildlife.

# Our 2022 Year in Review

## Take a look back at our 2022 Year in Review

The Ventura FWO mission is to conserve and recover rare fish, wildlife, and plant communities across the Southern and Central California coast from our beautiful coastal dune and sagebrush ecosystems to the rugged terrain of our chaparral and oak woodlands and forests.

This year, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, one of the nation's foremost wildlife conservation laws, while working with partners to find innovative strategies to protect the ecosystems that benefit society as a whole. Learn more about our work in 2022 by viewing our Year in Review magazine and video.



Cover of the 2022 Year in Review magazine from Ventura FWO.

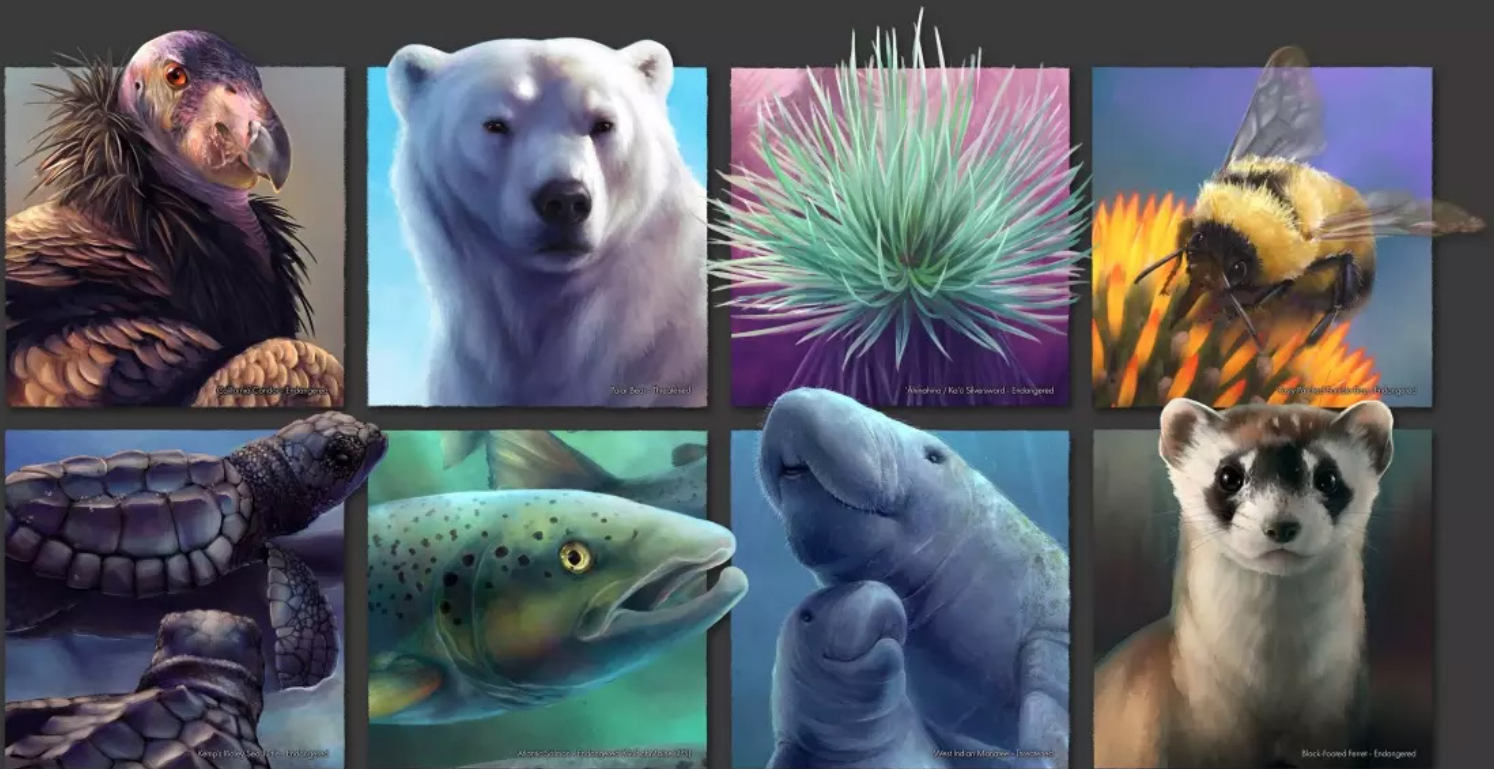
## Visit us online!

The Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office has launched its new website. Please visit us at <https://www.fws.gov/office/ventura-fish-and-wildlife> or on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/VenturaFWO>.

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August 2023



# THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT AT 50

## More Important Than Ever



### Celebrating the Endangered Species Act at 50

To commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Endangered Species Act, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released a poster featuring portraits of eight federally listed species that have been put on the road to recovery due to this important law. The portraits were painted by Cal Robinson, a public affairs specialist in the Service's Sacramento Fish and Wildlife Office.