

Friends of Tecolote Canyon



Photo by Mark Hannibal

In Our Backyard and Yours

This issue is dedicated to the animals you may see in the neighborhoods surrounding Tecolote Canyon.

San Diego Gopher Snake ~ By Trent Robertson

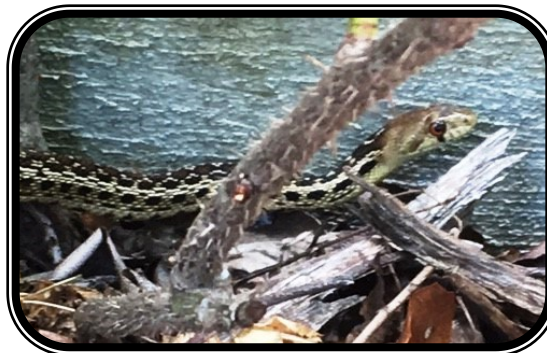


San Diego Gopher Snake

The Tecolote Nature Center has a number of live snakes on display for the purpose of educating the public about the important role snakes play in our local environment. The largest snake we have on display is a San Diego Gopher Snake named “Gulp”. Gopher snakes are one of the most frequently sighted snakes in Tecolote Canyon. They do not pose any threat to people and should never be injured

or killed. Unfortunately, Gopher Snakes exhibit a color pattern that can be mistaken for a rattlesnake. Another reason Gopher Snakes can be mistaken for rattlesnakes is because they may flatten their head and vibrate their tail when they feel threatened. It is important for local residents to be able to distinguish between these two species.

The San Diego Gopher Snake is an example of a wild animal that has adapted very well to living and hunting among humans. This is fortunate for us because they play a major role in controlling the population of rodent species such as rats, mice and gophers that are also well adapted to living among us, and that left unchecked can become major pests. In addition to rodents, Gopher Snakes will also eat rabbits, birds, lizards and insects. They are some-



*Gopher Snake at Tecolote Nature Center
~Photo by Marla Gilmore*

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Friends of Tecolote Canyon is a non-profit community organization committed to sponsoring nature education and restoration activities in Tecolote Canyon Natural Park. Our education program, supported by SDGE’s “Environmental Champions Initiative”, is dedicated to bringing children into Tecolote Canyon and fostering connection through enjoyable, memorable, and meaningful experiences in our unique and precious local habitat.

Wilderness is not a luxury but a necessity of the human spirit, and as vital to our lives as water and good bread.

Edward Abbey

times seen climbing shrubs and small trees in search of birds or bird eggs. They kill their prey by constriction.

Gopher snakes are found throughout the western United States. They are found in a variety of habitats including deserts, brushland, woodlands, coniferous forests, and grasslands. Our particular subspecies occurs south of Point Conception into northern Baja California on the western side of the Coast Range. Another subspecies, the Sonoran Gopher Snake, is found in desert habitats to the east of the Coast Range.

Gopher snakes produce 1-2 clutches of eggs per year and there may be as many as 24 eggs in a clutch. The eggs are laid between June and August. We invite you to come by the nature center to say “hi” to Gulp and the other snakes that reside there. We have a Coastal Rosy Boa and a California King Snake on display as well as photographs of other snakes that can be found in our region. We encourage everyone to learn more about these fascinating creatures that play such an important role in our environment.



Gopher Snake in Rose Canyon
~ Picture by Debby Knight

We have a website!

Friendsoftecolotecanyon.org is a new resource that you can visit for newsletter archives, Tecolote Canyon background, images, and contacts. Please send questions, comments, user issues, and feedback to nikiahrens@gmail.com.

Tecolote Canyon “Rim Shots” by Niki Ahrens,



Above ~ Gopher Snake approaching pocket gopher holes in the backyard

Upper Right ~ Gopher Snake emerging from pocket gopher hole

Lower Right ~ Gopher snake exploring pocket gopher holes



More “Rim Shots” *Photo’s and article by Niki Ahrens*



California Towhee parenting moment



Hooded Orioles on Coast Live Oak



Hooded Oriole on Toyon



Most of the Tecolote Canyon “rim shots” are common sightings in TCNP. Except one-- the California Quail sightings this season were especially fun.

Quail-ities of Our State Bird

Its distinct, squeaky “Chi-ca-go” call is one of the California Quail’s giveaways. For what may be the first time in years in North Linda Vista, a pair of California Quails made an appearance. When I heard their squeaky call, I caught sight of the

pair walking along the ground on the rim of Tecolote Canyon. While observing them over a few weeks during late spring, I saw them elevate to a maximum of only eight feet above ground. I noticed them visit the area around dinner hour over the course of a few months. They walked near each other in a stately and sweet way, stopping for brief rests.

Our state bird is often underneath shrubs on the ground, but it signals attention to itself with its voice. Its distinguishing quality is also 6 feathers in its cap (head plume), and a California quail is larger and rounder than a bird of similar stature like a mourning dove. The California quail eats vegetation like leaves, seeds and toyon berries, and can tolerate our dry San Diego climate well. They can get moisture from eating insects. CA quails may appear in groups and are likely to have a counterpart nearby even if not observable. They can lay upwards of 30 eggs at one time, and have egg-dumping behaviors where they lay eggs in other nests. Adult quails often raise young communally, and they can live to be six years old.



Left ~ top to bottom ~ Red-tailed Hawk soaring high; Cooper’s Hawk on chain link fence; California Thrasher on Coast live oak

Good Guy or Bad Guy? By Joan Brosnan

From a gardener's viewpoint, *Thomomys bottae*, Bottas' Pocket Gopher, exhibits the dark side of the force as the most notorious destroyer in Southern California. Evidence of its unwelcome presence is first noticed by the mounds of soil appearing on lawns and gardens or the overnight disappearance of flourishing flowers or vegetables. The actual entrance hole is usually kept filled in for protection from predators. Main predators include coyotes, snakes, skunks, owls, bobcats, hawks and rabid gardeners.

Usually solitary except during breeding season, one individual will dig and occupy a series of tunnels close to the surface and as deep as 5 feet below ground. Botta's Pocket Gopher is active for a total of about nine hours each day, spending most of its time feeding in the tunnels, but are not restricted to either daylight or night time. Tunnels are used extensively for feasting on plant roots and such delicacies as tubers and bulbs. A single gopher may account for the destruction of one's prize roses or dahlias. Silent and stealthy, they can communicate by making clicking noises, soft hisses, and squeaks. Could this voracious herbivore have a good side? It's debatable, however it could be considered beneficial as "nature's rototillers" aerate the dense clay soils in Clairemont and push mineral laden soil from the deeper parts of their burrow to the surface.



While walking in the canyon, I have seen a gopher dart out to pull an entire weed into its burrow. I have also been startled by a wiggling stalk only to see it disappear from view by an "invisible" force of nature.

Whatever your viewpoint on gophers, it could definitely use some orthodontia as its large front teeth continue growing unless worn down by activity. In fact, the lips close behind those incisors preventing dirt from being ingested along with our favorite vegetables. I have enjoyed observing Pocket Gophers on nature walks, if only they would keep their burrows confined within Tecolote Canyon, I might feel a small but limited affinity to their furry fat cheeks, tiny ears and eyes.

Desert Cottontail on the rim of Tecolote Canyon ~ Photos by Niki Ahrens

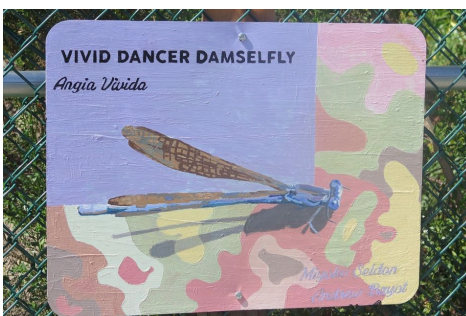
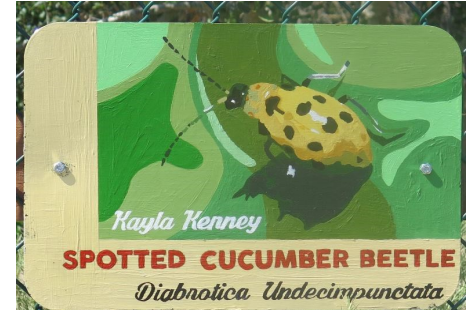




Partnerships in the Park

Student Art in the Park

We'd like to share our appreciation of the University City High School Art Tech Students for their contribution to our Canyon entrance. As you leave the nature center and head into the canyon, take notice of the insect panels that have been added to the wildlife panels, donated last year. Take a walk along the fence and enjoy their amazing artistic renderings of the smallest creatures within our beautiful canyon habitat.





Sabrina completed the scavenger hunt at Family Day 2017 and won the drawing for the kid's basket!

Did you ever wonder if insects have blood?

A swatted fly never leaves a single drop of red blood behind. That's not because flies don't have blood, it's just that their blood isn't red like ours.

Flies and other insects have a special kind of blood called *hemolymph*. Most often it is colorless, though occasionally it contains chemicals which make it yellow or green. Only a few insects have hemolymph with the bright redness that is found in the blood of humans and other vertebrates.



There minds were not built to sit and be taught They were built to explore, play, and learn. ~ *How Wee Learn*

Join us for Nature Art and Activities ~ Every third Wednesday at 1:30





EVENTS IN THE PARK

Tecolote Nature Center

5180 Tecolote Road San Diego, CA 92110

858-581-9959

Monday – Closed, Tuesday –Saturday 9:00-4:00, Sunday 9:00-2:00

Saturday August 12th

Come enjoy a meandering educational and pleasant walk in a Tecolote finger canyon under the shade of Coast Live Oaks.

8am–11am We will be meeting at the south end of Mt. Carol Drive.

There are no facilities at this neighborhood entrance and parking is on the street.

Bring water, sunscreen, and sturdy hiking or walking shoes.

Saturday, August 19th & September 16th

9:00-11:00 AM – Weed Warriors

Canyon clean up with Ranger Janice

Sunday, August 20th & September 17th

9:00 AM Sunday in the Garden

Volunteer with Park Ranger Steven

Get dirty, have fun, help out your community

Wednesday, August 16th & September 20th

1:30 – 3:00 PM Art & Activities for Kids

Free crafts, nature stories, and activities!

Saturday, August 26th & September 23rd

8:00 AM Audubon Society Bird Walk

All skill levels welcome

Updated activities are posted at:

<http://www.meetup.com/Friends-of-Tecolote-Canyon-Natural-Park-and-Nature-Center/>

Like us on

www.facebook.com/friendsoftecolotecanyon

Tecolote Nature Center ~ 5180 Tecolote Road San Diego, CA 92110

Hours of operation: Tues.-Saturday; 9-4:00, Sunday: 9-2:00, Closed Monday

For information call 858-581-9959



Like us on Facebook – Friends of Tecolote Canyon

Activities are free of charge.

**Donations to the “Friends of Tecolote Canyon
are always appreciated!”**



*Friends of Tecolote Canyon and the ESCAPE team gratefully
acknowledge a generous grant from **SDGE** supporting
another year of our Escape program.*



*We want to thank **Scott Chambers and Filmetrics** for
their donation, providing 5 years of wifi to the nature center*

Volunteer Opportunities ~ Something for Everyone!

Docents * Interpretive Guides * Art and Crafts

Tecolote Canyon Advisory Committee * Native Plant Garden

Weed Warriors * Park Patrol * Jr Volunteers (community service)

Environmental Stewards Canyon Program (ESCAPE)

If you are interested, come in and speak with any staff member.



SD City Council Community Project and Services

