



Santa Lucia Conservancy – *Keeping it Wild!*

Ground Nesting Birds of the Preserve



Grasshopper Sparrow

The Preserve's Grasshopper Sparrows and Meadow Larks depend on healthy grasslands for successful breeding, making them excellent indicators of our management success.



Burrowing Owls typically nest in tunnels that have been dug by a ground squirrel, lined with feathers, grasses and other materials. Healthy and grazed grasslands have encouraged the growth of our ground squirrel population, thereby creating valuable habitat for Burrowing Owls. After a long absence, Burrowing Owls have returned to the grazed areas of Peñon Peak here on the Preserve.



Western Meadow Lark

How The Preserve is helping

The Preserve has over 6,000 acres of protected grasslands. Ground nesting bird populations are in decline throughout North America as suitable grassland habitats are being lost to development, agricultural use, non-native weeds and grasses. Changes in grassland ecology due to the absence of native species like elk, grizzly's and even ground squirrels contribute to this loss of habitat.



Killdeer

This Killdeer nest at the Sports Center shows how vulnerable ground nests can be and the importance of blending in. Horned Larks were once found on the Preserve, but declining grassland conditions no longer support them. This bird is one of several grassland species we hope to restore through the cattle program.



Horned Lark

How do the Conservancy Cattle fit in?

Our Conservation Cattle Grazing Program is a cutting edge experiment in using cattle to mimic natural processes like native grazing and grass fires. Additional benefits to our community include: reduced fire risk, improved water infiltration for rain and the beauty and biodiversity that reflect a healthy environment.