



Santa Lucia Conservancy- *Keeping it Wild!*

The Afterlife



View from Robinson Canyon Road- I. Fenstermaker

A Lasting Legacy

Of all the trees in California, oaks create the most lasting, and often striking, dead wood. Standing or fallen, dead trees, or *snags*, represent a critical element of a healthy oak forest. They can persist for decades, serving as ecological bridges from one generation of trees to the next.



Our Screech Owls depend on natural cavities for nesting- Fallon

Dead Trees Bring New Life

Each stage of decay creates unique habitat for wildlife, making the tree a hotspot for nests, nurseries, and food storage and supporting behaviors such as perching, foraging, and roosting.



A Western Fence Lizard keeps an eye out for insects- C. Wyckoff

Oak woodlands, among California's richest habitats, are also some of our most imperiled. Since 1945, millions of acres have been lost. Even today, just 4% of remaining oaks are protected statewide. The oak woodlands of the Santa Lucia Preserve support over 300 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians and bring historical, cultural, and spiritual value to people as well. Oaks can live for hundreds of years, connecting us with the past and uniting us in awe in the present. Initially, seeing dead oaks might tug at this connection and elicit a sense of loss. However, the end of a tree's life as we know it is actually a rebirth, during which the tree transforms into a sanctuary, supporting more life than it did while alive.



This snag at Boot Hill, near the Preserve's Equestrian Center, offers many of the elements that make fallen trees so valuable- I. Fenstermaker

Mutual Benefit
Preserving snags protects us in return. Peeling bark provides essential habitat for species like the Western Fence Lizard. These lizards, identifiable by their striking cerulean bellies, benefit people by reducing the prevalence of Lyme Disease in our natural areas.



California Quail on a downed tree- C. Wilson

Active Management
At the Preserve, we ensure dead trees 'live on' as vital resources for both people and wildlife to enjoy. Snags are thoughtfully integrated along the golf course as visually interesting features, demonstrating their value in both landscaped and wild settings.



An Acorn Woodpecker assesses her impressive cache B. Chen

Ecosystem Engineers

Native Acorn Woodpeckers create new tree cavities each year, building homes for a myriad of birds, mammals, and insects. Acorn caches, known as granaries, turn logs into food pantries for seasons to come. Forgotten acorns may someday sprout and grow.



Granary on Longridge- I. Fenstermaker

Nature's Cradle

The benefits of old wood are not limited to dry land. Logs in streams act as underwater nurseries for aquatic species, including Steelhead Trout.



Juvenile Steelhead in Williams Canyon- C. Fischer