



WHERE THE ***WILDLIFE WANDER***

The Santa Lucia Preserve is, at its very essence, a bold and forward-thinking model of conservation. In an era where the leading threat to wildlife is loss of habitat, The Preserve design permanently protects over 90 percent of the land for the explicit purpose of providing large, diverse and connected areas of healthy and wild natural lands.





More impressive still is the community itself. The people who call this place home are invested intellectually and emotionally in this majestic landscape and in the well-being of the rare diversity of life it supports. At the heart of it all is a conservation community.

In partnership with The Preserve landowners, the Santa Lucia Conservancy is leading several groundbreaking research projects focused on understanding the natural resources of The Preserve and measuring our efforts to conserve it. Our newest project is aimed at understanding how wildlife are using habitat in the different areas of The Preserve, and how the presence of people may affect them.

In August of 2014, the Conservancy and 25 Preserve households launched the “Where the Wildlife Wander” project, systematically documenting wildlife using state-of-the-art cameras. In just six months, these citizen scientists along with Conservancy biologists have downloaded tens of thousands of images, documented nearly 40 birds and mammals, discovered a new species to The Preserve (kangaroo rat, *Dipodomys* sp.), and logged over 3,500 wildlife observations using 65 cameras. This incredible network of motion-sensitive infrared cameras allows us to observe the local wildlife without capturing them or affecting their behavior, allowing us to compare the number of species using habitat adjacent to homes and recreational areas versus land managed as wild habitat.

It is still early in this three-year study, but as the images are collected, we are learning a great deal about our wildlife and gaining rare insights into their lives: young lions playing tag, tiny fawns exploring a new world, and shy foxes on midnight hunts for mice. Social events on The Preserve are great venues for our participants to share encounters and establish friendly ‘bragging rights’ over who has captured the most interesting photos and which homes have the greatest diversity visiting their backyards.

A better understanding of how wildlife is interacting with the people and developed spaces of The Preserve will help us in many ways: improving human-wildlife interactions, prioritizing habitat restoration, and adaptively managing our lands. A project of this scale is only possible because of the extraordinary commitment of The Preserve’s conservation community. You can see ‘best of photos’ and information on living with wildlife on our website at www.slconservancy.org. ■

The Santa Lucia Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) non-profit land trust incorporated in 1995 to conserve the ecological health and integrity of The Preserve.

Science-based and forward-thinking, the Conservancy plays an essential role in ensuring The Preserve attains its full potential: a place of enduring wild beauty and resilient biodiversity, actively cared for and protected by a thriving community of people who treasure it.