



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office

Central and Southern California Coast

Stories from the Field

Summer 2022 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

Plant once believed in danger of extinction, no longer threatened in the wild

Thanks to decades of conservation efforts, the San Benito evening primrose, a small flowering plant native to California, has been removed from the federal list of endangered and threatened wildlife and plants due to recovery. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the plant as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 1985 due to ongoing threats of motorized recreation activities and commercial mining operations.

At the time of listing, the species was documented in only nine locations in a small area of San Benito County, California. Annual surveys for the species have confirmed that the plant now resides in more than 100 areas across multiple watersheds in portions of San Benito, Monterey and Fresno counties. [Learn more.](#)



The San Benito evening primrose is being delisted under the Endangered Species Act. The plant occupies a goldilocks niche, surviving best in areas with nutrient poor soils and a specific amount of disturbance. As a result, the San Benito evening primrose contributes to a primary trophic level in an environment where many plants can't survive. Credit: Ryan O'Dell/BLM



Morro shoulderband snail. Photo courtesy of Dan Dugan

Endangered snail inches toward recovery

A rare snail found only around Los Osos and Morro Bay along the central California coast is crawling toward recovery thanks to survey, habitat protection and conservation efforts with local partners. We announced this February that the Morro shoulderband snail is no longer in danger of extinction, improving its conservation status from endangered to threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

“The Endangered Species Act is a catalyst for recovery, and we know it’s working when we see species large and small take steps toward delisting,” said Cat Darst, Assistant Field Supervisor for the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura, Calif. “Thanks to city, county and state efforts that include habitat protection and increased surveying, Morro shoulderband snail numbers are now in the thousands rather than hundreds.”

USFWS partners supporting the snail’s recovery include the community of Los Osos, private landowners and local biologists, as well as the California Department of Parks and Recreation, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Morro Coast Audubon Society, Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo and the County of San Luis Obispo. [Learn more.](#)

Collaborative conservation efforts lead to downlisting of coastal California beach plant

This March, we announced the downlisting of beach layia from endangered to threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) due to substantial improvements in the species’ status since listing in 1992. As a result of years of collective conservation efforts of federal, state, local and private partners, this species is one step closer to full recovery.

Beach layia is a succulent annual herb belonging to the sunflower family. The plant grows on dry, exposed beach sites spread across six isolated dune systems in coastal California. From north to south, there are 13 populations of beach layia from Humboldt County to Vandenberg Space Force Base in Santa Barbara County.

“Today’s action is the result of the collaborative conservation efforts of many partners, including federal, state, local and private groups,” said Tanya Sommer, Field Supervisor of the Arcata Fish and Wildlife Office. “While there is still work to be done before the beach layia is fully recovered, with the continued commitment of these partners and the public I am sure we will get there.” [Learn more.](#)



Beach layia. Credit: Dave Impert/USFWS

Conservation in Action

Celebrating the history of island plant conservation

California's Channel Islands make up an archipelago of eight islands off the coast of Southern California. Often referred to as "The Galapagos of North America," their isolation coupled with unique climate, soils, and topography support a diverse range of flora and fauna, including many rare and endemic plant species found nowhere else on Earth.

Take a visual journey through the history of plant conservation on these majestic islands in this interactive ArcGIS Story Map created by Daniel Cisneros, 2021 Kendra Chan Directorate Fellow. Check out the [storymap](#).



Island barberry. Credit: Ken Niessen/USFWS



Santa Cruz Island dudleya. Photo courtesy of Santa Barbara Botanic Garden



Soft-leaved island paintbrush. Photo courtesy Kathryn McEachern/USGS

Wildlife scientists continue to seek cause of California brown pelican illness and mortality

We're working with our partners at California Department of Fish and Wildlife, local wildlife rehabilitation facilities, and other state partners to assess an increase in California brown pelican illness and mortality along the southern and Central California coast in recent weeks. If you see an injured or sick pelican, please contact your local wildlife rehabilitation facility.

For your and the birds' safety, please do not touch, attempt to feed, or take photographs with the birds. CDFW, USFWS and partners will continue to track this unusual event and we value the public's interest and appreciate all efforts to report. [Learn more](#) about this strange mortality event.



Brown pelican. Photo courtesy of Mike McCrary

Our People

Connecting people with nature

Join Hispanic Access Foundation Interns Fabiola and Fernando as they show us the importance of environmental conservation and teach us new facts about nature!

[Watch the videos.](#)



Faces of the Fish and Wildlife Service

Meet fish and wildlife biologist Andrew Dennhardt and office assistant Ann Bliss in our latest *Faces of the Fish and Wildlife Service* interviews!

Andrew discusses his conservation heroes and his path to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Ann discusses how an RV road trip put her down the path to a career in conservation and how volunteering at a wildlife rescue inspired her to make her own pollinator garden. [Learn more about Andrew.](#) [Learn more about Ann.](#)

Cat Darst is an FWS scholar!

Assistant field supervisor and USFWS Scholar Cat Darst cares about species recovery, improving decision making, and conservation policy.

“Her favorite part of working for the USFWS is the application of the best available science to Endangered Species Act decisions,” Cat explains. She believes that, “this is when the Service is at our best, doing the incredibly important, science-based work of preventing extinction and promoting recovery.” [Read the full story.](#)



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. [Watch the videos.](#)



Field Feats

Plover fencing installation

We're working with Ventura Audubon Society to install fencing along areas of Hollywood Beach in Oxnard to help Western snowy plovers thrive during the breeding season! These fences are important because they remind visitors to share the shore with our local, native, and rare wildlife, especially during the nesting season when the birds and their nests are most vulnerable! Don't forget that we #sharetheshore with wildlife!



Wildlife biologist Andrew Dennhardt helps install plover fences. Credit: David Sherer/USFWS



Signs that were put up along the plover fences. Credit: Amy Hughes/USFWS



Dr. Kathryn McEachern. Photo by USGS.

Recovery champion announced

We announced Dr. Kathryn McEachern, research ecologist with the U.S. Geological Survey, as the recipient of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's prestigious 2021 Recovery Champion award for her leadership in the recovery of threatened and endangered plants on California's Channel Islands!

"We cannot achieve our mission of endangered species recovery without the pivotal scientific research that underpins conservation and management actions for rare species," said Steve Henry, field supervisor of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura. "I am honored to present Dr. McEachern this national award on behalf of our agency for her lifelong contributions to Channel Islands plant conservation and for her role in inspiring new generations of women scientists."

Recovery efforts for species in Santa Barbara County

We're working with the La Kretz Center for California Conservation Science at UCLA and biologists with a local environmental consulting group to detect and recover California tiger salamander and vernal pool fairy shrimp in northern Santa Barbara County!

While out on a site visit, the group inspected 2 vernal-pool locations, evaluating the ponds' soil and hydrologic features and sampling them for the presence of California tiger salamanders, vernal pool fairy shrimp, and other listed or at-risk species. The day's visit demonstrated the tremendous value of collaborative conservation!



Inspecting a vernal pool. Credit: Andrew Dennhardt/USFWS



Working with partners is important for conservation. Credit: Andrew Dennhardt/USFWS

Field Feats

Grand opening of the North Campus Open Space Preserve with the University of California Santa Barbara

We're thrilled to celebrate the Grand Opening of the North Campus Open Space Preserve with the University of California Santa Barbara!

“Coastal wetlands are a precious resource that benefit people and wildlife. They buffer climate change by creating tidal systems that adapt to sea level rise and reduce flooding by protecting communities from storm surge and retaining rainwater. Coastal wetlands support a myriad of rare and native species from California red-legged frogs and California least terns to tidewater gobies and western snowy plovers,” said Steve Henry, field supervisor for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Ventura, Calif. “Devereux Slough at the North Campus Open Space offers pristine habitat to help move these species closer to recovery while providing year-round educational and recreational opportunities for people from all walks of life, from college students to young families, because nature is for everyone.”



Ribbon cutting ceremony. Photo courtesy of UCSB



Ventura marsh milk-vetch.. Credit: Colleen Grant/USFWS



North Campus Open Space Preserve.. Credit: Colleen Grant/USFWS

Restoring La Graciosa thistle at Myrtle Pond

Wildlife biologists Colleen Grant and Deb Kirkland and botanist Kristie Scarazzo have been working with the The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County to remove bulrush at Myrtle Pond in the Guadalupe Nipomo Dunes Complex!

This will prevent further overgrowth and loss of open water habitat, benefitting the federally protected La Graciosa thistle and California red-legged frog! LCSLO is the best and we love working with them!



Myrtle Pond. Credit: Colleen Grant/USFWS



Removing bulrush at Myrtle Pond. Credit: Colleen Grant/USFWS

Our 2021 Year in Review

Take a look back at our 2021 Year in Review

Despite these trying times, the Ventura FWO mission holds fast: 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.

Buoyed by the Endangered Species Act, one of the nation's foremost wildlife conservation laws, we worked with partners this year to find innovative strategies to protect ecosystems that benefit society as a whole. Learn more about our work in 2021 in our Year in Review [magazine](#) and [video](#).



Visit us online!

The Ventura Fish and Wildlife Office has launched its new website. For the latest information and to sign up to receive our Stories from the Field newsletter, 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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We honor the beauty that is found in every unique individual and celebrate our shared diversity.

Illustration of rare plants that we work to conserve and protect along the Southern and Central California coast by Karen Sinclair/USFWS