

RED-EARED SLIDER TURTLE



Fun Fact: The large Red-Eared Slider Turtle **population** at Descanso Gardens got its start in the 1980's. The Los Angeles Zoo needed a place to put turtles when they cleaned their turtle pond. Many of the visiting turtles liked it so much at Descanso Gardens that they stayed!

The easiest animal to see at Descanso Gardens is the Red-Eared Slider Turtle. Look for these turtles at the Lake, Mulberry Pond and other water features.

Habitat

The Red-Eared Slider is not **native** to Southern California, but can be found in every body of freshwater in Los Angeles County. They were often left there by pet owners. Red-Eared Sliders adapt very well to living in Southern California ponds and streams. They have taken over good turtle **habitat**. This has reduced the number of the native Western Pond Turtle.

Turtles have special features that help them survive in their habitat:

- Webbed feet that are good for scooping to make nests for their eggs.
- A turtle's mouth is called a beak. Red-Eared Sliders eat plants, tadpoles, fish, birds, snakes, and even other turtles.
- Turtles have gill-like structures that help them breathe underwater. Each scute grows to make the shell larger as the turtle grows.
- Turtles are cold-blooded. They need to bask in the sun for warmth. You will see Red-Eared Sliders in sunny places along pond edges or warming up on a log in the water.
- A turtle's shell is attached to the spine and ribs. So a turtle would feel it, if you touched its shell. But please don't touch- if a Red-Eared Slider grabs your finger you will be sorry! Sections of shell are called scutes. How many scutes can you count on a Red-Eared Slider's shell?

Predators

Turtles are eaten by many **predators** including raccoons and large birds, like herons. Since turtles have so many predators only a few turtle eggs live to adulthood. Red-Eared Sliders that make it to adulthood can live 70 years or more.

The scientific name for Red-Eared Slider Turtle is *Trachemys scripta elegans*.

CALIFORNIA SISTER BUTTERFLY



Fun Fact: This butterfly rarely sips nectar from flowers. Instead it sips liquid from dung, carcasses, rotting fruit, aphid honeydew and sap.

The California Sister Butterfly is common in Southern California. In the spring and summer these butterflies are seen in the oak trees. If you walk in the Oak Woodland or on the road to the Boddy House, look at the tops of the oak trees for butterflies. Male California Sister butterflies-fly back and forth or sit in the tops of the oak trees to watch for a mate to fly by.

Habitat and Life Cycle

California Sister butterflies depend on Coast Live Oak Trees:

- The California Sister lays one egg or two eggs on the leaves high up in the Coast Live Oak. When the **larvae** hatch, they will eat the oak leaves.
- A **larva** molts or sheds its skin several times. The butterfly may look different in each phase of its **life cycle**. In the fifth and last phase, the **larva** is the color of an oak leaf. It has 6 pairs of “horns” that look like the spines on an oak leaf. Blending in, or camouflaging, with the leaves is a way it protects itself.
- The California Sister **chrysalis** also stays protected by blending in with the tree. It’s brown with white spots and looks like a dead leaf.
- The butterfly emerges from the chrysalis after 10 days. Each butterfly lives for about one month. California Sisters **pollinate** important **native** plants like toyon and buckeye.

Predators

California Sisters have many **predators**: lizards, frogs, praying mantis, dragonflies, crab spiders, mice and some birds. Many birds do not like the taste of this butterfly. This defense keeps **predators** away. When California Scrub Jays were fed California Sisters, they wiped their beaks and ruffled their feathers like saying “yuck!” Other types of butterflies copy the colors of the California Sister to trick **predators** and defend themselves.

The scientific name of the California Sister is *Adelpha californica*.

AMERICAN BULLFROG



Fun Fact: Bullfrogs are about 6 inches long. They can jump distances 10 times as long as their body length. They have special muscles in their legs. These muscles strain and energy is put out. The Bullfrog's legs "catch" the energy. Then the frog can jump many inches.

At Descanso Gardens, Bullfrogs can be spotted in the streams and at the edges of the small ponds. They are easiest to see in the Spring. If you watch them a while you might see one catch a fly!

Characteristics and Behaviors

The American Bullfrog is the largest frog in North America. Bullfrogs get their name from the noises males make during mating season, which sound like a bull bellowing. Male bullfrogs form into groups called choruses and bellow or croak for the female frogs. All the sounds coming from male frog groups help them attract the female frogs.

Habitat

Bullfrogs live in large bodies of water like swamps, ponds and lakes. They also live in **habitats** people make such as pools and ditches.

The bullfrog is **native** to eastern North America but can be found in the south and west. There are many reasons the Bullfrog **population** has spread. Bullfrogs are brought to new states by people. Sometimes the frogs escape or are let go and then survive in the local **habitat**. In California, Bullfrogs are an invasive species and have survived well enough to take over the **habitat** and food sources of our **native** frogs.

Predators and Prey

Bullfrogs are "ambush" **predators**. This means that they sit and wait for food to come by. Bullfrogs **prey** on many small animals. First, the bullfrog leaps close to the **prey**. Then the frog makes a quick lunge with its mouth open. The frog's sticky tongue reaches out and traps the insect or animal. The Bullfrog's tongue brings the **prey** into his mouth as it closes. Large **prey** that do not fit entirely into the mouth are stuffed in with the frog's hands.

The scientific name of the American Bullfrog is *Lithobates catesbeianus*.

YELLOW GARDEN SPIDER



Fun Fact: Sometimes the garden spider connects itself to a web by a thread of silk and hides in the bushes. When an insect gets caught, the spider can feel the web vibrate as the trapped insect moves.

Yellow Garden Spiders are common, large orb-weaving spiders seen at Descanso Gardens.

Look for Yellow Garden Spiders and their webs in the Camellia Forest in summer and fall. To find them, watch for sunlight shining on their webs.

Behavior and Characteristics

In females, the top of the abdomen is black with symmetrical patches of bright yellow. Males are not as colorful. They are smaller with brownish legs and less yellow on their abdomens. Females are about one inch, which is three times longer than the males. Like all arthropods (the family of spiders) they have an external skeleton. That means the skeleton is outside the spider's body.

A male spider courts the female spider her by plucking or pulling at the threads of her web. After mating, the female deposits one or more egg sacs on her web. Babies hatch in late summer or fall.

Habitat

These spiders are called "orb weavers" because their webs have several small-to-large circles or "orbs" inside each other. Yellow Garden Spiders spin circular webs in sunny areas where they can anchor their webs to trees or bushes. The spider may eat its web each night and spin it again the next night.

Predators and Prey

Yellow Garden Spiders make venom that is harmless to humans. The venom helps to paralyze **prey** like flies, bees, and other flying insects that are caught in the web. Yellow Garden Spiders help plants by controlling insect pests in a garden.

The scientific name of the Yellow Garden Spider is *Argiope aurantia*.

WESTERN FENCE LIZARD



Fun Fact: Male Western Fence Lizards appear to do push-ups. **Naturalists** think this makes the lizard appear larger and chases other males away from their **territories**.

This is one of the most common lizards in California. They are everywhere in Descanso Gardens. Keep an eye out for them in the California Garden on rocks or on nooks and crannies of oak trees. They are very active during the day.

Characteristics and Behaviors

Western Fence lizards are a type of reptile. They are cold-blooded animals, which means they depend on their surroundings to keep them warm. They can grow to be 8 inches long and are covered in gray, tan, or brown scales with a white or yellow belly.

A Western Fence Lizard's color changes with the outdoor temperature. In the morning they are darker, which helps them absorb sunlight and warm up. As the day gets warmer, their color lightens so that they do not get too hot. They are sometimes nicknamed "Bluebellies" because adult males have large bright blue patches on their bellies and throats. Most of the time the blue patches are hard to see. Sometimes these blue patches change colors in different light. This is called "iridescence."

If you have a chance to look at a Western Fence Lizard up close, see if you can find its "third eye." Look for a large scale on the back of the lizard's head with a greenish white dot in the center. The lizard can sense light and some colors through this scale. The third eye helps a lizard figure out the time of year and weather. Then it will know when to sun itself, hunt, or head for its burrow. The third eye also helps a lizard find its way home using the direction of the sun.

Habitat

Western Fence Lizards are found in the Western United States and North Western Mexico. They live naturally in grassland, sagebrush, chaparral, woodlands and forests.

Predators and Prey

They eat beetles, ants, flies, caterpillars and spiders. Since Western Fence Lizards like to sunbathe, they are easily caught by many **predators** such as coyotes, snakes, and birds.

The scientific name of the Western Fence Lizard is *Sceloporus occidentali*.

WESTERN TIGER SWALLOWTAIL BUTTERFLY



Fun fact: When you walk at Descanso Gardens you might notice butterflies sitting on the edges of mud puddles. They are actually sipping the mud. This is called “puddling,” an important behavior for butterflies. Butterflies need the minerals found in mud. Butterflies need their body temperature to be about 86 degrees before they can fly, so on cool days you might find a butterfly sitting still on a leaf in the sun with its wings folded, or “shivering” its wings to warm up.

Look for the Western Tiger Swallowtails in the Rose Garden at Descanso Gardens. This yellow and black striped butterfly has a wingspan of up to 4 inches. It is called a Swallowtail because it has a long tail on each back wing that looks like the long, pointed tail of a bird called the Swallow.

Habitat

Swallowtails live near woodlands, rivers and streams, canyons, parks, and roadsides. When the Western Tiger Swallowtail is a caterpillar it eats leaves from trees and shrubs. As an adult butterfly, the Swallowtail drinks nectar from flowers. Butterflies have a proboscis, or tube-like organ, that helps them drink liquids. The nectar they gather **pollinates** the plants.

Life Cycle

The butterfly goes through four stages of development: egg, caterpillar, **chrysalis**, and adult butterfly. A caterpillar, or **larva**, will emerge from the egg and eat until it is full grown. Once grown, it forms a chrysalis. During the chrysalis stage, it does not eat or drink. Many changes happen within the chrysalis, and the caterpillar transforms into a butterfly with wings. The WesternTiger Swallowtail butterfly lives for about one month in butterfly form. Often, Swallowtails lose one of their wing tails to a **predatory** bird, but they can still fly.

The scientific name of the Western Swallowtail Butterfly is *Papilio rutulu*.

MALLARD DUCK



The duck's quack is the sound of a female Mallard. Males don't quack. They make a quieter raspy or scraping sound.

The most common ducks who live in Descanso Gardens are called Mallard Ducks. At Descanso Gardens, you can see a group or "raft" of ducks on the lake or resting near the lake. They also enjoy the streams and ponds in the Gardens.

Characteristics and Behaviors

The male's shiny green head, gray sides, and black tail make it easy to identify. Females and ducklings are mottled brown with orange-and-brown bills. Both males and females have a blue wing patch with a white edge along the wing and orange webbed feet.

Ducks are strong fliers. Migrating flocks of Mallards can travel at 55 miles per hour.

A male and female Mallard duck will pair up in the fall. They court all winter. They build their nests on the ground close to water. Only the female cares for the eggs in the nest. She also takes care of the brood of ducklings. If you see a Mallard pair with their ducklings at Descanso, the ducklings may hurry to hide under their mother's wing for warmth or protection.

Habitat

Mallards live all over North America, Europe and Asia in ponds, parks and wild wetlands.

Mallards eat a wide variety of food. They don't dive. Instead they "dabble," or tip forward in the water to find seeds and plants that grow in the water. They also roam around on the shore and pick at plants and **prey** on the ground. During the breeding season, the ducks eat mainly animals including insect **larvae**, earthworms, snails and freshwater shrimp. During migration Mallards eat seeds in the fields along their path.

The scientific name of the Mallard Duck is *Anas platyrhynchos*.

WESTERN HONEY BEE



Fun Fact: When the air temperatures drop below 50 degrees, Honey bees gather around their queen to keep warm. Worker bees rotate from the outside edge to inside so all can stay warm.

Western Honey bees can be found on flowers everywhere at Descanso Gardens.

Pollination

Honey bees are pollinators. A pollinator is an insect, bird or mammal that helps a plant spread pollen, the substance that creates seeds. When a bee goes inside a flower, it uses its tongue to collect nectar. The pollen in the flower sticks to the hair on the bees' body, and that pollen will be transferred to the next flower the bee visits. Western Honey bees are mostly attracted to yellow, blue, and purple flowers that are shaped like bowls or bells. Bees can't see the color red, but they do have a very good sense of smell, and like sweet or minty smelling flowers.

There are also many types of **native** bees at Descanso. California **native** bees are also important pollinators, and most of them live in **solitary** nests rather than hives.

Habitat

Honey bees are found all over the world. Honey bees build hives of wax to live in. They make honey and store it in a structure called a honeycomb inside the hive. A bee hive has one queen and many worker bees. Worker bees care for the bee **larvae**, build the honeycomb, and get food. Beeswax comes from a gland in the worker bee's abdomen. Bees do a "dance" to tell other bees where there is food. When bees need to make a new hive, the queen and worker bees travel in a group to a new place.

People Need Honey Bees

Honey bees **pollinate** the flowers of fruit trees and crops that people eat. Beekeepers keep honey bees in human-made boxes, take them to farms to pollinate crops, and collect their honey. In the last few years, many Honey bees have died off. Scientists have found that exposure to pesticides are a main contributing factor to these deaths.

Protection

Bees only sting when they are afraid that their hive is **threatened**. When a bee stings, it will kill the bee. The bee sacrifices itself, but protects the hive from **predators**.

The Western Honey Bee is one of many bees in the family whose scientific name is *Apis*.

CALIFORNIA SCRUB-JAY



Fun Fact: Scrub-Jays can be playful. Jays have been seen to sneak up behind an Acorn Woodpecker to pull its tail. Sometimes they even pull a cat's tail!

California Scrub Jays are easy to see in the Oak Woodland at Descanso Gardens. You might have to follow their noisy calls to find them. They are fun to watch because they are loud and playful. They move about in bold hops and jumps, looking around with sharp turns of the head. Their call is a loud rough "Dzweep, dzweep."

Characteristics and Behavior

The California Scrub-Jay is blue with a rounded head and no crest. Males and females look alike. A pair defends their **territory** all year. They keep other Scrub-Jays away by flying at them, calling, and sometimes pecking. Pairs often stay together for several years.

Habitat

California Scrub-Jays are important members of Coast Live Oak **habitats**. Each bird can collect 5,000 acorns in the fall. They bury their acorns far from the tree. If the Jay does not return to eat an acorn, the acorn may be able to sprout and grow into a new oak tree.

California Scrub-Jays eat mostly insects and fruit during spring and summer. During fall and winter they eat nuts, seeds, and acorns. Jays hold the acorn nut between their feet and hammer it with their wide bills. They also eat small animals such as lizards and mice.

Scrub-Jay nests are made of a basket of twigs lined with roots, plant fibers, and animal hair. The pair both help build the nest. They keep their nest location a secret by entering and leaving the nest on different routes.

The scientific name of the California Scrub-Jay is *Aphelocoma californica*.

ALLEN'S HUMMINGBIRD



Hummingbirds are the smallest birds. They get their name because of the humming sound made by their wings beating quickly. If you see a hummingbird, listen closely and you might hear the humming noise.

You can spot these little birds buzzing around the Rose Garden or any bed of flowers at Descanso Gardens. They also swoop over the ponds to grab small insects.

Characteristics

Allen's Hummingbirds are very small, about 3 inches long. The male has a green back and forehead. His body and tail are rust-colored and he has an orange-red throat that is iridescent. That means its feathers change colors in sunlight. The females are mostly green. Their orange colored throat has speckles. Their tail has white tips.

Habitat and Food

These hummingbirds are seen in the woods, gardens and meadows of coastal California and southern Oregon.

All hummingbirds are very important **pollinators**. A hummingbird sticks its long straight beak and tongue into a flower to drink nectar. Sticky pollen grains from the flower stick to the side of its beak. When the hummingbird visits its next flower, some of the pollen grains from the previous flower will drop.

The Allen's Hummingbird carries mites which are tiny insects that live inside flowers. These mites travel in the hummingbird's nose and spread from flower to flower. The mites lay eggs in the new flowers. The insects have many healthy places to survive.

The scientific name of Allen's Hummingbird is *Selasphorus sasin*.

COTTONTAIL RABBIT



Fun Fact: Cottontail rabbits defend themselves from predators by hopping, kicking, clawing and biting. Their back legs are longer than the front legs, which makes them able to hop. The back legs also have very strong muscles and bones for kicking. Each of their front feet has four toes with claws plus a dewclaw. A dewclaw is a claw that is higher up on the foot. All of the claws help with eating and with protecting from **predators**.

When at Descanso, look for cottontail rabbits in the Rose Garden and California Garden. Rabbits are small mammals. The cottontail rabbit is a wild rabbit and is sometimes called a Western Brush Rabbit. It has a short stubby tail, and grey or brown fur with a grey belly. Cottontails are shy. Walk quietly in the early morning or late afternoon and you might be lucky enough to see one.

Habitat

Cottontails do not dig their own holes or burrows for shelter. They live in ground burrows left by other animals. Underground dens are used in cold or wet weather. They are also used to hide from **predators**.

Cottontails are herbivores, meaning they eat only plants. Their **habitats** include forests, wetlands, hayfields, orchards and gardens. Cottontails often hide in the bushes during the day. They look for food later in the evening.

Predators

Underground burrows provide the rabbits with safe homes. They use their large ears to listen for predators and protect themselves. On windy days, they will stay in their burrows because the wind makes it hard for them to hear potential danger.

The Cottontail's most dangerous **predators** are birds that hunt, such as the hawk. Other **predators** might be snakes, coyotes, mountain lions, bobcats or dogs. When **threatened** by a **predator**, Cottontails hop in a zig zag back to the safety of their burrows.

The scientific name of the Western Brush Rabbit is *Sylvilagus bachmani*.

MULE DEER



Fun Fact: Sometimes Mule Deer run with a bouncing motion with all four feet hitting the ground together. This is called “stotting” or “pronking.”

At Descanso Gardens, look for Mule Deer in the Camellia Forest, around Fern Canyon, in the Oak Woodland and California Natives. The high fence around the Rose Garden is to keep Mule Deer out at night so they don't eat all the roses. Our Rose Horticulturalists will encourage deer to leave the Rose Garden during the day.

Characteristics and Behaviors

Mule deer have large ears and antlers and black tipped tails. Their antlers grow straight up and fork as they grow. Since their ears look like a mule', they are called a mule deer.

The deer can be forty-two inches tall at the shoulder. From their nose to their tail could measure up to nine feet. The bucks or male weigh about two hundred pounds. The does or female weigh about 150 pounds.

Usually does have one or two fauns (baby deer). The does and fauns stay together in a herd. The bucks go off on their own.

Habitat

Mule Deer are found all over Western North America.

Mule Deer eat acorns and berries. They also eat mushrooms, dandelions, clover, pine, oak and grass. The deer love the roses and camellias at Descanso Gardens.

Predators

Predators include coyotes, wolves and cougars.

The scientific name of the Mule Deer is *Odocoileus hemionius*.

CALIFORNIA GROUND SQUIRREL



Fun Fact: Rattlesnakes are a major **predator** of Ground Squirrels. Ground squirrels have developed different ways to protect themselves. For example, adult Ground Squirrels have a resistance to Rattlesnake venom. A Ground Squirrel can also force extra blood into its tail and waive its tail back and forth. This tricks the snake- the snake senses the extra heat from the increase in blood, and thinks it's a larger animal. Sometimes the squirrel gets lucky and the snake goes elsewhere to find dinner.

At Descanso, keep a watch for ground Squirrels around the Lakeside Lookout. You can also find them in the California Natives and the Oak Grove.

Characteristics and Behaviors

The California Ground Squirrel has brownish-gray fur with light colored spots on its back. It is about 18 inches long and has a white belly. Its tail is five to seven inches long.

Ground squirrels spend most of their lives on the ground near their burrow, however they can also climb trees. They spend their time feeding, sunning, dust-bathing and grooming. Female squirrels have five to eight babies in a nest in the ground or in a rock pile. The babies leave the nest after about eight weeks. Adults live to three or four years of age.

Habitat

Ground squirrels live in the hills and open or rocky areas. These squirrels live in burrows dug under trees, logs, bushes or rocks. They live in colonies, however they don't socialize with each other. Several squirrels may share a burrow, but they will each have their own entrance.

They eat plant parts like leaves, stems, flowers and roots, acorns, berries and fruits. They also eat insects like grasshoppers, crickets, beetles and caterpillars. When collecting its food, a squirrel will store the food in its cheek pouches.

Predators

Their **predators** are Rattlesnakes, Red-Tailed Hawks, Raccoons and Coyotes. When these squirrels feel **threatened**, they make a high-pitched alarm call. The call sounds like a loud "cheep". It is repeated for several minutes. When defending themselves and alerting others to danger, the squirrels also kick sand and swish their tails from side to side called tail waving.

The scientific name of the California Ground Squirrel is *Otospermophilus beecheyi*.

EASTERN FOX SQUIRREL



Fun Fact: Pioneers brought these squirrels to the Western United States because they liked to hunt the squirrels for food.

You can find an Eastern Fox Squirrel just about anywhere at Descanso.

Characteristics and Behaviors

Male and female Eastern Fox Squirrels look alike. Their nose-to-tail length is about 17 to 28 inches. Both male and female squirrels have large bushy tails which can be 8 to 13 inches in length. Fox Squirrels make a barking noise. They chatter bark when frightened.

Eastern Fox Squirrels are found in woodlands with spread out trees and plants. These squirrels can also be found in neighborhoods and cities. Eastern Fox Squirrels are very good climbers. They have flexible ankle joints that help them climb down tree trunks. Their long tails help with balance as they move and jump. Even though Fox Squirrels are great climbers, they spend a lot of time on the ground too.

Eastern Fox Squirrels build two types of shelters. They build leaf nests called dreys and tree dens. The drey is built on tree branches. It has large balls of leaves, twigs and grass. Tree dens are holes in a tree. The dens are used to raise their babies.

They eat seeds and nuts of trees such as oak, walnut and pine. Fox Squirrels store nuts by burying them in the ground. This gives the squirrels a supply of food for the winter months. Many of these nuts are never eaten and can go on to sprout into new trees. If you see a Fox Squirrel in the fall, chances are the squirrel's cheeks will be stuffed with acorns.

Habitat

The Eastern Fox Squirrel is found across North America. The "fox squirrel" name comes from the yellowish red color that is seen on these squirrels. In most areas of southern California, the squirrel's upper body is brown grey to brown yellow with a brownish orange belly.

The scientific name of the Eastern Fox Squirrel is *Sciurus niger*.

Glossary

Glossary words are highlighted in the animal texts in **bold**.

Chrysalis	The hard layer on the outside of the pupa of a butterfly.
Habitat	The natural home of an animal, plant or other living thing.
Invasive species	An animal or plant that is not native to a habitat but easily grows and survives there. Often invasive species take away the food and shelter of native plants or animals.
Larva	The early form of some insects. For instance, butterflies are first a larva. Larvae is the plural of larva.
Life cycle	The stages a plant or animal passes through during its lifetime.
Native	Plants or animals that occur naturally in a specific place. Non-native plants are usually introduced by humans.
Naturalist	A scientist who studies nature.
Pollinator	A pollinator is an insect such as a butterfly or bee, or an animal such as a bird or bat, that helps spread a flower's pollen.
Population	The whole number of a type of plant or animal in an area.
Predator	Animals that hunt other animals for food. The hunted animal is the "prey."
Solitary	Living on its own.
Survival	Continuing to live.
Territory	The area that is defended by an animal. The area includes its home and food sources.
Threatened	Scared. Also, a type of plant or animal that may not continue to live on earth, endangered.

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