

# FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT

By Mary Wilson

July 23, 2017

## Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve

Temperatures have been ranged from 93° to 109° at the reserve since June 14<sup>th</sup> this year. Hillsides are brown, wildflowers have dispersed their seeds but you will see the large white trumpet flowers of the jimson weed and the common sunflowers have their yellow and brown flowers facing the sun. Desert straw, California sandaster and California buckwheat have flowers. The turkey mullein still have their tiny flowers. The prickly lettuce and horseweed are finished for the season. The vinegar weed and tarweed are now coming up with no flowers yet.

There are still some poppies and they are quite small. The entire blossom may be ½ inch across, the calyx is about ¼ inch and the seed pods are around 1 inch. On the Lightning Bold Trail I found six of these poppy plants.

Spotted lizards, cabbage butterflies, ravens, sparrows and saw a family of quail.



Tiny California poppy



Common sandaster



Desert straw

## Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park

The California buckwheat is in varying colors from the white to the rust color. Desert straw is in bloom. Both the male and female junipers have new growth at the end of the branchlets. The female junipers still have a few small berries left. Some of the male juniper trees still have cones that are brown but it looks like some are producing new green cones. Will keep watch on these male cones as they had a seasonal growth of cones this past spring. The research question will be, “Will they have a second season of producing cones and will the female trees grow the receptors to receive the pollen?”



California Buckwheat - May



California Buckwheat—July



California Buckwheat—September

## AMERICAN BADGER

*Taxidea taxus*



Badgers are stoutly built, powerful and are known to be cantankerous carnivores. They are fossorial (Latin for “digger”) creating many-chambered underground dens. They can move yards of dirt in minutes, barreling in head first with long digging strokes of the front legs and quick, earth-moving shoves backwards with the rear legs. They have been known to move dirt faster than any other mammal because of their strong shoulders, sturdy claws, and partial webbing between their front toes that allow them to scoop soil out quickly. They use their back feet to kick the loose dirt out of the way. Badgers have a third eyelid that protects their eyes from all the flying soil, and thick guard hairs in their nostrils and ears to keep them clear of debris. Badgers dig in pursuit of prey and they expand tunnels into sleeping burrows.

They measure 20 to 34-inches in length and can weigh up to 25 pounds. Except for the head, the American badger is covered with a grizzled brown, black and white coat of coarse hair or fur, giving almost a mixed brown-tan appearance. The coat aids in camouflage in grassland habitat. Its triangular face shows a distinctive black and white pattern, with brown or blackish “badges” marking the cheeks and a white stripe extending from the nose to the base of the head.

It preys on pocket gophers, ground squirrels, moles, marmots, prairie dogs, woodrats, kangaroo rats, deer mice, and voles. It is a significant predator of snakes including rattlesnakes. They also prey on ground-nesting birds, such as bank swallow or sand martin and burrowing owls. They will also prey on lizards, amphibians, carrion, fish, and skunks. Badgers also eat a variety of insects, including bees and honeycomb, grubs and vegetable matter including fruits and roots.

The badger’s sense of smell is very powerful and they can detect an animal in its burrow through soil as well as snow cover. When they locate their prey, they dig rapidly directly down into the animals den in a devastating surprise attack from above.

A badger being pursued by a large predator such as a wolf or mountain lion can dig backwards, fangs facing out for protection and disappear beneath the soil in a matter of seconds. The badger has very thick fur and loose skin which allows it to twist around, even when having been grabbed from behind by a predator, to defend itself with its impressive canines.

Badgers are normally solitary animals, but are thought to expand their territories in the breeding season to seek out mates. Mating occurs in late summer and early fall, with some males breeding with more than one female. Young are born from late March to early April in litters ranging from one to five young, averaging about three.

Badgers are born blind, furred and helpless. Eyes open at four to six weeks. The female feeds her young solid foods prior to complete weaning, and for a few weeks thereafter. Young badgers first emerge from the den on their own at five to six weeks old. Families usually break up and juveniles disperse from the end of June to August and young leave their mothers as early as late May or June.

Most female American badgers become pregnant for the first time after they are a year old. Males usually do not breed until their second year. The average longevity in the wild is 9-10 years.

American badgers require cover for sleep, concealment, protection from weather, and natal denning. They typically enlarge foraged out gopher or other prey holes, or other animal burrows. Their dens range from about 4 to 10 feet in depth and 4 feet to 6 feet in width. A female American Badger may create 2 to 4 burrows in proximity with a connecting tunnel for safety for her young. Burrows may be dug and used for a day to a week, and then abandoned. They may return later, with other small wildlife utilizing abandoned burrows in the interim. Where prey is plentiful, they will reuse dens, especially in the fall, sometimes for a few days at a time. In winter, a single den may be used for most of the season. Natal dens are dug by the female and are used for extended periods, but litters may be moved, probably to allow the mother to forage in new areas close to the nursery.

While the American badger is an aggressive animal with few natural enemies it is still vulnerable to other species in the habitat. Predation on small badgers are by gold eagles, coyotes, cougars, and bobcats. Bears and gray wolves occasionally kill American badgers. They are trapped by humans for their pelts. Their fur is used for shaving and painting brushes.

Conservation Status - The California Department of Fish and Game designated the American badger as a California species of special concern.

**The photos below were taken with motion cameras placed by burrowing owl habitats. The badgers will prey on the owls.**



April 13, 2017—12:21 a.m.



March 24, 2017—8:06 p.m.

**One burrowing owl checking out the motion camera!**

