

A Brief Walk Along the San Diego River



San Diego River, Mission Valley

By: Marly Nicole Isler

Dedication:

I would like to dedicate this booklet to Joan Embery. She inspired the start of this idea and has been a driving force in the production of this guide.

Joan Embery has been a champion of conservation, environmental, and preservation issues. Her work has included hundreds of television shows, public appearances, and wildlife expeditions around the world. As a dedicated animal and environmental advocate, Joan spends her time contributing to wildlife organizations and educating the public on related issues.

In 2004, Joan began her own non-profit organization called The Embery Institute for Wildlife Conservation. This organization hopes to connect people with wildlife and conservation issues and educate them on their specific roles in insuring healthy environments.



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Photo By: Shannon Switzer

History:

The San Diego River is 52 miles long stretching from Santa Ysabel in East San Diego County to the El Capitan reservoir, Lakeside, Santee, Mission Valley, and ending in the Pacific Ocean through Dog's Beach in Ocean Beach. In 1769 when the Spanish were creating settlements they chose present day San Diego because of its availability of water. San Diego's adjacency to the river and the Pacific Ocean are what bring prospective homeowners and tourists to San Diego.

Birds of the San Diego River:

There are over 435 different bird species in San Diego County; more than any other county in the United States. 36 are described in this booklet. 260 bird species migrate through San Diego County each year on the Pacific Flyway, a major route stretching from Alaska to Patagonia.



Photo by: Mike Baird

American Coot

- *Fulica americana*

The American Coot lives around wetlands. Adult birds have a thick white bill, a dark gray body, and yellow legs. They have scalloped toes instead of webbed feet. Groups of coots are called covers or rafts.



Photo by: Dick Daniels

American Crow

- *Corvus brachyrhynchos*

The American Crow has iridescent black feathers and a very long tail. They breed for life and are susceptible to the West Nile virus. They are protected internationally by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

American Kestrel

-*Falco sparverius*

The American Kestrel is the smallest bird of prey in North America. It does not build or use an open nest but prefers holes in trees, burrows, or cliff sides. It was formerly known as the sparrow hawk.



Photo by: Frank Vassen

Anna's Hummingbird

-*Calypte anna*

This hummingbird is greenish gray and is the only North American hummingbird with a red crown. They feed on the nectar of flowers and help with pollinating plants. The female birds raise their young by themselves. Unlike most hummingbirds, the male Anna's Hummingbird sings during courtship and performs a diving exhibition. This image is of a male Anna's Hummingbird.



Photo by: Kevin Cole

Bald Eagle

- *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*



Photo by: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Northeast Region

The Bald Eagle is the national bird of the United States. It has a brown body with a white head and tail. Juveniles are usually all brown in color. They eat mostly fish and are a bird of prey. They build the largest nest of any North American bird. At one point on the verge of extinction, they now have a stable population..

Barn Owl

- *Tyto alba*



Photo by: Ronie Macdonald

The Barn Owl is a nocturnal bird whose range is worldwide. Their wingspan is around thirty-six inches long. The adult female is larger than the male. Barn owls eat small rodents and lay a white colored egg. The barn owl has great eyesight and hearing and can also turn its head 270 degrees. They fly silently and can eat their weight in food every night.

Black-Chinned Hummingbird

-Archilochus alexandri

The adult male Black-Chinned Hummingbird has a black face, a forked tail, and a misleadingly purple chin. The adult female has a rounded tail and no chin markings. They are a migratory bird that spend winters in Mexico.



Photo by: gailhampshire

Black-Crowned Night Heron

-Nycticorax nycticorax

This type of heron is black above its head and on its back, with pale grey wings and red eyes. These birds reside close to wetlands. While flying, they fold their head onto their shoulders, hiding their neck.



Photo by: : Mike Baird

Black Phoebe

- *Sayornis nigricaus*

Common around western farmlands and streams, this flycatcher is dark brown on its top half and white on the bottom. It is a non-migratory bird that eats almost solely flying insects.



Photo by: Linda Tanner

Brown-headed Cowbird

- *Molothrus ater*

This dark colored bird often travels in flocks, eating mainly seeds and insects. Cowbirds practice brood parasitism, meaning they lay their eggs in the nests of other birds and hope the other mother will overlook the additional eggs.



Photo by: Rodney Campbell

California Condor

-Gymnogyps californianus

The California Condor is the largest North American bird with a wingspan of almost ten feet. It is a scavenger whose diet primarily consists of carrion or the carcasses of dead animals. The California condor has a lifespan of up to 60 years. In 1987, a conservation plan was put into effect that led to the capture of the 22 remaining condors. Only four years later, 405 condors were reintroduced into the wild. In this image, the red on the wing is a tagging device.



Photo by: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Headquarters

California Quail

-Lophortyx californicus

The California Quail is the state bird. They have a plume of feathers on the top of their heads which is a dark brown or black color. Highly sociable, they live in small groups called “coveys”.



Photo by: Sid Mosdell

Cardinal

-*Richmondia cardinalis*

Characterized by their red plumage, the Cardinal is named after the color of the Catholic Cardinals' robes. These robust, seed-eating birds have strong bills to crack open shells.



Photo by Flickr User: Claybusters1

Cattle Egret

-*Bubulcus ibis*

This white colored species of heron has a special relationship with cattle and other large grazing mammals. The egret will eat ticks off the back of cattle, benefiting both species. During breeding season, plumes of a yellowish brown decorate the egret.



Photo by: Derek Bakken

Cooper's Hawk

-Accipiter cooperi

This medium-sized hawk is characterized by its very long, rounded tail with dark bands. The Cooper's Hawk is described as looking like a cross while flying due to the extension of their neck. They mate for life.



Photo by: gailhampshire

Costa's Hummingbird

-Calypte costae

This hummingbird is very small; an adult male being about three inches in length. The most distinguishable feature of this bird is its purple head and throat feathers that flare down its body. The female will lay two white eggs each incubation period.



Photo by: Larry & Teddy Page

California Gnatcatcher

-Poliioptila californica



Photo by: Jerry Kirkhart

The Gnatcatcher is now a threatened species. Its diet consists of small insects and spiders but mainly depends on sage shrub berries. Due to land development, this shrub has greatly diminished in amount.

Golden Eagle

-Aquila chrysaetos



Photo by: Chuck Abbe

The Golden Eagle is a top predator in San Diego County. They build large nests in high places, like cliffs, to which they may return for several breeding years.

Great Blue Heron

-Ardea herodias

The Great Blue Heron is a wading bird whose diet consists mainly of small fish. They usually roost in colonies and build their nests out of sticks, laying three to six light blue eggs at a time.



Photo by: Mike Baird

Great Egret

-Ardea alba

The Great Egret can be distinguished from other egrets by its yellow bill and black legs. This bird will feed mainly on fish, frogs, and small reptiles; spearing its prey with its long bill.



Photo by: Mike Baird

Great Horned Owl

-*Bubo virginianus*



Photo by: Derek Bakken

The Great Horned Owl is named for its horns or ear tufts on the top of its head. The eyes of the birds can't move and are always directed straight forward, causing the owl to turn its head to look around. They can eat prey sometimes two to three times heavier than themselves. They are one of the few predators of skunks.

Greater Roadrunner

-*Geococcyx californianus*



Photo by: Jöshua Barnett

This bird has been known to run at speeds of up to 26 miles an hour. A very fast runner, it chases down its prey, from small mammals to reptiles like lizards, and scorpions. It has four toes on each foot; two toes face forward and two toes back.

House Finch

-Carpodacus mexicanus

Adult House Finches are brown across their back and wings. Male's heads and shoulders are usually reddish in color. They are aggressive enough to drive other birds away from their nesting sites or a bird feeder.



Photo by: Alejandro Erickson

House Sparrow

-Passer domesticus

The House Sparrow is a very common bird in San Diego County and around the world. It is brown in color. Often in flocks, these are small noisy birds that prefer to live in manmade structures than natural nesting locations. The oldest recorded sparrow was a little over fifteen years old.



Photo by: Dawn Beattie

Least Bell's Vireo

-Vireo bellii pusilla

This small songbird is a dull olive gray on top and a lighter color below. It has a faint white eye ring and wing bars. The Least Bell's Vireo is an endangered subspecies.



Photo by: USFWS Endangered Species

Lesser Goldfinch

-Spinus psaltria

The males of this songbird have a bright yellow belly while the females are a grayish olive-green with some yellow on their underside. They eat seeds from plants and sometimes mimic other birds in their song.



Photo by: Don DeBold

Mallard

-*Anas platyrhynchos*

The Mallard Duck, a common bird, lives in wetlands. The males have a vibrant green head while the females are a brownish color.

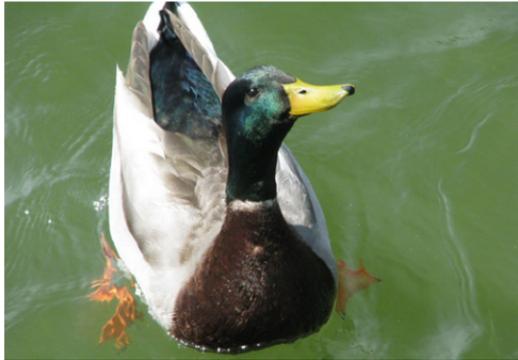


Photo by: Joanna Lee Osborn

Mourning Dove

-*Zenaidura macroura*

The Mourning Dove is one of the most abundant North American birds. The male and female birds have relatively the same coloration. They eat mostly seeds.



Photo by: Brandon Trentler

Nuttall's Woodpecker

-*Dendrocopos nuttallii*

The Nuttall's Woodpecker has black wings and tail with white barring, and the males of the species have a red crown. Their diet consists mostly of insects found in oak trees.



Photo by: Kaaren Perry

Osprey

-*Pandion haliaetus*

Also known as a Sea Hawk or Fish Eagle, the Osprey is a bird of prey. These birds can be found nesting near bodies of water since their diet consists mainly of fish.



Photo by: David Slater

Red Shouldered Hawk

-Buteo lineatus

This hawk is very similar to the red tail below physically, but is smaller with a longer tail. The red shoulders are visible when the bird is perching. These forest hawks hunt prey ranging from mice to frogs and snakes.



Photo by: Steve Byland

Red Tailed Hawk

-Buteo jamaicensis

The Red Tailed Hawk is one of the larger hawks. The males have a dark red tail. Their diet is usually rodents. Pairs assist each other with making their nests and the chicks are all white when they hatch. These hawks are not migratory but move to areas with the most abundant food source. In California all raptors are protected by state and federal laws.



Photo by: Patrick Ashley

Red Winged Blackbird

-*Agelaius phoeniceus*

This bird can be found up and down the Pacific Coast of North America. The males are black in color with a red shoulder and a thin yellow band underneath the shoulder. Females are a nondescript dark brown. The bulk of their diet is made up of seeds and insects.



Photo by: Tony Alter

Snowy Egret

-*Leucophoyx thula*

This small heron is all white with long black legs and yellow feet. The upper part of their bill is usually yellow, but during breeding season, the bill turns a red color. They eat fish, crustaceans, insects and small reptiles. As shown in the picture, they can stalk prey in shallow water.



Photo by: Don DeBold

Western Screech Owl

-Megascops kennicotti

This small owl is native to North and Central America. Sometimes they live in cacti. A nocturnal bird, they have excellent hearing and night vision to catch prey.



Photo by: Kathy & Sam

Yellow Warbler

-Setophasa petechia

This songbird is a greenish-yellow color. They feed mainly on insects and berries and nest in trees.



Photo by: Brian Gratwicke

Mammals of the San Diego River

There are 15 species of mammals that live in San Diego County, fifteen described in this booklet. Many are on the endangered species list. The jaguar, bison and grizzly bear are all mammals that used to thrive in San Diego County.

Bobcat

-*Lynx rufus*

The bobcat is a nocturnal mammal that can swim well and has very good eyesight. They hunt by lying and waiting in trees and dropping on their prey.



Photo by: Brian Gratwicke

Brush Rabbit

-*Sylvilagus bachmani*

The brush rabbit is a small mammal that rarely weighs over two pounds. They live in the burrows of other animals. When a predator appears in an open space, the brush rabbit will do a form of zig-zag running as a survival technique.



Photo by: Martin Jambon

Grey Fox

-Urocyon cinereoargenteus

The California Grey Fox kills rabbit-size prey and also eats nuts, fruits, and eggs. Its natural enemies are wolves, coyotes, and bobcats. This fox mates for life and both parents rear the pups. They are the only North American canid to climb trees.



Photo by: Ingrid Taylar

California Ground Squirrel

-Otospermophilus beecheyi

The California Ground Squirrel lives in burrows and has become tame in areas of human development. Their predators are rattlesnakes, large birds, foxes, raccoons, and other carnivorous mammals.



Photo by: Ingrid Taylar

Coyote

-*Canis latrans*

Coyotes are a carnivorous mammal that usually feeds off smaller mammals, including domesticated ones. They are very fast and able to jump large distances.



Photo by: Don DeBold

Dusky-Footed Woodrat

-*Neotoma fuscipes*

The Dusky-Footed Woodrat is a nocturnal rodent. Some have been found to put California bay leaves around the outside of their nests to control the numbers of parasites, like fleas, inside.



Photo by: Mbmceach

Pocket Gopher

-*Geomyidae*



Photo by: Ingrid Taylar

The Gopher is a small burrowing rodent that creates large community tunnels. Adult gophers frequently stand next to the entrances of these tunnels to watch for predators.

Mexican Free-Tailed Bat

-*Tadarida brasiliensis*



Photo by: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Headquarters

This medium-sized bat is very vulnerable to human disturbance and habitat destruction. In California, the number of these bats has drastically declined.

Mountain Lion

-Puma concolor

The Mountain Lion is a large territorial cat that lives and hunts alone. They primarily hunt deer and are at times a danger to humans. Though they are present in San Diego, the mountain lion is rarely seen.



Photo by: Jöshua Barnett

Mule Deer

-Odocoileus heminus

The Mule Deer is the most common deer in San Diego County. They can survive for several days without water. The male's antlers drop off during the winter but are regrown by the mating season in fall.



Photo by: Gerry

Raccoon

-Procyon lotor



Photo by: Michael Scheltgen

Raccoons switch dens every few days, except in extreme weather or when a mother is having babies. If water is available, raccoons will wash their food before eating. If water is available, the raccoons will wash its food before eating. The babies are called “kits.”

Stephens' Kangaroo Rat

-Dipodomys stephensi



Photo by: Northwest Power and Conservation Council

The Stephens' Kangaroo Rat is a nocturnal, desert animal. Its long tail and big hind feet keep it balanced and allow the rat to jump to escape from predators. It is endemic to Southern California, and primarily found in western Riverside County. The species is named after American zoologist Frank Stephens. It is on the endangered species list.

Striped Skunk

-Mephitis mephitis

The Striped Skunk's greatest defense is its scent which has a ten to fifteen foot range. The Striped Skunk is a predator of the honeybee, relying on its thick fur to protect from stings.



Photo by: Pacific Southwest Region

Virginia Opossum

-Didelphis virginiani

The Virginia Opossum has a prehensile tail that is nearly hairless. They are nocturnal and have fifty more teeth than any other native mammal in North America. They will feign death when threatened, called "playing possum." The opossum is the only marsupial found in North America north of Mexico. Marsupials have a pouch on their stomachs.



Photo by: John



Photo by: USFWS Mountain-Prairie

Long-Tailed Weasel

-Mustela frenata

The tail of a Long-Tailed Weasel comprises 40-70% of the head and body length, and ends in a distinct black tip. They den in ground barrows, under stumps, or beneath log piles. A carnivorous mammal, they prefer their prey alive.

Reptiles and Amphibians of the San Diego River

There are 77 reptile and amphibian species in San Diego County, 20 are described in this booklet.

Arroyo Toad

-Bufo californicus

The Arroyo Toad is a nocturnal toad. Arroyo is a Spanish word that means dry creek, and they usually inhabit these sandy banks, which offer protections for their eggs. In the dry season, they go into a state of hibernation called aestivation. This is to prevent dehydration. They are an endangered species due to habitat destruction.



Photo by: Pacific Southwest Region

Belding's Orange Throated Whiptail



Photo by: Jim Mullhaupt

-*Aspidoscelis hyperythra beldingi*
This lizard is fast moving with a long, thin tail. As a juvenile, the tail is blue, but as they mature it fades to grey. One of their predators is the roadrunner.

California Glossy Snake



Photo by: Natalie McNear

-*Elegans occidentalis*
The Glossy Snake is a nonvenomous, nocturnal predator of small lizards. They are excellent burrowers and three subspecies have been recognized in California.

California Kingsnake

-Lampropeltis getula californiae

The California Kingsnake lives anywhere where there is an abundance of rodents. About three to five feet long, this snake's coloration can vary from selective breeding but is usually a dark brown and creamy white. They are active in the morning and late afternoon, however, when the climate is very hot they become nocturnal.



Photo by: J. Maughn

California Legless Lizard

-Anniella pulchra

The California Legless Lizard is a burrowing reptile that primarily eats insects. This lizard, often mistaken as a snake, is ovoviviparous, meaning the eggs develop inside the female until the live birth occurs. They can also grow back their tails.



Photo by: J. Maughn

California Lyre Snake

-Trimorphodon biscutatus lambda
The California Lyre Snake is nocturnal and mildly venomous. They need to chew on their victims to allow the venom to have a significant effect. Their diet consists of bats, small rodents, lizards, and birds.



Photo by: SearchNet Media

California Striped Whipsnake

-Masticophis lateralis
The California Striped Whipsnake, or Racer Snake, has very keen eyesight and moves on flat ground with its head raised to look for prey and to watch for predators. They are about two to four feet long. When they are harassed they will bite and excrete a foul smelling musk.



Photo by: Wikipedia user: T71024

Coast Horned Lizard

-Phrynosoma coronatum

The Coast Horned Lizard's or "horned toad's" diet is mainly ants. They spend most of the winter months underground. For defense, they will squirt blood from their eyes, inflate themselves with air, and bury themselves in the sand.



Photo by: cuatrok77

Coastal Rosy Boa Constrictor

-Lichanura trivirgate

The Coastal Rosy Boa Constrictor is one of two small boa species found in the United States. They are a beige color. They have one hundred teeth that point backwards in their mouths but their prey is killed by constriction.



Photo by: Natalie McNear

Coronado Skink

*-Plestiodon skiltonianus
interparietalis*

The Coronado Skink is small, around seven inches in total length. The tail of these skinks is a grey or dull blue in adults, and a bright blue in juveniles. and birds.



Photo by: Erin and Lance Willett

Granite Spiny Lizard

-Sceloporus orcutti

The Granite Spiny Lizard is a large, colorful species of reptile. The males have blue on their throat and belly. They can usually be seen basking on granite boulders and are excellent climbers.



Photo by: Nicole Beaulac

Pacific Gopher Snake

-Pituophis catenifer

The San Diego Gopher Snake is one of the most common snakes in San Diego. It's diet consists mainly of rodents. It is nonvenomous and kills its prey by constriction.



Photo by: Nathan Rupert

San Diego Ringneck Snake

-Diadophis punctatus similis

The San Diego Ringneck Snake likes moist environments. Its body is an olive color with a bright orange underside and a ring on its neck that it displays as a defense mechanism. A mildly venomous snake, when disturbed, the Ringneck will coil its tail like a corkscrew.



Photo by: Mark Herr

Side-Blotched Lizard

-Uta stansburiana

This lizard is very common in the deserts of western North America. Males usually have a bright throat in one of three colors. These colors create a hierarchy. The orange throated males are dominant, and usually have many female mates. The blue throated males only have one female. Lastly, the yellow-throated males mimic female displays and don't hold specific territories.



Photo by: Frank Peterson

Southern Alligator Lizard

-El garia multicaudata

The Southern Alligator Lizard or San Diego Alligator Lizard has a triangular shaped head and a tail that is almost twice the length of its body.



Photo by: Jerry Kirkhart

Southern Pacific Rattlesnake

-Crotalus oreganus helleri

The Southern Pacific Rattlesnake is a venomous brown snake. Adult California Ground Squirrels are immune to their venom.



Photo by: Mike Baird

Western Blind Snake

-Leptotyphlops humilis

This is a small, harmless snake with a blunt head and tail. It can easily be mistaken for a large worm. The eyes of this snake are nonfunctional.



Photo by: Eugene van der Pijll

Spotted Night Snake

-Hypsiglena torquata

The Spotted Night Snake is a very small reptile that has toxic saliva to help subdue prey. The saliva is not dangerous to humans.



Photo by: squamatologist

Red Diamondback Rattlesnake

-Crotalus ruber

The Red Diamondback Rattlesnake is San Diego's largest venomous snake. They prey on rabbits, squirrels, birds, lizards and other snakes. They become a darker red with age. These snakes are only dangerous if they have been provoked, and only bite when they feel threatened.



Photo by: reptilist

Western Fence Lizard

-Sceloporus occidentalis

The Western Fence Lizard is nicknamed the “bluebelly” because of its vivid colored underside. Its diet consists mainly of small insects. It has a protein in its blood that kills the bacteria that causes lyme disease. If a lyme disease infected tick bites a Western Fence Lizard, the tick becomes disinfected.



Photo by: David A. Hofmann

Insects of the San Diego River

Harvester Ant

-*Pogonomyrmex Barbatus*



Photo by: Jeff Turner

Velvet Ant

-*Dasymutilla Occidentalis*



Photo by: Craig Pemberton



Photo by Wikipedia user: Calibas

Lorquin's Admiral

Limenitis Lorquini



Photo by: Doug Fisher

Dragonfly

Arthropoda Odonata

Western Tiger Swallowtail

-Papilio Rutulus



Photo by: Kathy Zimmerman

Damselfly

-Zygoptera Odonata



Plants of the San Diego River

San Diego County is the most botanically diverse county in the contiguous United States. San Diego County alone is more diverse than many states, and it has even been identified as an international ‘hotspot’ of biodiversity. San Diego County has a combination of climatic, geographic, geologic, and floristic features that are unique in the USA. It represents the southwestern region of the California Floristic Province and the Sonoran Region of the Desert Province, spanning a range of habitats from the Pacific Coast to mesas, foothills, mountains, and desert.



Southern California Fuchsia
Photo by: Liz Baumann



Lemonade Berry Bush (left)
photo by Doug Kalal



California Sunflower (right)
-photo by M. Dolly

Invasive Plants

The San Diego River Park Foundation identifies, maps, and tracks invasive non-native plants along the San Diego River. They work with their volunteers to remove the invasive plants and replace them with native vegetation.

Partial List

- Crown Daisy - *Crysanthemum coronarium*
- Giant Reed - *Arundo donax*
- Pampas Grass - *Cortaderia selloana*
- Brazilian Pepper Tree - *Schinus terebinthifolius*
- Eucalyptus - *Eucalyptus* ssp.
- Mexican Fan Palm - *Washingtonia robusta*
- Canary Island Date Palm - *Phoenix canariensis*
- Castor Bean - *Ricinus communis*
- Salt Cedar - *Tamarix ramosissima*
- Ludwigia - *Ludwigia peploides* (an aquatic weed)
- Wild Radish - *Raphanus sativus*

*Giant Reed - Photo
Right by: Wikipedia
user: Dori*

*Eucalyptus - Photo
Right Page by:
Danielle Langlois*





Recreation

Bird Watching & Hiking



*Photo Above by:
Daniel Schwen*



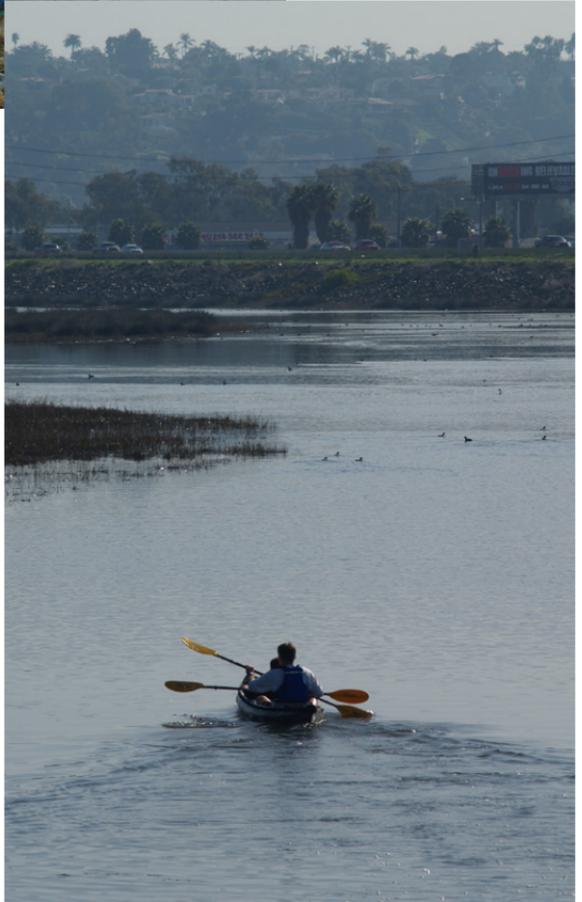
Biking





Kayaking

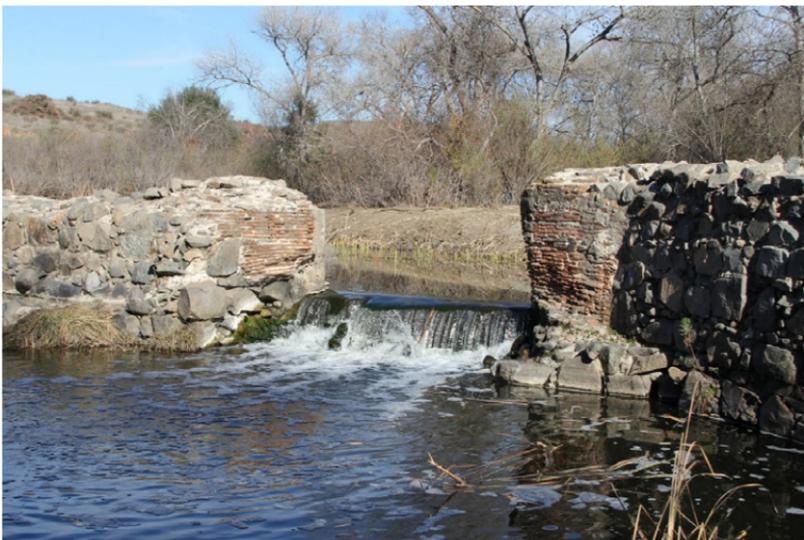
*Each year
hundreds
of
thousands
of people
visit the
San Diego
River for
activities
like these!*



Challenges

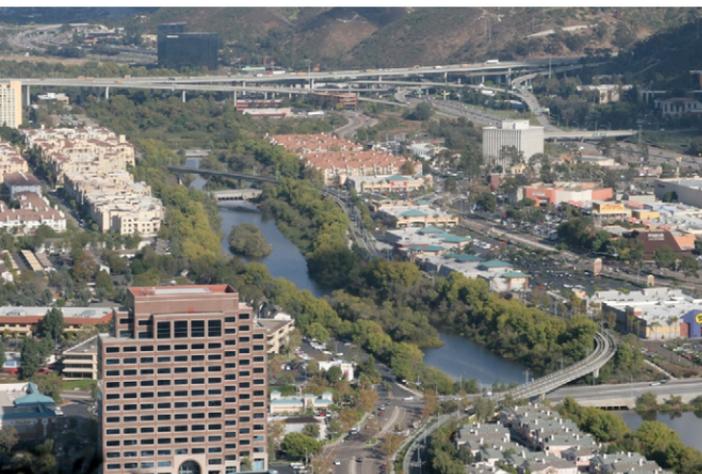
Water Quality

Photo by:
Reid Farmer

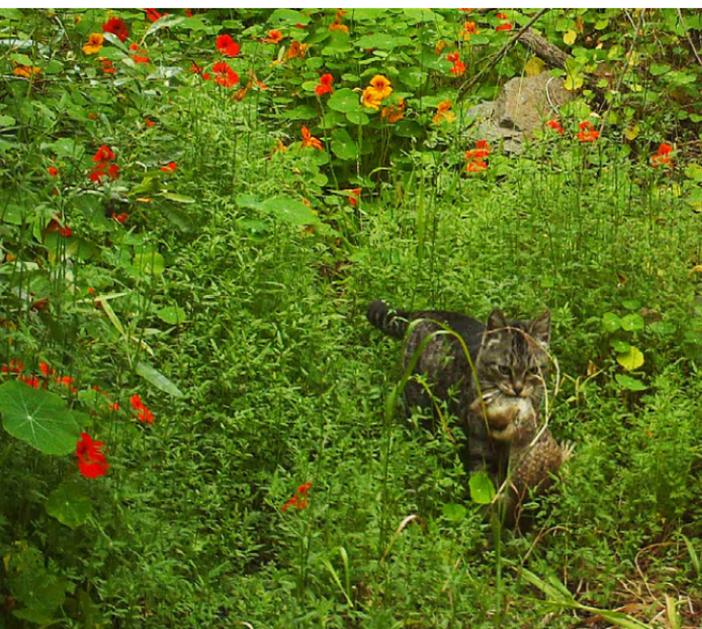


Pollution





Development



Feral Animals

Volunteer

There are many volunteer opportunities to assist with the conservation and stewardship of the San Diego River and its ecosystem. Work parties clean the river, remove the invasive plant species, and plant native plants for its restoration. Environmental groups lead nature tours through the land around the San Diego River as well as raise funds for land acquisition and nature centers. Leading the way is the San Diego River Coalition – a 70 member group dedicated to preserving and enhancing the San Diego River – and the San Diego River Park Foundation (SDRPF). The Foundation works to support important projects which will help to establish a river-long park by 1) restoring and enhancing the river, 2) providing greatly needed community facilities and opportunities to learn about our region's rich history, 3) encouraging stewardship of the riparian environment, and 4) improving the lives of those that live, work and play in the area.

The San Diego River Park Foundation is dedicated to making the river a truly treasured regional asset that is valued by all members of our community.

The Foundation welcomes and encourages anyone who is interested to volunteer and to support in their efforts.

San Diego River Park Foundation
PO Box 80126 San Diego, CA 92138-0126
619-297-7380



The San Diego River Park Foundation is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization dedicated to preserving the cultural and environmental legacy along the 52 mile San Diego River. www.sandiegoriver.org

Partial Endangered List

- Arroyo Toad
- Bald Eagle
- Coastal California Condor
- California Gnatcatcher
- Great Grey Owl
- Horned Lizard
- Kangaroo Rat
- Last Bell's Vireo
- Pronghorn Antelope
- Red Diamondback Rattlesnake

Extinct

Bison

Grizzly Bear

Jaguar



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