



The Clear Print

The San Diego Tracking Team Newsletter

SDTT Launches New Website

The SDTT is proud to present our new and improved website. We're still at sdtt.org, but we've been working all summer to bring you an appealing new look and informative new content. Special thanks should be given to our new webmaster, Martin Noreke, our former webmaster, Rick Botta, and to Lee Kirchhevel for the use of his photos. So check out sdtt.org and let us know what you think of it.

Coyotes and the Urban Interface

Rapid, sprawling urbanization in southern California coastal sage scrub has created fragments of varying sizes within an urban matrix. As urban development and fragmentation continue, it is important for land managers to understand the impacts in order to devise and implement effective conservation plans. Fragmentation resulting in habitat loss and lack of connectivity is credited with altering basic ecological processes as well as population and community dynamics. Dana Morin shares with us her masters thesis on how fragmentation impacts carnivore activity and rodent communities.

Join us at 6:30 PM on Friday, September 29, at the Tecolote Nature Center for this SDTT Speaker Series Lecture hosted by the Friends of Rose Canyon Tracking Team.

Six Feet from a Twelve-Foot Bear: Jim Lowery's Animal Movement Workshop

By Sarah Haas & Gary Seiser

When we signed up to take Jim Lowery's Animal Movement Workshop, we never thought we'd be six feet from a twelve-foot Kodiak bear named Diamond, up close and personal with only a thin electrical wire separating us. The thrill of watching Diamond move around and getting to see pieces of his personality emerge was a very special, and educational, experience. All the animals we watched during the class, including a mountain lion, wolves, and a black bear, just to name a few, not only provided us with a hands-on learning experience but also a window into the world of the animal individuality.

The goal of the class was to watch animals move, then examine and analyze their track patterns via journaling and photographing their tracks. The San Diego Tracking Team was well represented by Duane Boney, Juliet Hendershott, and the two of us. We started off on Saturday by

working with a beautiful buckskin horse named Phoenix at Sunwolf Farms in Frazier Mountain. Sunny Rose Berger, Phoenix's owner and lifelong riding and competition partner, held impressive rodeo titles including the 1992 ABRA World Champion. We watched as Phoenix walked, trotted, loped and galloped, on lead and under saddle, and then analyzed how his track patterns matched his body movements. Later that afternoon we relocated to work with a dog and a llama in the same fashion (minus the saddle!).

Sunday at Steve Martin's (no relation to the actor) Working Wildlife, our focus changed to non-domesticated mammals. All the individuals at Working Wildlife were born in captivity and are trained to be furry thespians in the film industry. We were able to meet and work with a red fox (he moved around too quickly for us to catch his name), Coda the mountain lion, Frosty the arctic wolf, Tuff the timber wolf, Misty the black bear, and the (1,000-lb plus) grand finale Kodiak grizzly bear, Diamond.

We'll admit, there was a lot of ogling and awing at these beautiful creatures, but we definitely did not depart without learning a thing or two. First of all, we witnessed the importance of respect for all wildlife, no matter what their level of training. Although most of the animals we studied were habituated to human presence and contact, their natural instincts, behaviors and intelligence were obvious. The folks at Working Wildlife spoke honestly about their respect for the species they worked with and how important it is to learn about the personalities of each individual animal. For us trackers, it was so valuable to watch the personality behind the tracks and observe how animal behaviors, some specific to an individual and some specific to that species, can translate into the tracks they leave behind.

Second, we learned the importance of how an individual's life history translates directly into track patterns. For instance, a one-time injury can affect that animal's gait for the rest of their lives, making their track pattern different from what you might see in the field guides. Not only is it important to think about what an animal was doing (looking to the left or right, sniffing the ground, crouching, etc.) when tracks were made, but also to look for patterns that can provide clues to identifying individuals. Even when you watch an animal move, the tracks it leaves may not be what you expect. It takes a lot of time, practice, and experience to really be able to put the two together in the tracker's mind.

Finally, we learned how much fun it is to hang out with other trackers. Learning to track is not just about logging dirt time, memorizing gaits or learning to see through the mind's eye, although those are all huge components, but it's also about the connections we make with nature... and with *people*! Encouragement, perspective sharing and story swapping is all part of being a member in the tracking community. Not only did we acquire a lot of information about the mechanics of tracking during the workshop, but we also enjoyed sharing the joy of this important and ancient art with other trackers and friends.

We would highly recommend this workshop if it's offered again in the future. It's not offered every year, so watch for it. Although you normally have to be a graduate of Earth Skills' Basic Tracking course to take this workshop, those who have taken classes with the SDTT can attend. Whether you have the opportunity to participate in this workshop or any other continuing education class, the most important thing is to expose yourself to new challenges and opportunities to learn – and to make connections with other people who have been infected with the tracking bug!

Links to the places mentioned:

Jim Lowery's Earth Skills
<http://www.earthskills.com/>

Sunny Rose Berger's Sunwolf Fams
<http://www.frazmtn.com/sunwolf/>

Steve Martin's Working Wildlife
<http://www.workingwildlife.com/>

Tracking in the Mountains

By Gary Seiser

Want to track at 8100 feet in a place where pinecones as big as softballs litter the forest floor, the air is cool and clear even at high noon, and the view from the mountain top is breathtaking? That's what I did in July when I took the Basic and Advanced Tracking courses offered by Earth Skills. Jim and Mary Lowery run this small school out of Frazier Park, just three hours north of San Diego. They offer a wide range of courses including tracking, survival and outdoor skills, earth philosophy, plants, and even one entitled "Interpretive Skills for Naturalists & Docents." Their classes have a strong Tom Brown Tracker School flavor, but in a very relaxed and comfortable style.

Day One was the Basic Tracking course, which was done at the much lower elevation of 4000 feet. A variety of topics were covered, including clear print identification, gaits, sign, wide-angle vision, and fox walking. We used Jim's book, *The Tracker's Field Guide* (Falcon 2006), and other handouts to help us identify tracks that Mary found and Jim put us on. For many of the students it was their first time really looking at tracks. For me it was quality dirt time in a positive atmosphere and a good refresher, affirming how far I've come in my tracking knowledge.

Days Two and Three, however, were the Advanced Class up at 8100 feet, with us camping out for two nights. The students included two high school boys, a man who had served in the Israeli army and is now an Argentine Tango instructor in Los Angeles, a father & son (age 13), an elementary school teacher, a woman who runs a non-profit for human-animal conflict mediation, and others, myself included. It was a fun group and I enjoyed meeting all of them. In the advanced class we got into more detail on gaits, pressure releases, trailing, and tracking in pine needles, one of the most difficult of all tracking substrates. There was a really interesting discussion on "tracking in four directions," which addressed the different tracking personalities that people have and how that impacts the way in which they track. But the most fun was the nighttime "blind drum stalk" in which we wore blindfolds and had to stalk through the forest toward a drumbeat a quarter of a mile away. And, of course, there was hot chocolate around the campfire each evening, a nice way to end the day. Much of the advanced class was a refresher for me, but some was humbling, reminding me I still have much to learn.

A number of San Diego Tracking Team members, myself included, have already signed up for the Animal Movement Workshop, September 16-17, 2006, which includes a day with horses and dogs, and a second day at Working Wildlife observing cougars, wolves, bears and other animals moving through tracking boxes so we can actually see them move and then examine the tracks those movements made. I'm really looking forward to that.

If you haven't yet tried any of the Earth Skills courses, you should. The prices are reasonable, the locations are close and beautiful, and the quality of instruction is high. You can find them on the Internet at www.earthskills.com, or contact Jim Lowery by e-mail (jim@earthskills.com), snail mail (Earth Skills, 1113 Cougar Court, Frazier Park, CA 93225), or telephone (661-245-0318). You'll be glad you did.

Upcoming Events

The **Fall Wildlife Survey** period begins October 21 (transect schedule will be sent to SDTTLIST at that time), and the **Fall/Winter Deer Scat Collection** period will be starting soon. Plenty of volunteer opportunities remain for both. If you are interested in helping with any of these activities, or if you have any questions, please e-mail Lani at lani.noreke@sdtt.org.

Friday, September 29: Speaker Series—Dana Morin on Coyotes and the Urban Interface, 7:00 PM lecture, refreshments from 6:30 at the Tecolote Nature Center (5180 Tecolote Road, San Diego 92110).

Saturday, October 14: Monthly tracking walks, 8:00 am to 10:00 at the Peñasquitos Preserve Ranch House. Beginning and Intermediate/Advanced levels offered.

Saturday, October 21: Fall Wildlife Survey Volunteer Training, 9:45 am to 4:00 pm at the Ranch House in Peñasquitos Canyon.

Saturday, November 11: Monthly tracking walks, 8:00 am to 10:00 at the Peñasquitos Preserve Ranch House. Beginning and Intermediate/Advanced levels offered.

Note Date and Location! **Friday, November 17 and Saturday, November 18:** Intermediate Tracker Naturalist Class, 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm Friday and 8:00 am to 6:00 pm Saturday at the Mission Trails Regional Park. Contact Rick Botta (858-672-0584, registration@sdtt.org) to sign up as a student or to help out.

Are you a donor member of the SDTT? Get a head start by sending in your 2007 membership contribution now. Don't forget, you can help support SDTT in two important ways—volunteer your time and/or contribute financially by becoming a donor member. Call 760-715-4102 to volunteer and go to www.sdtt.org for a membership form.

Please send submissions to the Clear Print to Lani Noreke at lani.noreke@sdtt.org.