



HOW TO HELP - A crowd listens intently as Ron Krueper, superintendent of Tehachapi District State Parks, speaks at the Antelope Valley Conservancy's third annual Endangered Species Day Conference on Friday at Antelope Valley College in Lancaster.
RON SIDDLE/Valley Press

Helping the endangered

Everyone can aid plant, animal species on edge

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By LINDSAY HYMAS
Valley Press Staff Writer

The ground-nesting western burrowing owl, once one of the most abundant grassland bird species in California, is threatened severely by habitat loss due to urban sprawl.

Habitat loss is also the primary reason that the desert tortoise, found throughout the Mojave Desert of California, Nevada, Arizona, Mexico and Utah, is classified as threatened.

While residents in the Antelope Valley may think these animals don't have anything to do with them, we are very much a part of each other's well-being, according to Wendy Reed, director of the Antelope Valley Conservancy.

Species tend to be part of inter-reliant systems, she said at the close of the conservancy's third annual Endangered Species Day Conference May 16.

"Joshua trees and pronuba moths rely on each other. Our community is no different. Working together, we can ensure community amenities and preserve functional habitats for future generations," Reed said.

The U.S. Senate established Endangered Species Day on the third Friday in May as a national celebration of America's commitment to protecting and recovering the nation's endangered species.

On the day, Congress encourages nationwide events that educate Americans about the importance of protecting endangered species.

About 20 to 25 middle- and high-school students and Valley residents attended the Conservancy's conference at Antelope Valley College to learn about area preservation efforts.

Eight officials from federal, state and regional agencies and wildlife groups gave presentations on their organizations' habitat preservation efforts in the Valley.

Panel members represented the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Angeles National Forest, Edwards Air Force Base, California Department of Fish & Game, California State Parks, Desert Managers Group, the Mountain Lion Foundation and the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee.

"It's important to bring all these officials and agencies together to educate us and to create relationships with each other," Reed said. "None of us can preserve an ecosystem on our own. We must work together."

Agency officials discussed preservation and management projects they are working on and stress that one of the most important ways to help protect endangered species is to protect and preserve their habitats.

So what happens when a plant or animal species becomes extinct? Not only does it impact hundreds of other species, it can lead to a loss of jobs, tourism income and health resources for humans, the National Wildlife Federation said.

According to the National Wildlife Federation's Endangered Species Program, endangered species provide medicinal, agricultural, ecological, commercial and aesthetic and recreational benefits to humans.

For instance, about 40 species contribute to a prospering pharmaceutical industry worth more than \$40 billion annually.

Humans depend upon 20 species of plants, such as wheat and corn, to provide 90% of the world's food. Plant and animal species and their ecosystems form the basis of America's multibillion-dollar, job-intensive tourism industry.

As panelists said at the conference, the public can do much to help protect and preserve natural habitats and wildlife, thus preserving the balance of our delicate ecosystems.

State wildlife officials say individuals can abstain from feeding wildlife, feed pets indoors and lock pet doors at night, disinfect bird baths weekly to avoid disease transmission, secure garbage in shelters or use garbage cans with locking lids, use landscape plants native to the area, install wildlife-proof fences to enclose and protect garden areas, use fertilizers sparingly and do not use pesticides that could cause secondary poisoning in predators or scavengers such as coyotes, hawks and owls.

Residents whose homes border wildlife areas should learn about the wildland, including special plants and animals and the general ecology; be aware of potential problems they may encounter as a homeowner and consider what they are willing to do to help keep the neighboring natural area wild, state wildlife officials say.

"According to the Land Trust Alliance, the lands preserved in the next 20 years will be the last lands preserved on earth. We are losing thousands of acres of natural habitats every day," Reed said.

"Here in the Antelope Valley, we must protect the part that is our responsibility, and Antelope Valley Conservancy is working hard to do just that."

For details about wildlife preservation, individuals can visit www.parks.ca.gov, www.resources.ca.gov or www.ceres.ca.gov. The conservancy can be reached at (661) 943-9000. Its Web site is at www.avconservancy.org. People also can contact the area California State Parks office at (661) 942-0662.

lhymas@avpress.com