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# Jurupa, Alvord district students take trip to wild side

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By **LAURA RICO**  
The Press-Enterprise

RIVERSIDE - You don't have to go far to encounter endangered wildlife. Some of it is in your own backyard.

Sycamore Canyon Reserve, minutes from downtown Riverside, is home to a variety of wildlife, including lizards, gophers, coyotes and the endangered Stephens' kangaroo rat.

Sixth-grade students from Jurupa and Alvord unified school districts got to trek through the sage scrub hills Friday during a hike through the canyon.

The tours, guided by county biologists, marked National Endangered Species Day, an initiative that calls for the study of threatened wildlife and raises awareness of the public's role in protecting and recovering threatened or endangered animals.

The Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency, Environmental Programs Department, and the city parks department organized Friday's program.

Carolyn Syms Luna, head of the Environmental Programs Department, said the program gives children the opportunity to experience out in the field what they learn about in school.

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Bandit the raccoon is displayed for Mission Bell Elementary students attending a wildlife presentation Friday at Sycamore Canyon in Riverside. The day included a hike through the hills, where the sixth-graders could apply their classroom lessons in the field.

"This program takes kids out of the classroom to practice what is preached," she said. "Sea World and the zoo are just so artificial."

Stephens' kangaroo rats were elusive during the daytime trek, but there were plenty of sightings of gophers burrowing into holes and lizards jumping along the rocks.

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"Are they good for pets?" asked Benny Lara, a student at Mission Bell Elementary School in Jurupa.

Unfortunately for Benny, the answer was no. Wild animals belong in their natural habitats, said Environmental Programs Department biologist David Carr.

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"If you keep an animal at home, it's not able to do its job," he said.

While encroaching development poses the biggest threat to wildlife in Riverside County, there are success stories, according to Kristi Lovelady of the Environmental Programs Department.

The peregrine falcon was endangered due to the spread of the pesticide DDT, which kept the birds from successfully nesting and breeding. Since environmental controls were put in place, the population has rebounded.

"We have the pleasure of having a nesting pair of peregrine falcons living in one of the county buildings," she said.

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## Endangered Species Day

The U.S. Senate designated May 18 as National Endangered Species Day.

**More than 1,800 species** worldwide are listed as threatened or endangered.

**Riverside County** is home to 49 threatened and endangered species. These species are protected under several regional habitat-conservation plans.

### **Sycamore Canyon**

**Reserve**, near UC Riverside, was created as a reserve for the endangered Stephens' kangaroo rat.

Source: Riverside County Habitat Conservation Agency and Environmental Programs Department

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