

CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

BECAUSE LIFE IS GOOD

A CANYON IN PERIL: SURPRISE THREATENED BY ORV ABUSE

Surprise Canyon, located in the arid Mojave Desert in southeastern California contains the longest perennial stream in the Panamint Mountains. This special canyon supports rich riparian and aquatic ecosystems full of lush williows and towering cottonwoods that rarely thrive in the desert. This precious desert stream, and the critters who call it home, are gravely threatened by a small number of extreme off-road vehicle users.

SPECIAL RESIDENTS OF SURPRISE CANYON

INYO CALIFORNIA TOWHEE (*Pipilio chrysalis eremophilus*)

This bird is an ecological wonder. It reflects the extremes of the desert as it nests in cool, shaded willow patches and feeds on seeds, insects and cactus fruits on adjacent desert slopes. It is completely isolated to unique riparian areas surrounded by Mojave desert scrub within Inyo County's Argus Range. After Surprise Canyon was closed to motorized vehicles in 2001, the riparian woodlands began to recover, and the Inyo California Towhee took up residence. Towhees now breed in the Canyon's lush riparian woodlands. This rare songbird, once numbering fewer than 200, is now estimated to have a population of nearly 700 and is well on its way to recovery.



Photo by Don Roberson



PANAMINT ALLIGATOR LIZARD (*Elgaria Panamintina*)

This threatened lizard has been found in only the White, Inyo and Panamint Mountains. All specimens have been found near permanent water in canyons or in talus near dense vegetation, suggesting a dependence on water for survival. CA Game and Fish reports that the few populations remaining are at risk because of habitat loss due to mining, grazing and off-road vehicles in the restricted riparian habitats that shelter this species. They recommend implementing land use restrictions in the Inyo-White-Panamint system to prevent further destruction.

PANAMINT DAISY (*Enceliopsis covillei*)

Blooming March through June, the Panamint Daisy, an endemic species found only in the Panamint Mountains, produces its 4"-5" wide yellow daisy-like flowers. This spectacular flower can be found growing on the dry rocky walls of Surprise and Jail canyons. The Panamint Daisy is a special status plant and protected by California State law.



Jo-Ann Ordano © California Academy of Sciences

NELSON'S BIGHORN SHEEP (*Ovis Canadensis nelsonii*)

Surprise Canyon is frequented by bighorn sheep, a Special Status Species. They are of particular concern because of ungulate species, the bighorn sheep appears to be most susceptible to detrimental effects from human disturbance. The largest threats to sheep are loss of habitat and harassment that results in increased stress and a destructive physiological response. Researchers have suggested that disturbance from human recreation could be a limiting factor in the growth of California bighorn populations. These majestic creatures have been nearly wiped out by diseases, over-hunting, loss of habitat, and competition with livestock. Fragmentation of their population by fences, roads, and aqueducts has also contributed to some decline in their population.



Photo by Dee E. Warenycia