

Wildlife

Tahoe National Forest



The Tahoe National Forest is characterized by a wide variety of wildlife habitats as it spans the Central Sierra Nevada range between the Sacramento Valley and the Great Basin region. Broad vegetation types include: mountain chaparral, mixed conifer, red fir, and eastside sage-pine/brush.

Providing for good habitat for wildlife is an important objective of the National Forests. The natural habitat is carefully considered in the management of many uses in the National Forests.

Wildlife is often difficult to observe. It is easier to notice signs that they are or have been in the area. For instance, one might see tracks near a water source, nibbled leaves, scat, clawed trees or branches, and feathers or fur left behind. The sounds of birds or coyotes yipping are good indications, as are holes in the ground, cavities in logs, and matted grasses where animals keep their homes. Please take care when viewing wildlife and try to adhere to the Wildlife Watchers' Code of Ethics.

There are many and varied species of wildlife in the forest. This brochure features some of the most common species found in the Tahoe National Forest.

Black Bear

Black bears are the only type of bear in California. They range in color but are primarily brown to cinnamon, despite the name "black bear". These omnivores typically live in mountainous forests and forage on berries, nuts, insects, small animals, and garbage. They are usually nocturnal but may appear during the day. They spend most of their time alone, except females with cubs. They can live to be over 30 years of age.

Mountain Lion

Mountain lions are large wild felines that typically live where mule deer are found, as that is their main diet. They are tawny gold in color with black fur tips on their tail and ears. Mountain lions are mostly nocturnal, escaping the heat of the day to sleep in cool rock cavities or shady brush. They are very secretive and solitary, and extremely rare to see. Mountain lions need large areas for their habitat, 25 – 30 square miles, but instead of being territorial, they generally avoid contact with others. They can live up to 18 years of age.

Mule Deer

Mule deer or black-tailed deer are commonly seen in the forest, often eating in meadows or grassy areas. Mule deer are most active during dawn, dusk, and moonlit nights and can be alone or in groups. They are reddish in the summer and grayer in winter, to help them blend with their surroundings to avoid predators like the mountain lion or human hunters. Their tails are black-tipped or black on top. Mule deer are the most important big game mammals of the West.

Raccoon

Raccoons are medium sized animals known for their ringed tails and black "masks" across their faces. They are nocturnal and omnivorous, eating almost anything available. Raccoons live near water, usually riparian areas, and nest in snags, logs, or rocky dens.

Western Gray Squirrel

Western gray squirrels are large squirrels with gray fur and a very bushy tail. They are found in oak and pine-oak forests. Western gray squirrels are very active in the morning, foraging for acorns and pine nuts. Their call is like a short bark. They

nest in cavities of trees and in branches, making their homes of sticks and shredded bark.

Striped Skunk

Recognized by its distinctive stripe and odor, the striped skunk is a common mammal of the forest. They are roughly the size of a house cat with black fur and two white stripes down the back. Skunks are generally found in mixed woodlands, brush land, and near water. They are nocturnal and omnivorous and den in burrows, under boulders, wood piles, or abandoned structures.

Coyote

A coyote looks like a medium-sized dog with gray, yellowish-gray, or reddish gray fur. They live in dens in open woodlands, meadows, and plateaus where it is easy to hunt for small rodents at night. Coyotes are social and can often be heard calling to each other with short yips and long howls.

American Beaver

The American Beaver is the largest rodent in the area and is known for building dams and lodges along streams and lakes. They eat the bark off of deciduous trees in mountainous areas such as birch and aspen. The beaver has brown fur, webbed feet and a wide, flat tail that is used as a shovel and tool for building their dams and lodges.

Porcupine

Porcupines are very large, slow-moving, heavyset rodents well known for their quills. The quills are released when the porcupine comes into contact with an assailant. Porcupines tend to be nocturnal and solitary and spend most of their time in trees. They live in woodland areas, feeding strictly on vegetation. Areas devoid of bark in high branches are often evidence of porcupines in the area.

Other Rodents

Many other species of rodents are found on the forest. Most are nocturnal and vegetarian, preferring to live underground or in grasses. Depending on the rodent, they will feed on seeds, nuts, insects, bark, acorns, grasses, and berries. Some of the rodents in the Tahoe National forest include: mountain cottontail rabbits, whitetail jackrabbits, harvest mice, deer mice, voles, pikas, and yellow-bellied marmots.

Small to Medium Carnivores

This includes species such as the American Marten, Pacific Fischer, Sierra Nevada Red Fox, and the Wolverine. These animals are all considered to be sensitive by the Forest Service. They are secretive and need large areas as a home range. A wolverine was photographed by a researcher in 2008 in the Tahoe National Forest, the first documented in 80 years. Researchers are continuing to try to determine more about this one animal and the population from where he came.

Wildlife Watchers Code of Ethics:

- Respect wildlife and wildlife habitat
- Respect other wildlife viewers and property
- Respect the "wildness" of wildlife

Observe Wildlife from a Safe Distance for Us and for Them:

- For a close look use binoculars and spotting scopes
- Move slowly and quietly
- Avoid nests and dens
- Never touch or move baby animals
- Learn to recognize wildlife alarm signals
- When an animal changes behavior as a result of your presence, you are too close

Be Considerate of Wildlife and Their Habitat:

- Keep wildlife healthy; don't feed them
- Never chase, herd, flush or make deliberate noise that stresses wildlife
- Leave plants, trees and other natural features as they are found

Please Plan Ahead:

- Observe all rules and regulations
- Tread lightly, staying on trails and roads
- Pack out all garbage
- Do not let pets chase wildlife

If you have questions, please call the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (916) 358-2900, or the local Forest Service Office.

Tahoe National Forest
631 Coyote Street
Nevada City, CA 95959
530-265-4531 (voice)
TTY users dial 711 for relay service

All are Welcome

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