



Tahoe National Forest

Wildlife

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. The common game species that inhabit the Tahoe National Forest include deer, bear, turkey, quail, and gray squirrel. Other fur-bearing mammals that live in the forest include raccoon, bobcat, beaver, coyote, and gray fox.

Providing good habitat for wildlife is an important National Forest objective and is carefully considered in management decisions.

Black Bear

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

Mountain Lion

Mountain lions are large 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 using 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 more active during dawn, dusk, and moonlit nights and can be alone or in groups. They are reddish in the summer and gray in winter with their tail being black-tipped or black on top.

Raccoon

Raccoons are medium sized animals known for their ringed tails and black mask 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 squirrel are found in oak and pine-oak forests. They are very active in the morning foraging on acorns and pine nuts. Western gray squirrel are large squirrels with gray fur and a very bushy tail. They are larger than the chickaree which is brown and has a long, chipping call instead of the gray squirrel's 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 omnivores who 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 answering each others calls 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. Beavers have brown fur, webbed feet and a wide, flat tail that is used as a shovel and tool for building 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 in contact with an assailant. Porcupines tend to be nocturnal and solitary, spending 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 porcupine in the area.

Small to Medium Carnivores

This includes species such as the American marten, Pacific fisher, Sierra Nevada red fox, and the wolverine. These animals are all considered to be sensitive species 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 wolverine in 80 years.

Rodents and Rabbits

Many other species of rodents are found on the Forest. Most are nocturnal and vegetarian, preferring to live underground or in grasses. They feed on seeds, nuts, insects, bark, acorns, grasses and berries.

Some of the rodents in the Tahoe National Forest include harvest mice, deer mice, voles, pikas, and yellow-bellied marmots. Rabbits include mountain cottontail rabbits and whitetail jackrabbits.

Spotting Wildlife

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 general guidelines below.

Respect Wildlife and Habitat

- Do not feed wildlife.
- Observe wildlife from a safe distance. Use binoculars or a spotting scope.
- Leave plants, trees and other natural features as you found them.
- Never approach, touch or move baby animals.
- Tread lightly. Stay on trails and roads.
- Never chase, herd, flush or make deliberate noises to stress wildlife.
- Do not let pets chase wildlife. Keep dogs leashed or under voice command.