



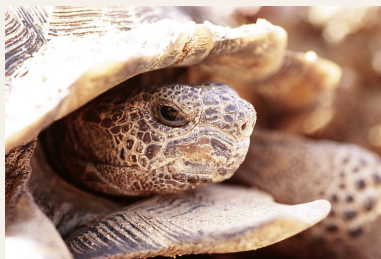
THE BALK BUZZ

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF BALK BIOLOGICAL, a DBE, WBE, SLBE/ELBE, and SB/MB company

This Just In...

- Several of Balk Biological's teams have recently been selected for Construction Management and A&E on-call contracts with SANDAG!
- Balk Biological has also recently signed several multiple-year contracts to provide biological consulting services on San Diego Gas and Electric and Southern California Edison projects. We look forward to working with our primes to support SANDAG, SDG&E, and SCE!
- Balk Biological is now an approved SANDAG Planning Bench Firm.
- Michelle is now the chair of the Women's Small Business Executive Mentoring Program Committee for the San Diego Chapter of Women in Transportation (WTS). Potentially interested in participating in this program as a mentor or protegee? Contact Michelle Balk at mbalk@balkbiological.com.

The Tortoise and the Bear



No, not a race between the tortoise and the hare, but quite the

opposite. The tortoise and the BEAR are at a complete standstill. The term hibernation may bring to mind a sleepy bear emerging from a cave after a long winter. But what about the lesser-known term, estivation? As hibernating bears withstand cold, dry winters; estivating tortoises must withstand the hot, dry summers when food and water are scarce. Like the hibernating bear, an estivating desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*; federally- and state-listed threatened) shuts down bodily functions to conserve energy, water, or oxygen. This type of metabolic suppression can help exotherms like the desert tortoise survive

The tortoise and the bear may have more in common than you think when it comes to hibernation and estivation. In fact, the desert tortoise does both; it hibernates in the cold winter months and estivates in the hot summer months. Like the bear cave, the tortoise finds refuge in a burrow where the cooler soil temperatures help them survive when temperatures rise above optimum. The tortoise can dig numerous summer holes to take a break from the heat or go into full estivation. These summer holes are a piece of cake at only four feet deep; in comparison to their winter burrows that can be double to quadruple in length. Shelters are used year-round as tortoises are known to spend up to 95% of their lives underground.

Balk Biological biologist Lish Omlid regularly identifies both summer and winter desert tortoise burrows in the field.

the harsh conditions of an arid desert habitat. Both hibernation and estivation are voluntary states of inactivity that can last days, weeks or even years, depending on the species.

As a biological monitor for desert projects, Lish helps construction crews avoid any impacts to these animals and their burrows.

HELLO FROM SOME OF OUR TEAM



Michelle will be in trouble with her chiropractor, and Brian is having a Lion King moment with the smallest goat, Crossbow. We enjoyed our day of Goat Yoga team building at Blackledge Farms in Ramona.

Interview with a Biologist

Balk Biological's Brian Lohstroh fills us in on his summer southwestern willow flycatcher surveys.

What is your favorite part of a southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*; SWFL; state-listed endangered) survey? SWFL surveys are a little more nuanced than other species surveys. You will very often not know you have them with absolute certainty until the last survey period, even if you detect willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*; WIFL) (but not necessarily SWFL) early on. They are really only known to breed in a few well-known locales, so us permitted bios end up surveying everything else and then come up empty (but for migrants). Clients sometimes get confused and agency folks sometimes overemphasize detection of WIFL migrants, but they are actually really common this time of year and do not mean a habitat is occupied.



Any fond memories from recent SWFL surveys? I completed my first SWFL visit [of the season] ...on Tuesday and picked up a migrant, which is not that surprising (but it is always somewhat exciting to hear that fitz-bew). At least a couple different subspecies (NWFL and SWFL [*brewsteri* and *extimus*, respectively]) migrate through our area and although they look alike, they sound slightly different (you can listen to the two different calls online).

Are there any parts of the survey protocol that you find most important/helpful? Migrants tend to use marginal habitat, including narrow strips of scraggly willows and

adjacent upland [coastal sage scrub]. It's absolutely possible to pick up migrant SWFL, but the only real way to verify it is a migrant only is to confirm they are not breeding. I'll confirm my migrant observations over the course of follow-up visits, when I presumably (and sadly) don't detect anymore WIFL at the site. The SWFL protocol is actually a pretty good primer on SWFL, discussing all this.

How long have you been permitted? I got permitted in 2005, starting the process in 2000. One of my mentors happened to be running a study site on the Upper San Luis Rey River, at one of the largest (if not the largest at the time) breeding colonies in SoCal. Of course, I also took the training up at Wheldon, CA. Gathering enough contact time and going through the application process takes a lot of time, but the upside is there is no evaluation required to stay current, at least for now.

Permitted Bio Tips: The Upper [San Luis Rey River] population is also somewhat of an aberration because they nest in coast live oaks. I believe that reach of this river was once willow dominated, but a regime change occurred (possibly related to the Henshaw Dam and/or VID control of flows) and oaks took over. However, the SWFL are so-site specific that they just kept returning there regardless, and the canopy structure, highly important to suitable SWFL habitat, remained amenable to them.

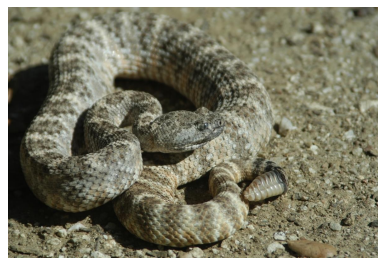
RECENT BLOG POSTS:



June:
Goat Yoga!



May:
The Squeaky-Clean Call
of the Least Bell's Vireo



April:
It's Rattlesnake Season in
San Diego—What You
Need to Know

MICHELLE'S RARE PLANT CORNER

Summer is almost here, and the smell of willow monardella (*Monardella viminea*) is in the air! Ok, hopefully not, since if you're smelling this delightfully minty-scented plant, chances are you've done some damage to

Upcoming Holidays

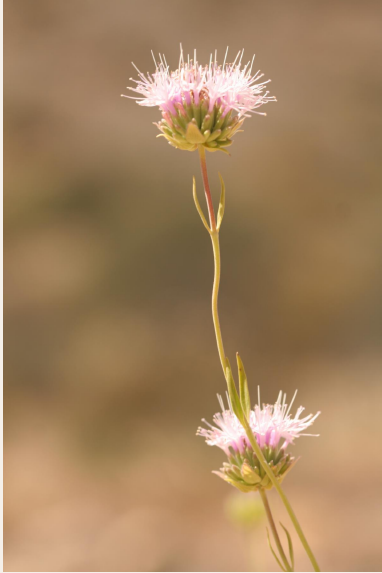
July 13 Embrace Your
Geekness Day

July 27 Take Your Pants for a
Walk Day

August 9 Book Lovers Day

September 16 Guacamole
Day

Where to Find Us



it. My first sighting of this species was back in the early 2000s when I was driving my truck along a gravel road that intersected a cobbly wash east of the City of San Diego. Suddenly a delicious smell was blasting through the air vents. I jumped out and recognized a plant I had always

wanted to see and had unfortunately just driven over. Luckily it is a tough perennial that enjoys a bit of disturbance, hence its presence in the wash.

Willow monardella is a perennial herb in the Lamiaceae (Mint family). It is on both the state and federal lists of endangered species and is a California Rare Plant Rank 1B.1 plant. It blooms between June and August and can be found in alluvial ephemeral washes in chaparral, coastal scrub, and riparian forest, scrub, or woodland. It has clusters of lavender flowers borne on stem ends. The plant is known only from San Diego County and Baja California, Mexico, from elevations of 165 to 740 feet. It may be confused with the closely related Jennifer's monardella (*Monardella stoneana*), which is an overall smaller plant and is only known to occur in the San Ysidro Mountains in extreme southern San Diego County.

June 29: Association of Environmental Professional's (AEP's) USACE's Navigable Waters Protection Rule - An Overview and Guidance Webinar

June 30: AEP's NEPA Essentials Workshop

September: (Actual date and book selection TBD): AEP's quarterly book club meeting



Above: Willow monardella (pink arrows) in typical habitat



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Connect with us

