

# Boden Canyon Ecological Reserve requires a good sense of balance



**Boden Canyon, an oasis in highly developed Southern California.**

*DFG photo by Robert Waldron.*

**W**hen you walk in Boden Canyon, you have a feeling that time has slowed. A bird trills from the sycamore tree that grows along the Santa Ysabel Creek. A bobcat yawns, face to the sun, while she

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sits in a grassy meadow. You can feel the tranquility of the wilderness permeate your body. Then a distant car horn blares and you remember that just over the hills to the south, lies one of the main highways in north San Diego County and you are back in the reality of Southern California, where open spaces are becoming rare and cramped by development. Even though civilization is creeping in on all sides, Boden Canyon remains a bountiful retreat for many plant and animal species through careful and cooperative management as well as strictly enforced regulations.

Boden Canyon Ecological Reserve (BCER) lies between the communities of



**Bedrock milling features are holes in stone created by grinding acorns.**

*DFG photo by Robert Waldron*

Escondido and Ramona, with its southern boundary along Highway 78. Boden Canyon and Santa Ysabel Creek areas were identified as a valuable wildlife corridor and an integral part of the region's multiple species conservation planning effort. Twenty-one separate parcels were purchased by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and both the City and County of San Diego for a total of 2,041 acres of preserved open space. Acquisition of remaining parcels was completed by the DFG in late 1999 and planning for a collaborative management strategy has been underway since. A five-mile dirt access road bisects the reserve and it serves as a public trail as well as a means to conduct maintenance operations and improve enforcement capabilities.

The Boden Canyon area is comprised mostly of southern mixed chaparral in the uplands, the vegetation community most common in San Diego County. This type of habitat supports a variety of wildlife such as the northern red diamond rattlesnake, San Diego banded gecko, wrentit, California quail, and mountain





**The oaks around the pond support many acorn woodpeckers.**

*DFG photo by Lyann Comrack*

lion. Magnificent oak woodlands define the river drainages to the north with fine examples of the rare Englemann oak and large western sycamores found along the rocky riverbed of the Santa Ysabel. Listen for acorn woodpeckers when walking along these areas and keep an eye out for the western grey squirrel – only a few of the many animals that can be seen in these woodlands. Cattails ring a pond that is located in the center of the canyon where colorful dragonflies and even tricolored blackbirds fly about in the spring. Boden Canyon also boasts some of the largest poison oak bushes that many people have ever seen which is an added incentive to stay on the trail!

What makes Boden Canyon Ecological Reserve so unique is its relatively low level of human disturbance. The first inhabitants were members of the Kumeyaay tribe. Their only permanent marks left upon the land are bedrock milling features, which are holes created in stone from grinding acorns. One lies right on the edge of the access road – just waiting for discovery. Only a handful of families homesteaded the area in the mid- to late 1800s, leaving only a few remnant foundations, eucalyptus groves, and a rudimentary road. The canyon was named after one such homesteader, Johann Boden, a German immigrant and farmer. Not until the 1970s and 1980s did the most visible changes occur in the attempt to create a recreational vehicle and equestrian park. Although this venture was unsuccessful, it did provide a great opportunity to work toward a more lasting gift to the residents of San Diego County.

Luckily, the creation of permanent structures was very limited, greatly reducing future restoration needs. However, one structure creates a quandary for resource managers – the concrete dam. Created to impound water for fishing and other activities, it now hosts exotic non-native aquatic species that outcompete the native species for food



**Only sharp eyes can spot the elusive granite spiny lizard.**

*DFG photo by Kim McKee-Lewis*



**Staff use acoustic and visual methods**



and shelter, especially the endangered southwestern arroyo toad. Although draining the pond would solve this problem, it would compromise the tricolored blackbirds that have discovered the area and need open water for their breeding cycle. These blackbirds are rare and need protection, too.

While biologists develop a plan to reach a reasonable balance for our wildlife at the pond, they must also determine which outdoor activities are appropriate for the BCER. As the human population encircles the remaining open spaces, more and more people want to visit wildlands for respite. This ever increasing public usage may ultimately result in habitat degradation and loss of native species unless protective measures are in place to preserve the ecosystem for the future. The ecological reserve system of the DFG provides first for protection of rare species and natural communities, and research and educational needs, then for compatible, wildlife-dependant recreation where appropriate. Each reserve is unique, and the level of public use that can be sustained varies throughout the state. To preserve the almost pristine nature of Boden Canyon, only foot access is allowed throughout most of the BCER. The public can enjoy many activities such as nature observation, photography, upland game hunting and more. A multi-use trail, paralleling the Santa Ysabel Creek, has been proposed by the San Dieguito River Valley Regional Open Space Park which would accommodate hikers, bikers, and equestrians. This higher impact recreation must be carefully evaluated and protective measures implemented to reduce the risk of erosion, soil compaction, and invasive species introduction.

Accommodating multiple compatible public uses requires a delicate balancing of interests. Many monitoring programs have been initiated to track the health of the canyon's fauna and flora, and to ensure the regional planning efforts will be successful. Currently underway are plant, raptor, bat, bird and



**Exact locations of bird sampling stations are critical to annual surveys.**

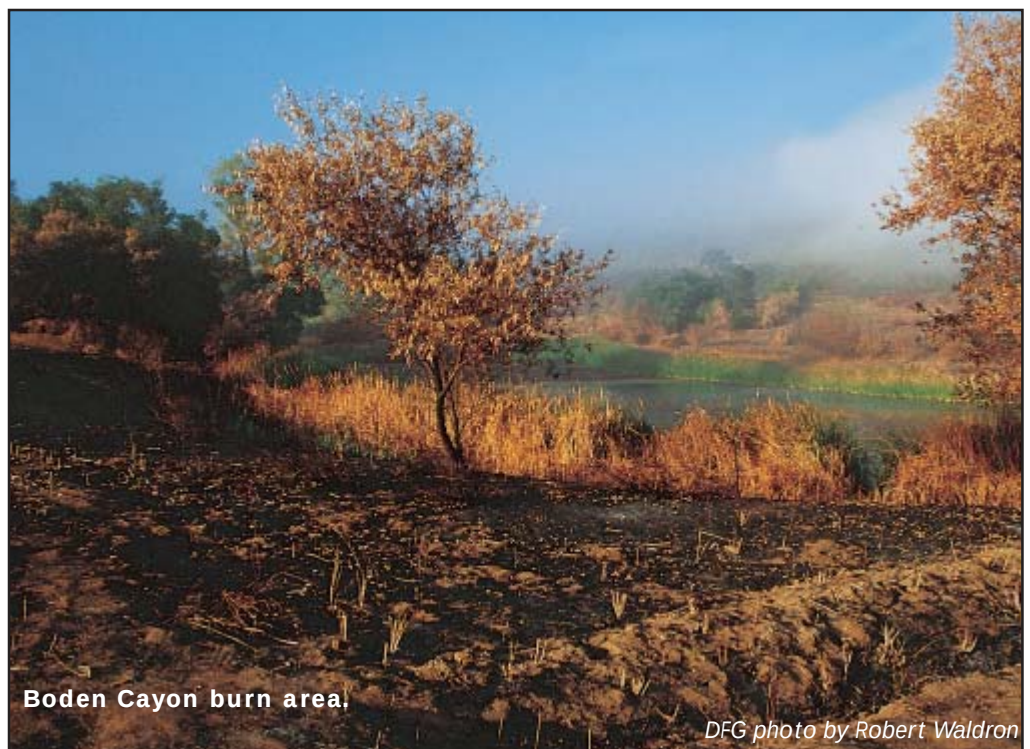
*DFG photo by Kim McKee-Lewis*



**to identify bats.**

*DFG photo by Kim McKee-Lewis*

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**Boden Canyon burn area.**

*DFG photo by Robert Waldron*





DFG photo by Robert Waldron

Visitor information at Boden Canyon.



Red diamond rattlesnake.

Photo © L.S. Vincent

water quality surveys. A wildfire in August 2001 near the center of the canyon provided an unexpected additional survey opportunity for reptile recruitment. Results from ongoing monitoring efforts will guide future restoration, enhancement, and public use opportunities in the reserve. Adherence to reserve rules and regulations will be the key to sustaining a variety of public uses.

A brochure has been prepared, with a detailed topographic map and the rules and regulations that apply, for those who would like to visit Boden Canyon. It can be requested from the South Coast Regional Office at (858) 467-4201. BCER is well signed and information kiosks are located at access points. Refer to these kiosks for the most updated information as it will be subject to change. *And above all else, enjoy your visit!* 🐾

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Englemann oaks have smooth, flat grayish leaves and rough bark.



DFG photo by Robert Waldron



DFG photo by Kim McKee-Lewis