

California's Ecological Reserves

With its snow-capped mountains, broad river valleys, a magnificent coast line and vast deserts, California is home to the greatest diversity of plant and animal life of any state in North America. Nearly 8,000 varieties of plants, 958 species of

By Kari Lewis

mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and a mind-boggling 30,000 insect species live here.

California is also home to 34 million people and the seventh largest economy in the world. California is the largest agricultural producer in the United States, and supports thriving industries in research and technology.

As the most biologically diverse, most productive, and most populous state, California faces unique challenges in the conservation of biological diversity. Agencies, non-profit organizations, and the public work together to conserve California's precious natural heritage.

This work takes a variety of forms, including planning for conservation, responsible land use, and acquisition of habitats for wildlife. The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) contributes to conservation, in part, with its protection and stewardship of ecological reserves.

In this issue, *Outdoor California* presents DFG's ecological reserve system. These pages feature reserves from all over the state, the species and habitats they protect, the people who manage them, the research projects they support, and opportunities for public education and enjoyment.

The ecological reserve system, authorized by the California Legislature in 1968, is designed to conserve areas for the



Brush rabbit.

Photo © Susan Van Der Wal

protection of rare plants, animals and habitats, and to provide areas for education and scientific research. With the acquisition and designation of Buena Vista Lagoon Ecological Reserve in 1968, the DFG began an ecological reserve system which now encompasses 119 properties totaling nearly 129,000 acres.

This system of reserves makes a significant contribution to the conservation of

California's biological diversity by protecting important species populations and habitats, some found nowhere else in the world!

California's ecological reserves also provide educational and recreational opportunities for wildlife viewing, nature walking, and fishing in areas where these activities have no adverse effect on the wildlife and habitats. Welcome to California's ecological reserves!