Our vision is a San Francisco Bay Area Wildlife Corridor. UWRP notes that as Silicon Valley's human population, development, and sea level increases, it is of utmost importance that the wildlife thoroughfares are identified and protected, thus maintaining California's natural genetic diversity.

Gray Fox Report for December 2017

by William C. Leikam, co-Founder, Urban Wildlife Research Project (UWRP)

Section I
Watching the Region for Gray Foxes with Trail Cameras

November had been such a promising month for the repopulation of the gray foxes to the baylands. I assumed that we had at least one that would remain in the region. That turned out to be wishful thinking as December has passed with no further sightings of a gray fox on any of the seven trail cameras and there has been no scat found anywhere in the region. However, during December some of us witnessed a tragedy out along Matadero Creek.

The following account is based on my log entry of both 12/1/2017 & 12/2/2017:

- **Evening 12/1/2017 - My Initial Find**

  That Friday evening, December first, shortly before 5:00 PM, I walked out into the overflow channel along the creek to set up trail camera number 6-V for the night. As I came down into the concrete channel, over by some willow trees, I noticed something red, something I’d never seen there before. I looked down. Shocked, I stared at two freshly laid out carcasses, two animals stripped of their fur. It took a moment for everything to register and even then, I had no idea what kind of animals I was looking at. As I gathered my thoughts and walked back under the trees’ canopy, I took a closer look and realized that there were two skinned raccoons lying there. (See photos for this date and following to 12/02.) Looked to me like a professional had done it because the skinning job was perfect. I checked around for anything more and found three snares hanging from a nearby branch.
I made a call to Police Dispatch to have one of the Animal Services people come out and pick them up. However, Bill who was on duty that evening was running about an hour and a half to two hours behind schedule and would not be able to get there before roughly 7:00 PM. I told dispatch where the raccoons were located. I left hoping that Bill would be able to find them in the dark.

I was about ready to leave when I remembered that I had an extra trail camera in my car's trunk. I could use it to try to get an image of the poacher if he showed up. I set the camera back in the trees.

- **12/2/2017 - The Following Morning**

I parked at the Matadero Creek Bridge at 7:15 AM. On my way down the trail to the overflow channel, I first noticed that someone had been there after I had left the previous evening because the No Trespassing sign on the trail leading into the overflow channel had been turned 180 degrees and faced the channel. I walked on over to where the raccoons lay and saw that they had not yet been collected by Animal Services. One of the dead raccoons had been pulled away from where it had lain. Its hind leg had been nibbled upon. The snares that had been in the tree were gone. I went back into the trees for my trail camera but it was not where I had posted it. Down the channel, I found a spatula/scraper between Markers 22 & 23. Down the channel another 10 feet, I found a small marshmallow. I thought, "Bet that's the bait they used." On down toward the ditch, there was broken glass. Neither the spatula, the marshmallow, nor the glass had been there the day before.

That Saturday morning at around 10:00 AM, Bill from Animal Services phoned. He had just returned to his office with five dead raccoons. We talked about the situation and what we might do about it. He suggested that I contact the rangers and make a report. I replied that I had just completed doing so and that I would follow up with a phone call.

Ranger "Robbie" answered. When he caught the gist of what I was saying, he asked, "Can you meet me at the bridge and I'll tell you in person what happened last night." As I waited for Robbie to arrive, I wondered, "How can a person do such a thing as that? I don't think they could if they heard the cubs "chatting" in that rolling low purr of theirs as they go along and the way mama raccoon wrestles with them, showing them how to defend themselves." I'd heard it many times. I'd seen them wrestle and play hundreds of times, especially on my trail cameras. A tear broke and I wiped it away.

We met and as we walked the channel, he told me the following story.

Normally he gets off work at 3:30 PM, but Friday night at about 6:00 PM he worked at the city's maintenance yard that backs up to the overflow channel and the creek. A
chain-linked fence separates the channel and the yard. He said that as he worked he noticed down in the channel a guy riding along on a bicycle and because it was already dark, the guy had a high powered light strapped to his cap. As the guy drew closer, Robbie saw that he wore knee-length shorts and he carried a large backpack.

The guy stopped directly across from where Robbie hid and watched. He unpacked his backpack, rummaged around for a couple of minutes and then went back in under the trees. About 15 minutes later, the guy came back out and rode away.

Robbie said that it all looked very suspicious, so he called Police Dispatch requesting that an officer is sent out to help him. Within five minutes, a patrolman arrived. The two of them went on down into the channel to where the poacher had gone back into the brush. There under the canopy, the officer and Robbie found four leg hold traps and one snout trap. (Those are vicious traps.) They collected them, found the snares, found a couple other related items, and found that the guy used small marshmallows as bait. They picked it all up and took it in as evidence.

As of this writing, this poacher has not returned as he knows that someone is onto him. Some of us speculated on what this person was doing with raccoon pelts as on the open market they are nearly worthless. In the January 2017 publication, Trapping Today, "The 2017 Fur Prices: FHA January Auction Results Raccoon prices remain low, with many raccoon pelts still unsalable, and unsold at this auction. Better Canadian raccoons did average over $7.00." I suppose that it's possible that this professional poacher might make raccoon hats, or other such items and sell them at a premium. In any case, this kind of destruction of our wildlife must be stopped.

**Update:** The poacher was caught. Turned out to be a 16 year old practicing taxidermy.

### Gray Foxes General Health

To date, no gray foxes were seen at the baylands during December.

### Total Numbers Of Gray Foxes in the Palo Alto Baylands Preserve

None.

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**Section II**

**Update for the Urban Wildlife Research Project - Greg Kerekes & Bill Leikam**

On November 28 in an article and published in the San Jose Mercury News titled "With Elk On Rebound, California Releases New Management plan: Wildlife experts say it's time to expand, link and improve their scattered habitats", I was quoted along with two other elk experts. [read article]

To find out more about us, search Urban Wildlife Research Project, UWRP, gray foxes, wildlife connection corridors, UrbanWildlifeResearchProject.com and
Section III

Gray Fox Baylands Goals

Within the permit that allows the Urban Wildlife Research Project to conduct its study of the behavior of the gray fox at the Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve, the objectives covered are:

- Monitoring of urban gray fox denning sites in Palo Alto Baylands.

This is being accomplished during the period when the gray foxes use a den site. It is one of the prime locations for gathering most of the behavioral data on the litter and on adults alike.

- Assessment of status and population trends of Baylands urban gray foxes.

See above - As of June 2015, it appears as though the number of gray foxes at the baylands has declined considerably. This brings up the question: As with coyotes that can regulate the number of pups born in a region, might also gray foxes do the same?

- Identification of habitat features that promote the presence of urban gray foxes.

As stated in a previous gray fox report, there is a need to undertake some work to increase the habitat features required by the gray foxes and other wildlife in an area where a road was built that borders the saltwater channel. I asked construction supervisor Frank Muzzi about this and he felt that the old growth Coyote Bush would grow back within the coming year and therefore accomplish the same goal. After considering this and talking with people who know how to restore habitats, we need to assess what kinds of plants would grow best along the edge of the saltwater channel and alongside the marsh. The Alkaline Saltbush is one but there are probably others as well. We need to grow a permanent habitat that contains the corridors and plant it as soon as possible. We’ll keep an eye on this as this is a critical link between the southern region of the baylands and the northern region.

- Assessment of reproductive success and identification of factors that promote successful reproduction.

Last month I wrote that gray fox reproduction at the baylands appears to be holding steady with an average of 3.3 pups developing to maturity during the 2013 and 2014 seasons. As noted above, the 2015 season has fewer pups than in years past. **Solution?** Open up the pinch-point along Matadero Creek by developing thickets that link one area to another.

- Identification and assessment of possible dispersal travel routes.

Presently there can only be guesses as to dispersal travel routes. We intend to make this important question much more concrete when we attain our collaring/take/capture permit from the Department of Fish & Wildlife.
Until next month, I hope that your endeavors are productive and rewarding. Take care.

Bill Leikam - The Fox Guy
Urban Wildlife Research Project (UWRP)

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