

Raptors on the River

The Pajaro River Levee Pilot Study



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About the Project

The Pajaro River corridor is home to a wide variety of wildlife. Unfortunately, the prevalence of burrowing rodents here can cause damage to river levees and increase the risk of catastrophic flooding. The Predatory Bird Research Group at UC Santa Cruz and the Zone 7 Flood Control and Water Conservation District are seeking to help solve this problem by implementing a 1-year pilot program to investigate the effectiveness of recruiting native hawks and owls, also known as raptors, to supplement current raptor-friendly pest management activities on the Pajaro River Levees.

Hunting perches and owl nest boxes have been placed along a 2.5 mile section of the river. Our team will investigate whether encouraging raptors to hunt on the levee will help our county work towards reducing the use of ecologically harmful anticoagulant and fumigant rodenticides for pest management. You can



Mark Schleicher

also help protect local raptors by not using rodent poisons on your property (see raptorsarethesolution.org for non-toxic alternatives).

Biologists, county maintenance crews, community volunteers, and local students will be working together to monitor bird and rodent activity on the levee in 2020. The initial findings of this pilot study will be available at the end of the year.

Raptors kill rodents/ help farmers

A recent study by Humboldt State University of occupied barn owl boxes in Napa Valley vineyards found that during one breeding season (March to June) alone, each adult barn owl consumed 155 rodents while each nestling ate 191 rodents. In 20 owl boxes, over 20,000 rodents were eaten by the owls, providing natural, non-toxic rodent control to vintners. Red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks, and other raptors are also on the job: one red-shouldered hawk can consume 30 rodents in a month! In Ventura County, a pilot study using raptor perches and owl boxes found substantially less damage from ground squirrels and gophers to their levees than in areas where poison was used. Levee managers estimate a cost savings of \$7,500 a year for each mile of levee.

Rodenticides kill raptors and more

There is no such thing as a "safe" rat poison. Dozens of scientific studies have found rat poisons in a wide variety of wildlife, including foxes, bobcats, coyotes, mountain lions, and every species of hawk and owl. Rat poison also kills pet dogs and cats as well as scavengers like raccoons, skunks and opossums. Rat poison leads to a slow, painful death for all animals who are exposed to it, whether they consume the poison directly or eat the flesh of a poisoned animal.

Rat poison is often used in bait stations, but the rodents do not die inside the stations. After eating the bait, rats and mice go back into the wild and can take more than a week to die. During that time they may return to the bait station and ingest many more times the lethal dose. Weakened from internal bleeding, poisoned rodents are a toxic ticking bomb for any animal who preys on them.

For more information see <https://pbrg.pbsci.ucsc.edu/PajaroRaptors.html>



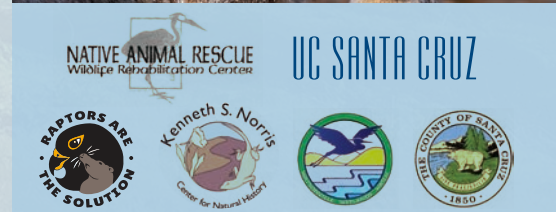
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Partners: UC Santa Cruz Predatory Bird Research Group, Zone 7 Flood Control and Water Conservation District, Native Animal Rescue, Ken Norris Center for Natural History, Watsonville Wetlands Watch, Raptors Are The Solution

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