



FOR NATURE. FOR THE FUTURE.

IMPACT REPORT 2024-2025

the **nat** | SAN DIEGO
NATURAL HISTORY
MUSEUM

Yes, that is the sky. We're in the process of replacing our Atrium ceiling with a new, flat design and adding 200 solar panels. This project helps green our building and preserve our priceless collections.



DEAR MUSEUM FRIENDS,

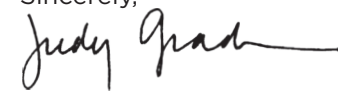
As I gaze up at the sky through the rapidly growing hole in our roof, I'd like to say I'm thinking about how the sky's the limit for us with our talented staff and volunteers, stable financial situation, and community of support. But no, I'm more worried about whether it will rain, whether the plans for inclement weather are sound, and if the project will stay on schedule. It is exciting to see the culmination of years of planning, and absolutely terrifying to be heading up an open-air museum.

The roof replacement project (which is fortunately on schedule) was made possible by a successful culmination of the 150th anniversary and a ton of generosity that helped us close our capital campaign. Although we are still seeking support for the roof, we met our overall goal and advanced our mission. As we capped off our anniversary year, it was gratifying to see the amount of national media coverage around our milestone that celebrated not just our longevity but also our science, creativity, and commitment to education and conservation in our region.

Our new mission, conserving nature through science and discovery, and the new organizational strategy that accompanies it points us toward applying our knowledge, encouraging everyone to love nature, and raising our voice for conservation. We know that this needs to be done in partnership with our community, and that our stewardship needs to extend to our team and our building. Many of the elements of this report reflect the new strategy, reinforcing the power of our new goals.

Given the backdrop of uncertainty surrounding public funding, we are continuing to get great work done and improving life for wildlife and people in our region. Some notable accomplishments this past year include the successful breeding of California red-legged frogs after five years of work translocating egg masses and improving ponds. After decades of silence, red-legged frogs are once again calling in the Southern California night. We toasted the success of 25 California least tern nests, signaling hope for this highly endangered species. Our native gardens hit their first birthday and have already increased biodiversity around our building. We logged record visitation to our Museum and introduced thousands of people to nature through hiking, whale watching, and community science.

Once we close off the roof we will all rest easier, but even a new roof cannot contain my gratitude for our team, our supporters, and our community. Our longevity and our evolution into a force for nature in San Diego and the Baja California Peninsula was made possible through the actions of many people over many years. Thank you, and I look forward to taking our collective work to new heights.

Sincerely,


Judy Gradwohl
 Christy Walton President and CEO



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Mission in Action

On the occasion of our 151st year, we updated our mission statement:

To conserve nature through science and discovery.

It's short, it's straightforward, and it's memorable. The sentiment behind this mission statement remains largely the same as our previous one, but this more active and simplified approach serves as an aspirational "north star." It addresses what we plan to do (our impact and vision) versus how we plan to do it.

Our new strategic framework and mission statement outline a bold role for The Nat—leveraging the strength of our reputation, our collections, our deep relationships, and knowledge to catalyze action that will conserve the bioregion through science, education, and advocacy.

OLD

To interpret the natural world through research, education, and exhibits; to promote understanding of the evolution and diversity of Southern California and the peninsula of Baja California; and to inspire in all a respect for nature and the environment.

NEW

To conserve nature through science and discovery.

Here for Nature

After more than 150 years of studying, protecting, and getting people excited about the natural world, we've earned the right to say: there's no other organization that does what we do. The Nat's unique mix of conservation, scientific research, exhibitions, and education makes us the trusted voice of science in our region. We connect our community—from curious schoolkids to civic leaders—to nature all around them.

That's the spirit behind our recently completed Here for Nature Capital Campaign. Timed with our 150th anniversary, this campaign wasn't just about bricks and mortar. It was about pushing our mission further—taking bold steps to expand our reach and protect the natural world.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of our community, we've raised more than \$50 million since the launch of the campaign. And what a difference it's made:

- We grew our endowment by \$19.5 million, giving us long-term stability along with funding for three key positions: the Laurence Klauber Curator of Herpetology, the Exequiel Ezcurra Director of Conservation Biology, and the Christy Walton President and CEO. We also launched the Joan and Irwin Jacobs Center for Science and Conservation, a home base for big ideas and collaborative action.
- We tackled major infrastructure upgrades like updating our HVAC systems, replacing our Atrium roof, and adding 200 solar panels.
- We expanded our work beyond the building by studying local canyons, launching the California Urban Nature Alliance, and expanding our community science and engagement programs.
- We made strategic investments in our collections and people, including the state-of-the-art Tom Deméré Paleontology Center and new apprenticeships to train and support the next generation of scientists.
- And the visitor experience just keeps getting better. We created a beautiful new native plant garden, built new exhibitions including *Expedition Baja* and *Amazement in the Basement*, and enhanced our Atrium and rooftop gathering spaces.

Together, we've done more than we thought possible. We've improved the building itself, elevated our science and engagement programs, and strengthened our ability to protect the region's natural treasures—now and for the next 150 years.



Joan and Irwin Jacobs Center for Science and Conservation

We are thrilled to announce an extraordinary \$10 million endowment gift from Dr. Irwin Jacobs to establish the Joan and Irwin Jacobs Center for Science and Conservation. This transformational contribution will help us modernize our research, deepen our impact, and expand our role as a scientific leader, including:

- Harnessing cutting-edge technology like genomics and AI to bolster new scientific discoveries.
- Leveraging our unparalleled natural history collections to understand long-term ecological trends and inform future conservation strategies.
- Expanding research and training opportunities for the next generation of scientists.
- Fostering collaborations with UC San Diego, the Salk Institute, and other leading academic and research organizations.

We are grateful to Joan and Irwin Jacobs for their incredible generosity and foresight. Their gift is an investment in science and in the future of our region. The Nat holds unparalleled knowledge of our landscape: millions of years of history preserved by nearly 9 million specimens. By applying the latest scientific tools and methodologies, we can gain new insight from our collections and drive innovative research that informs real world solutions.

Dr. Irwin Jacobs, Judy Gradwohl, and Kathryn Kanjo, Director and CEO of the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, make remarks at the commemoration of the Joan and Irwin Jacobs Center for Science and Conservation. Friends and supporters gather in the space, which features artwork by Robert Rauschenberg on loan from the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego.

INSPIRING A LOVE OF NATURE



A Whole New Floor to Explore

This spring brought the arrival of our largest new exhibition in recent years: *Amazement in the Basement*. And “amazing” is truly the word for it. In our renovated lower level, visitors can explore giant fossils, jars of reptiles, glittering insects, delicate plant pressings, and so much more.

Hands-on activities allow visitors to think like a scientist and share in the excitement of discovery, like piecing together a dire wolf puzzle or opening drawers to find fossil treasures from San Diego neighborhoods. This behind-the-scenes look at our specimens reveals how collections unlock new knowledge.

The exhibition also offers a glimpse at perhaps the most fascinating feature of all: our scientists. Through windows into the brand-new, state-of-the-art Paleontology Center, visitors can see scientists at work as they prepare and study fossils brought back from the field. When the windows must close due to extra dusty or detailed work, docents step in to give visitors the scientific low-down. These human-to-human moments make this exhibition unlike any other at the Museum.

By making this behind-the-scenes work and research accessible, *Amazement in the Basement* invites everyone into the scientific process and to appreciate how collections help us understand and protect our world. Future scientists and other enthusiasts leave buzzing with their own questions about nature—because there’s still so much to discover.

The Paleo Passageway in Amazement in the Basement is a visitor favorite because it gives guests an up-close look at the fossils in our collection. Here, content creators and members of the media get a first peek at the exhibition.

Wonder All Day, Every Day

Amazement in the Basement is just one of many recent additions that have brought the daily visitor experience to soaring new heights. Here’s a sample itinerary of how people can spend the perfect day with us.

10 AM: HIT THE TRAIL.

Smell the morning dew-coated native plants as you chat with Nat Garden Corp volunteers tending to our thriving Nature Trail.

11 AM: GET ARTSY.

Head to *Unshelved* to sketch specimens big, small, beautiful, bizarre, and everything in between. Take your masterpiece home or add it to our community gallery wall.

12 PM: TACO TIME.

Our new café partner, Craft Taco, offers made-to-order tacos featuring signature blue corn tortillas, delectable burritos and bowls, as well as coffee, specialty drinks, and more.

3 PM: KICK BACK FOR A FILM.

From mating grebes and urban squirrels to magnificent marine migrations and grunion runs, our new film *Wild San Diego*—created for The Nat in partnership with Day’s Edge Productions and PBS Nature—proves that this city’s heartbeat is as wild as it is wonderful. Read more about it on page 10.

4 PM: SHOP ‘TIL YOU DROP.

A sister store to the popular South Park boutique, Gold Leaf at The Nat offers a curated selection of nature-themed goods and gifts. On the first Thursday of the month, our youngest visitors enjoy stopping in for Nature and Me Storytime.

5 PM: ROOFTOP VIEWS AND VIBES.

End the week with a craft cocktail and bites from local restaurant Wolf in the Woods on our updated rooftop. With half-price admission and dazzling views of Balboa Park and beyond, Nat at Night is drawing crowds eager for a whole new way to experience the Museum.

2,300+ people
engaged across
30+ zip codes.

Connecting Communities To Science

Thanks to San Diego's many urban canyons, most of the city's 1.4 million residents live just a short walk from a park or green space. These natural areas provide essential benefits, from cooling neighborhoods to supporting wildlife, yet not everyone has equal opportunity to engage with or learn from them.

Recognizing these barriers exist, the Museum's science and education teams collaborate closely to create programs that help people connect with nature right in their own neighborhoods. By conducting plant and wildlife surveys alongside residents who live near the canyons and focusing on capacity building through hands-on programs, the Healthy Canyons Initiative empowers diverse communities to explore, learn from, and become stewards of their local canyons.

POWER THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships have been crucial in improving access to nature and supporting communities. Check out some of the ways we are working together to co-create programs and events that engage local residents in environmental stewardship and science:

In collaboration with Groundwork San Diego-Chollas Creek, we engaged in monthly Family Saturdays to host bilingual, intergenerational workshops. These workshops combined creative activities with expert-led presentations, community science training, and air quality and biodiversity data collection. The activities were carried out in canyons and neighborhoods near the Chollas Creek Watershed in southeastern San Diego. Participants presented their results at a community fair and found that they could turn environmental awareness into everyday action.

Through a partnership with San Diego Canyonlands, students in the Canyon Connections Internship co-created three bilingual field guides for canyons in City Heights. None of the high school student interns

had used or even heard of a field guide before, and by the end of their internship, had authored their own to share with their community. These guides were officially launched at the City Heights Hike-A-Thon, helping residents better explore and protect these local urban spaces.

The Healthy Canyons Initiative worked with the Border BioBlitz, Hilltop High School, Bonita Vista High School, California College Corps Fellows, and Chula Vista Open Space to help students contribute to our knowledge of local biodiversity. Together, we worked alongside over 160 students and recorded more than 1,100 biodiversity observations in nearby canyon habitats. In addition to hands-on fieldwork, we are collaborating to develop a community-friendly map to help residents better access and explore these valuable public green spaces.

NEIGHBORHOOD NATURE

Urban nature extends beyond canyon edges. With many yards and gardens playing an important role in these ecosystems, the opportunities to learn and engage with nature continue just the same. This year, over 60 households across San Diego joined our community science efforts to discover which birds are visiting their neighborhoods. Residents placed acoustic recorders in their canyon-adjacent yards, helping us compare bird activity in canyons versus residential spaces. Neighbors are turning their backyards into mini research stations, learning about local birds while supporting real conservation science.

Connecting local communities to their shared green spaces has been made possible in part with funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation and the Conrad Prebys Foundation.

High schoolers were key participants in this year's Border BioBlitz, where they registered plant and wildlife observations all throughout Rice Canyon. The efforts also contributed to our Healthy Canyons Initiative.



PUBLIC OUTREACH BY THE NUMBERS

Our educators and scientists spend a lot of time face-to-face with communities in San Diego County to share knowledge and excitement about our region's nature and engage people in community science programs.

39 events

7,575 people engaged

We participated in **13 nature events**, engaging with a total of **1,753 people**.

We held two events at local high schools to engage **316 students** in scientific research and community science projects.

Various science departments, scientific programs, and community partners had one-on-one time with **323 museum visitors**.

We hosted large-scale community science and training events. This year we engaged **873 community scientists** through **14 in-person events** (don't forget to add that to the **4,178 virtual participants**).

Finally, we collaborated with the Speaker's Bureau and reached **132 people** through presentations about nature and our Museum.

Where the Wild Things Are: On Our Giant Screen

San Diego's wildlife was in the national limelight with the airing of *San Diego: America's Wildest City* on PBS. This one-hour nature documentary was created by Days Edge Productions in partnership with several organizations including The Nat. Gorgeous footage and a clever script tell the story of San Diego County's incredible biodiversity.

A 40-minute version, *Wild San Diego*, now plays daily in our giant screen theater, delighting visitors with the playful antics of squirrels, the mating rituals of grebes (shown at right), stunning phenomena like bioluminescence, and much more. It's one more way we're introducing visitors to the amazing nature of San Diego.



Let's Take This Outside

While a museum full of school groups and eager learners is music to our ears, we are taking things beyond our walls with two new programs: Nature Buds and Nature Navigators.

Nature Buds embodies the spirit of our mission, starting with our smallest nature lovers. This simple yet effective tool is comprised of 28 leaf-shaped cards that feature engaging activities for early learners, designed to be used by parents or caregivers in any green space. The goal is to encourage outdoor exploration and promote early literacy skills among children 5 and under. Generously funded by the Dr. Seuss Foundation and created in partnership with First 5 San Diego, these card sets are free and can be picked up at distribution sites throughout our community, including the San Diego Public Library. They are currently offered in English and Spanish, but we have plans to add more languages and distribution locations to reach even more communities to ensure nature education is accessible to all.

Nature Navigators engages 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students in place-based learning. In other words, we bring The Nat to them. This new outreach program emphasizes scientific observation skills utilizing whatever outdoor space the school has access to, whether that is a school garden, a nearby park, or a canyon. Led by Nat staff and volunteers, Nature Navigators promotes biodiversity understanding and environmental stewardship, encouraging students to become community scientists and explore their local outdoor spaces.

We love inspiring the next generation, so they'll grow up to love—and hopefully protect—this amazing region we call home.

The colorful Nature Buds activity card sets (above) include a small magnifying glass and flashlight to help young minds explore the outdoors. Below, youth from the Nature Navigators program participate in learning activities at Howard Pence Elementary School.



ENGAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS

That's almost 30,000 more visitors than last year.

OVERALL VISITATION
385,839

GENERAL ADMISSION
328,449

We saw 20% attendance growth for this program, which provides free or reduced admission to San Diego County museums.

MUSEUMS FOR ALL
20,747

MUSEUM ACCESS FUNDS
5,741 students from Title 1 schools served

IN-MUSEUM SCHOOL PROGRAMS
389 programs reaching **14,492** people

IN-MUSEUM FAMILY & PUBLIC PROGRAMS
34 programs serving **4,201** participants

NATURE TO YOU LOAN LIBRARY
707 loans reaching **152,965** people

We loaned out 150 more resources than last year.

WEBSITE
628,465 visits
~**1,442,326** page views

ENEWS
75,938 subscribers

More than 4,000 new people subscribed to our eNews this year.

SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK
50,497 followers

INSTAGRAM
19,683 followers

We gained almost 5,000 followers this year—that's an audience growth of more than 30%.

TIKTOK
1,174 followers

YOUTUBE
1,944 subscribers

LINKEDIN
8,946 subscribers

A Year in the Life of Our Garden

It's hard to believe that The Nat's Nature Trail is only one year old. The space, formerly supporting lawn and non-native bushes, has already flourished into a thriving natural habitat thanks to the dedication of our Garden Corps volunteers, garden advisors, and community partners, along with guidance from Horticulturist Carla Quimson.

Hundreds of caterpillars found their way to our native milkweed this spring. Bumblebees and other pollinators are now regular visitors, signaling a thriving ecosystem. Sustainable features like a new bioswale (a vegetated channel that filters and disperses stormwater runoff) demonstrate best practices for habitat health. The rapid growth of our native plants is already visible: the California sycamore trees on the west side now stand half as tall as the Museum.

The creation of the Garden Advisory Committee has strengthened the vision and long-term care of the garden. Comprised of local native plant experts, the committee helped guide the addition of more than 150 endemic species to the Nature Trail this year, ensuring the plant palette reflects the unique biodiversity of our region.

Our Garden Corps volunteers have been instrumental to the garden's success, contributing to maintenance, interpretation, and even hosting several community events. Our volunteer program is further strengthened by our partnership with Forever Balboa Park. At our spring planting party, more than 200 volunteers and families came together to dig, plant, and learn. We planted 12 trees and more than 600 native plants in a single morning.

Community celebrations have brought new energy and visibility to the garden. In celebration of Pollinator Week, partner organizations gathered around the building for our annual Garden Fair, offering hands-on activities and educational programs while highlighting the many ways people can support biodiversity at home.

All this, and we're still just putting down roots. The future is ripe with opportunities to celebrate our native plants and get others involved. We can't wait to keep the momentum going.

Here for the flora. Volunteers, staff, and community partners helped our garden flourish in its first year. The Nature Trail's meandering pathways and abundance of native plants attract both people and pollinators.



VOLUNTEERS BY THE NUMBERS

393 active volunteers

33,915 hours of volunteer service

\$1,361,348 dollar value of volunteer hours
(in California in 2025 per Independent Sector)

CANYONEERS LED

62 public hikes for **1,742** people

6 school hikes for **200** students and chaperones

That's 10 more hikes and 656 more people than last year.

DOCENTS REACHED

1,706 students and chaperones with **63** programs

WHALERS REACHED

30,101 total passengers on cruises from Legacy Whale Watch and City Cruises

NAT GARDEN CORPS

89 volunteers **1,124** hours

This is a brand-new program to The Nat. Learn all about it on page 12.

NATURALISTS LOGGED

1,186 hours of guest engagement thanks to the **121** naturalist volunteers

SCIENCE VOLUNTEERS LOGGED

11,125 hours

That's up 1,354 hours from last year.



From Basement to Boats

As we embarked on the opening of our newest exhibition, *Amazement in the Basement*, our volunteers jumped in with two feet to support us. As usual, it was done with an admirable level of enthusiasm and glee.

Paleontology volunteers have (literally) opened a window into the world of local fossils for visitors, engaging them in lively discussions in our new Demonstration Lab. These dedicated volunteers share their knowledge about the process of fossil excavation and preparation and help Museum visitors make connections between our collection and familiar San Diego landmarks. Guests are surprised and delighted to learn about specimens collected locally—often from their very own neighborhoods.

Our Docents also help in the interpretation of the exhibition, chatting with our visitors about the scientific importance of our collections and connecting *Amazement in the Basement* to guests' individual interests, other museum exhibits, and opportunities to further learn about local nature.

Outside of the Museum, our Whaler volunteers engaged a record number of guests at sea.



While continuing to inspire passengers aboard City Cruises, our Whalers expanded their reach by partnering with a second whale watching company, Legacy Whale Watch. This move not only enabled us to reach a wider audience, it also made whale watching a year-round activity for our Whalers and the lucky passengers who interact with them on each trip.

Year-round whale watching offers opportunities to view gray and blue whales, as well as the potential to see fin whales, humpbacks, and a vast array of other marine life off the coast of San Diego. The partnership with Legacy Whale Watch has been a huge success, and our Whalers inspire new ocean advocates and nature lovers every day.

From Whalers to Docents to science volunteers, Garden Corps members, naturalists, and Canyoneers—our volunteers remain a cornerstone of the Museum. Thanks to their passion, dedication and deep care, our work reaches further, becomes stronger, and is more impactful.

Volunteers interact with people inside the building, outside on whale watching tours, and everywhere in between.

Volunteer Milestones

Volunteers keep us going—they support our organization's mission and help connect people to it. **Join us in honoring volunteers who have reached significant service milestones.**

20 YEARS

Cara Furio
Carol Norman
Christine Waters
Diane Cullins
Jack Berdy
Jeanne G. Shenkman
Judith Carlstrom

Karen Marshall
Larry Hendrickson
Leslie H. Rapp
Linda King
Margaret Fillius
Michael Simpson
Nancy Nenow

Nelson Brav
Rosanne Stogner
Rosemary Kelley
Sharon Weremiuk
Terry Esterly
Thomas Chester
Uli Burgin

Valerie Quate
Victoria Marshall
Walter F. Konopka
Wendy Esterly

15 YEARS

Frances Bookheim
John Hopper
Judythe Roberts
Lynne Grenfell
Marilyn Miles
Maritza Witmer
Mark Mauthner
Mary Lueking

Peter Vroom
Robert McCurdy
Teresa A. Norris
Uli Burgin
William Edwards
Yee-Ching Chang

10 YEARS

Andrew Currie
Anna Arft
Celinda Garibaldi
Charles Powell
Colton Holloman
Dale Noonkester
Daniel Keddy
Deborah Buffington
Della Snyder-Velto

Diana Lindsay
Diane Elias
Dolores Keyes
Donna Zoll
Duane Trombly
Elizabeth Eklund
Irina Fridman
Jack Berdy
James Varnell

Jeanine Kleeman
Jennifer Picha
Jerry Jacobs
Jerry Wilson
Jim Clevenger
Joal Mayer
John Carrington
Jorgiann Holmes
Karen Owens

Kate Harper
Katrin Soldau
Ken Shelby
Laura Keener
Laurel F. McKenzie
Leigh Anne Gibbons
Linda King
Maggie Holloway
Maria Gonzales Ceron

Marilyn Smith
Marilyn Thoman
Marlin Burke
Marlin W. Burke
Mary Duffy
Melonie Brown
Nicolina Stary
Richard Breisch
Sally Davis

Stefanie Curtis
Susan Emerson
Teresa Varnell
William Grant

5 YEARS

Adam Walley
Albert G. Verna
Alexander Moore
Amelia Campbell
Ashlyn Bahrychuk
Brianna Wetherbe
Bronwyn Jones-Mortell
Caitlyn Bannister
Callie Mack
Carly Slawson Rivera
Charles Clark
Charles Starnes
Christina Ward
Daniel Gerardi

Diane Dauble
Eileen Kreckman
Elizabeth Patterson
Emily Madden
Emma Edmonds
Gabriel Vogeli
Gale Kavanaugh
Gary Dixon
Gregg Wilson
Jacinta Lucero
James Berrian
Jane Barger
Jane Ploetz
Janet McClain

Jean Payne
Jeff Huston
Jeffrey Hirsch
Joanne McCamy
Jonathan Rheuben
Julianna Pina-Sanz
Katrina Limson
Kayla Mason
Kelly Fuller
Kurt Norton
Larry Lambert
Lauriel Adsit
Lindsey Calson
Lindsay Iglesias

Liz Perez
Madisen Hinkley
Marcia Halpern
Margaret Elizondo
Marilyn Solan
Marina Youngblood
Marnie Baird
Mary Lew
Mary Svonovec
Maurice Muschett
May Lew
Melissa Quinones
Mike Tuckfelt
Nancy Jo Mackey

Nicholas Donnellan
Quinn Tomlinson
Raquel Vasquez
Richard Hughes
Richard Neuman
Richard Matthews
Robin Kendall
Robin Shifflet
Sara Eaton
Sarah Van Horn
Sarichia Cacciatore
Scott Koshland
Sohath-Zamira Yusseff
Vanegas

Stephen Hodges
Stuart Schafer
Sue Fogle
Teresa Grider
Thomas Hughes
Vasti Walsh
William Polk
Wray Grimaldi
Yvonne Tempel

SCIENCE AND COLLECTIONS FOR CONSERVATION

Curator of Birds and Mammals Phil Unitt explores a small bird skeleton—one of over 10,000 skeletons in the Museum's collection.



Tracking the Tricolored Blackbird

More than 150 years ago, the tricolored blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*) was described as the most abundant bird in San Diego. Today, it is a threatened species that is rare in Southern California. The reason its population is dwindling? Mainly habitat loss due to development. Large nesting colonies used to be found in coastal freshwater marshes surrounded by extensive grasslands for foraging, many of which have disappeared. Additional threats like mite infestations and potential competition from the great-tailed grackle (*Quiscalus mexicanus*) aren't helping.

To learn how tricolored blackbird populations are faring, The Nat's ornithology team visited over 200 possible nesting sites throughout San Diego County but found only 16 nesting colonies totaling around 6,000 birds. Although few nesting sites were found, there's still some good news—our scientists found one new colony and one large colony, which was estimated to have around 3,000 birds.

Colony sites shifted dramatically over time, which emphasizes that the birds' population

can be understood only through multi-year studies, especially since the extra-dry start to 2025 meant there was little to no breeding in most colonies due to little water and scarcity of food. The surveys are also confirming the importance of private ranchland to the bird's survival in addition to areas already being managed by government agencies and water districts.

Our scientists are also experimenting with radio telemetry, a way to track the location of birds using radio signals. Two birds tagged in San Diego County were spotted in Riverside County. Their wide range makes for optimism among scientists who may try to establish new colonies by restoring habitat or by "attracting" birds by placing look-alike decoys and broadcasting the tricolored blackbird's song.

Our surveys and findings are helping provide important baseline information on the bird's population—the first step for conservation action.

The tri-colored blackbird was once one of the most abundant birds in Southern California. Today, Museum scientists are keeping a close eye on their populations and habitat preferences.



“Binational region” for a reason

Yes, we’re a hub for science and conservation in Southern California, but our work extends far beyond. Just south of the U.S.-Mexico border, the Baja California Peninsula is home to a spectacular wealth of biodiversity, ecosystems, and landscapes we’re proud to help conserve—all while working collaboratively with our colleagues in Mexico.



1 BORDERLAND BIOBLITZING

This year’s Border BioBlitz yielded nearly 30,000 plant and wildlife observations along the U.S.-Mexico border, thanks to the 1,700 contributors. Some cool observations included the very rare black-vented shearwater (*Puffinus opisthomelas*) off San Diego’s coast and the California king snake (*Lampropeltis californiae*) which is considered threatened in Mexico.

2 THEY ARE SO BACK

We reached a major milestone in our California red-legged frog project—see sidebar at right.



3 A HIDDEN TREASURE

After 100 years of not being seen, the extremely elusive and threatened California black rail (*Laterallus jamaicensis coturniculus*) was found in two key wetlands of Baja California. Over 45 birds were spotted thanks to the efforts from our Mexican colleagues, who also confirmed breeding activity—the first we know of in this region.



4 DESERT EXPLORATION

Museum supporters got up close and personal to the Peninsula’s nature on a field trip to Cataviña hosted by our philanthropy team. These science-focused field trips allow us to share the beauty and importance of our mission region with those who support our research and conservation work.



5 REPORTING FROM THE ISLANDS

Nat scientists and colleagues are publishing their findings from an expedition that documented the incredible biodiversity of remote islands in the Gulf of California. Their findings, which include 126 species of plants and animals never-before-recorded in the islands, help us better understand this delicate ecosystem, how it changes over time, and what we can do to best protect it.

6 RARE FOSSIL FOUND

Our paleontology team was contacted by a retired geologist living in the desert. The reason? They found an extremely well-preserved fossil skull of an extinct prehistoric bird (*Pelagornithidae*) in a dry riverbed—it’s rare to find a skull so intact. Our team is cleaning, studying, and imaging the specimen, which will be later returned to Mexican scientists.



7 WANTED: LOST ARACHNID

Known from a single specimen collected more than 125 years ago, *Kevonones mexicanus*, a type of arachnid, has only been found once more since then. Today, our scientists are searching for this lost species to photograph it, get DNA samples, and continue building out the natural history of the region.



8 NOURISHING A WATERSHED

Our scientists have made over 23 trips to the Los Planes watershed to cultivate our understanding of this area’s biodiversity. So far, we’ve participated in extensive biodiversity surveys, met with the community, published notes, and will soon release a report to share our findings.



9 GET IN, WE’RE GOING BOTANIZING

The next generation of botanists has been traveling the Baja California Peninsula thanks to efforts from our botany team and the Baja Rare project. The team visited over 25 sites to train more than 35 people on the rare plants of the region and have also organized an expedition dedicated to early-career botanists. So far, they’ve found new populations of species with binational distribution like *Marina orcuttii* and micro-endemic species from Baja California Sur like *Jatropha moranii*.



They Are So Back

15 translocations
79 egg masses
23,000 tadpoles released

After five years of hard work, the California red-legged frog project has reached a critical milestone: the reintroduced populations of frogs have begun breeding on their own. Each winter season since 2020, Museum scientists and partners have translocated eggs from ponds in Baja California to wetlands in the U.S. with the goal of re-establishing lost populations in Southern California, where the frog had gone locally extinct. Microphones were set up to detect calling males during mating season, which helped scientists discover the native-laid eggs in early spring. With adults now breeding on their own, the frog recovery team is focused on expanding their efforts and restoring more wetlands.





During post-fire surveys, our scientists recorded *Phacelia brachyloba* in Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve for the first time ever.

We Mean Bio-Business

Our BioServices department is the Museum’s biological consulting arm. In other words, we get hired to protect nature—from leading surveys in search of endangered species to monitoring habitats that are undergoing restoration. This year, the team was hired on 57 projects, bringing in total revenue of \$1.6 million. Check out some of the team’s projects and exciting findings.

NEW TECHNOLOGY, NEW FINDINGS

Our herpetology team is evaluating amphibian populations along the Santa Margarita River through traditional surveys. They’re also experimenting with deploying microphones to record ambient sounds in the hope of capturing male breeding calls. So far, this emerging technology has detected American bullfrogs (*Lithobates catesbeianus*), an introduced species, and Pacific treefrogs (*Pseudacris regilla*), a native species. Next, our scientists hope to find the federally endangered arroyo toad (*Anaxyrus californicus*).

NOT-SO-ELUSIVE BEE

For years, our scientists have been searching for the historically elusive Crotch’s bumble bee (*Bombus crotchii*). Thanks to recent efforts, we’ve

started seeing more bees in places where we have historically found few to none. Surprisingly, the populations seem to be faring well in our local urban canyons, with lots of observations reported in Mission Trails. Our team continues to monitor the bee to understand how its population is faring.

FIRE-FOLLOWING PLANTS IN TORREY PINES

The team added 21 new plant records to the Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve checklist, more than half of which are native. Many of the new records were fire-following plant species that appeared after a fire hit the area in June 2024, including the first record of *Phacelia brachyloba* in the reserve, a plant usually found at higher elevations.

OWL PELLETS ARE FULL OF CLUES

By analyzing burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*) pellets (regurgitated prey parts that are indigestible), our scientists found that in years the owls had breeding success, their diet was made up of more vertebrates (animals with a backbone like small mammals or reptiles) and fewer invertebrates (animals with no backbone like insects or snails). Thanks to these data, our scientists can focus on protecting areas with suitable habitat for burrowing owls: places with lots of vertebrate prey.

PHOTOGRAPHING AN ELUSIVE FOX

We’re on a mission to document the Sierra Nevada red fox (*Vulpes vulpes nector*), an elusive, rare, and endemic mammal to California. Our scientists placed 20 camera stations throughout the mountainous terrain and recently captured the first successful photographs of the fox at two stations. The foxes seem to favor areas with edible pine nuts but may need to avoid predation and competition from coyotes that were also spotted at high elevations.

25 REASONS FOR HOPE

Museum ornithologists co-led monitoring of the highly endangered California least tern (*Sternula antillarum browni*) nesting colony at San Dieguito Lagoon for the third year. Despite marked challenges experienced statewide by nesting least terns this year, the tiny but mighty San Dieguito colony supported an estimated 25 successful nests, making it a valuable source of optimism (and new terns).

COLLECTIONS BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL NUMBER OF SPECIMENS

~9.2 MILLION

SPECIMENS/OBJECTS ADDED TO COLLECTIONS THIS YEAR:

281,466

BOTANY

NEW SPECIMENS: 2,425



Thanks to Margie Mulligan, botany department associate, and collaborator Amy Vandergast, our herbarium will house approximately 40 new specimens of the federally threatened thread-leaf brodiaea as part of a larger conservation genetics project.

TOTAL SPECIMENS: 290,255

HERPETOLOGY ▲

NEW SPECIMENS: 887

MINERALOGY

TOTAL SPECIMENS: ~15,000

We recently added a yellow-bellied sea snake, the second-rarest snake in the continental U.S., to our collection. This is the only known specimen to have ever been found in San Diego County.

TOTAL SPECIMENS: 77,717

INVERTEBRATE ZOOLOGY ▲

TERRESTRIAL INVERTEBRATES
NEW SPECIMENS: 247,788
TOTAL SPECIMENS: 1,808,362

MARINE INVERTEBRATES
TOTAL SPECIMENS: ~5 MILLION

The Department of Entomology recently changed to Invertebrate Zoology, combining our Entomology and Marine Invertebrates Departments into one. This renaming better represents the diversity of what we study—it includes insects, arachnids, worms, crabs, snails, and any animal without a backbone.

MAMMALOGY ▲
NEW SPECIMENS: 107

ORNITHOLOGY ▼
NEW SPECIMENS: 392
TOTAL SPECIMENS: 53,338

Our collection houses one of the few complete skeletons of the most endangered marine mammal in the world—the vaquita porpoise. It was recently loaned for scanning and replication for educational purposes.

TOTAL SPECIMENS: 25,830

The yellow-billed loon has only been seen twice in our county. This year, the second was incorporated into our collections after this arctic bird was found stranded and oiled near San Elijo Lagoon.

Peccaries are pig-like mammals that are very rare to find in San Diego’s fossil records. This year, our paleontology team found three specimens in San Ysidro.

PALEONTOLOGY ▲
NEW SPECIMENS: 29,460

RESEARCH LIBRARY
NEW OBJECTS: 407 ▼

We recently acquired a rare book signed by educator and John James Audubon’s spouse, Lucy Audubon herself: *The life and adventures of John James Audubon, the naturalist*.

TOTAL SPECIMENS: 1,643,366

TOTAL OBJECTS: 317,407

NAT STAFF PUBLISHED 37 SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES THIS FISCAL YEAR. OUR ASSOCIATES PUBLISHED MORE THAN 142 ADDITIONAL SCIENTIFIC ARTICLES.

One of the pillars of scientific research is publication. Our scientists don't just collect specimens and conduct field work, they're also busy documenting their findings through peer-reviewed journal publications, scientific reports, and articles.

Publications aren't only tools to share new findings to the scientific community, they also help us solidify partnerships across disciplines and institutions.

This year, Nat researchers described species new to science, published new findings about local wildlife and their natural history, shared the best way to digitize glass photographs, and much more—all of which improve our knowledge of the natural world.

Citation format: First, second, and Nat authors listed. All other authors omitted for brevity.

Bold indicates Museum staff and research associates.

JULY 1, 2024-JUNE 30, 2025

STAFF PUBLICATIONS

By moving further inland, the least Bell's vireo is avoiding brood parasitism by brown-headed cowbirds (which lay their eggs in other's nests at the expense of the host's offspring) a move which translates to more nesting success for the least Bell's vireo.

Phylogeny and Diversification of Ancient New Zealand Mite Harvesters. Z. Alafraji, P. Aspholm, ... **S. Derkarabetian**. *Integrative and Comparative Biology*.

A dataset of acoustic measurements from soundscapes collected worldwide during the COVID-19 pandemic. S. Challéat, N. Farrugia, ... (including **M.E. Thompson**). *Scientific Data*.

Over the top: Three new species of terrestrial breeding frogs (Anura, Terrarana, *Pristimantis*) from the highlands of the Cordillera de Huancabamba, northwestern Peru. G. Chávez, W. Aznaran, ... **M.E. Thompson**. *Evolutionary Systematics*.

Use of alternate upland nesting habitat reduces brood parasitism in an endangered bird. **K. Clark, K. Ferree**. *Avian Conservation and Ecology*.

Phrynosoma mcallii (Flat-Tailed Horned Lizard). Mortality. **K.B. Clark, J. Barba, B. Ogg, B.D. Hollingsworth**. *Herpetological Review*.

Reassessing the phylogeny of Cyphophthalmi with phylogenomics: A UCE-based phylogeny of mite harvesters (Opiliones). **S. Derkarabetian**, L.R. Benavides. *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution*.

A vascular flora of Ladd Canyon, Santa Ana Mountains, Orange and Riverside Counties, California. **D.P. Donovan**, A.E. Fisher. *Aliso*.

Noteworthy Collections. **D.P. Donovan, J.P. Rebman**. *Madroño*.

Disconnecting trapdoors: Phylogenomic analyses reveal evolutionary contrasts in trapdoor spiders with intercontinental distribution (Idiopidae, Idiopinae). R. Fonseca-Ferreira, **S. Derkarabetian**. *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution*.

Tiny Hunters Along the Alpine Fault: Integrative Phylogeography Demonstrates High Geographic Structure in a Forest-Dwelling Aotearoa Harvester Genus (Arachnida, Triaenonychidae: *Algidia*). E. Frigyiik, C.M. Baker, ... **S. Derkarabetian**. *Journal of Biogeography*.

Social organization and physical environment shape the microbiome of harvester ants. D.A. Gamboa, P.J. Flynn, **E.S.H. Lowell**. *Animal Microbiome*.

Variations in beta diversity among plant types with different water dependence in arid palm groves of the Baja California Peninsula. P.P. Garcillan, **J. Rebman**. *Revista Mexicana de Biodiversidad*.

From the shallows to the depths: a new probe set to target ultraconserved elements for Decapoda and other Malacostraca. J.C. Geburzi, P.C. Rodríguez-Flores, **S. Derkarabetian**. *Frontiers in Marine Science*.

Comparative phylogeography of lizards (Squamata: Phrynosomatidae) in Baja California and expansion of *Callisaurus draconoides* within the North American deserts. A.D. Gottscho, **B.D. Hollingsworth**. *Preprint in bioRxiv*.

Botanists are looking at how water-loving plants differ from one corner of the desert to another, which highlights the importance of ecological niches.

Our library is bringing century-old photos into the digital era and helping others do the same.

Community composition and abundance of wild bees at row crop-grassland interfaces in west central Nebraska. **A. Gomez Villegas**, H.E. Stowe. *Environmental Entomology*.

Please Don't Break: Best Practices for Digitizing and Archiving Glass Plate Photographs. **A. Hammond**, N. Zocco. *Journal of Western Archives*.

Quantifying intraspecific variation in host resistance and tolerance to a lethal pathogen. **B. Hardy**, E. Muths. *Journal of Animal Ecology*.

Geographic distribution and conservation of *Bothriechis aurifer* (Salvin, 1860) (Squamata, Viperidae). J.A. Hidalgo-García, R. Luna-Reyes, **A.G. Clause**. *Check List*.

A Dry Collection Talk: Revitalizing the San Diego Natural History Museum Marine Invertebrate Collection. **P. Horsley, C. Mojica, K. Randall, T. Demere**. *Biodiversity Information Science and Standards*.

Batesian Mimicry Converges Towards Inaccuracy in Myrmecomorphic Spiders. M.B.J. Kelly, **S. Derkarabetian**. *Systematic Biology*.

First verifiable maximum size for the Two-striped Gartersnake, *Thamnophis hammondi*. S. Liu, S. Vasquez, ... **A. Clause**. *Reptiles & Amphibians*.

Spiders of the Coast: Building the tree of life for arachnids in Magic: The Gathering. M. Milne, **S. Derkarabetian**. *Banisteria*.

Northern Harrier breeding in Bahia de San Quintin, Baja California. X. Moreno, G. de Leon-Giron, ... **L. Hargrove**. *Western Birds*.

Maximum size and mass of Switak's Banded Gecko, *Coleonyx switaki* (Murphy, 1974). S.S. Murray, E.A. Dugan, **A.G. Clause**. *Herpetology Notes*.

Quantification of threats to bats at localized spatial scales for conservation and management. B.M. Myers, **D.C. Stokes**. *PLOS ONE*.

Drew Stokes always believed in "think global, act local" and shared that he felt this publication was his "most significant contribution to bat conservation as it provides a tangible way to do bat conservation at the local, regional, and perhaps worldwide level."

Ecological notes on the Panamint Alligator Lizard, *Elgaria panamintina*. J. Paz, **A.G. Clause**. *Reptiles & Amphibians*.

Environmental DNA metabarcoding for whole community inventories of vertebrates in rivers of the midwestern United States. S. Picq, A.N. Curtis, ... **M.E. Thompson**. *Journal of Freshwater Ecology*.

Systematic revision of the South American "Nuncia" (Opiliones, Laniatores, Triaenonychidae). W. Porto, **S. Derkarabetian**. *ZooKeys*.

Ferns and Lycophytes of San Diego County, California. **J. Rebman**, A. Winner. *Proceedings of the San Diego Society of Natural History*.

Stewardship Pathways: Advancing Tribal Stewardship of All Ancestral Lands. **P. Sternberg-Rodríguez**, A. Carver. *Artemesia*.

Population Genomics of a Cave-Dwelling Arachnid (Palpigradi, Eukoeneiidae) From the South-Western Italian Alps. P.C. Rodríguez-Flores, **S. Derkarabetian**. *Zoologica Scripta*.

An ultraconserved element probe set for velvet worms (Onychophora). S. Sato, **S. Derkarabetian**. *Molecular Phylogenetics and Evolution*.

Successful predation by a California Kingsnake (*Lampropeltis californiae*) on a Desert Rosy Boa (*Lichanura trivirgata*). C.A. Stevens, **A.G. Clause**. *Reptiles & Amphibians*.

San Diego Collaboration for Conservation: Sustaining the Region's Legacy of Biodiversity Conservation. T. Tinkler, D. Berry, ... **M.E. Thompson, J. Niles**. *The Nonprofit Institute*.

Trimorphodon lyrophanes (California Lyresnake). Longevity. **S. Vielma, J. Melli, A.G. Clause**. *Herpetological Review*.

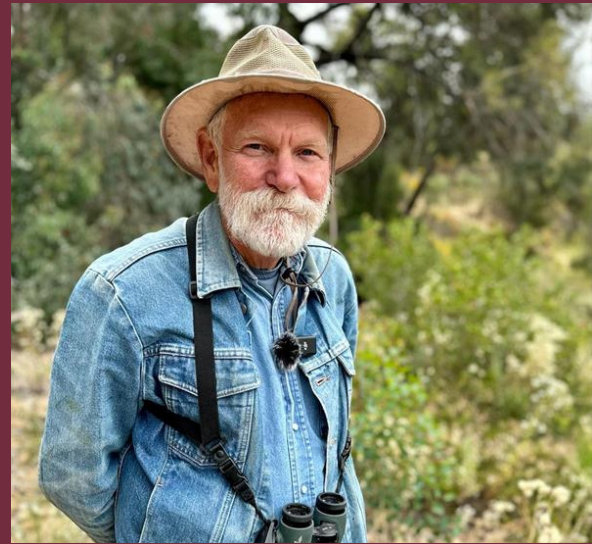
Infrequent long-range dispersal and evolution of a top terrestrial arthropod predator in the sub-Antarctic. J.O. Wolff, S.R. Kennedy, ... **S. Derkarabetian**. *The American Naturalist*.

Phylogeographic and genetic insights into *Sinonychia martensi*: an endemic cave-dwelling harvestman in Beijing. R. Xiao, J. Zhao, ... **S. Derkarabetian**. *BMC Ecology and Evolution*.

Scientists used traces of DNA that are left in the environment to track plants and wildlife without ever actually seeing them.

This is the first time a California kingsnake was ever recorded having eaten a boa, and raises questions about the effectiveness of a boa's defensive coil against other snakes.

This collaborative report outlines opportunities for regional biodiversity conservation in San Diego and was crafted primarily by input from attendees at our San Diego Biodiversity Conservation Summit last spring.



STAFF PUBLICATIONS HIGHLIGHT Phil Unitt & *Western Birds*

In addition to authoring his own papers and helping our own publication, *Proceedings*, Curator of Birds and Mammals Phil Unitt has been the editor for the journal *Western Birds* since 1986.

This past autumn, Western Field Ornithologists presented Phil with the Harry S. Swarth Award to recognize his work in significantly advancing field ornithology in the Western United States. They shared that as editor, "Phil has had a positive influence on the development of scores of ornithologists, extending his influence far beyond that of his own ornithological work."

Some of the standout publications from *Western Birds* this year include the first report of a black phoebe (a bird that primarily feeds on insects) eating a reptile, an updated list of the birds recorded within the Salton Sink that increased by 46 species, and a note of the northern harrier breeding in San Quintin, its southern limit.

USING OUR VOICE



Director of Conservation Biology Michelle Thompson speaks to Museum supporters about what makes the Baja California Peninsula so unique.

Resilient Ecosystems Mean Resilient Communities

Nature-based solutions are actions that help protect, sustainably manage, or restore natural ecosystems. By stabilizing sand dunes, planting drought-tolerant native plants, and building fire-resistant landscaping, we can improve coastal resilience in dunes and canyons.

In a new project, we'll be using nature-based solutions and regional expertise from the Museum, state agencies, nonprofits, universities, and military bases to help improve canyon and dune habitats, all while strengthening conservation planning for the long term. In addition to collaborating with experts in the field, we'll continue working alongside communities on the front line of climate risks, strengthening our successful Healthy Canyons Initiative (see page 8), and supporting our community approach to preparing for climate change impacts throughout the San Diego region.

This project is made possible through funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the U.S. Department of Defense, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Museum colleagues from local agencies and the San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative visited the Museum's library to network and learn about the Nat's newest project.



Speaking Up for Nature

The Nat's Board of Directors created an External Affairs Taskforce to establish guidelines for pursuing advocacy, forming partnerships, and making public statements. The efforts were chaired by Dr. Peter Cowhey, Dean Emeritus and Qualcomm Chair Emeritus of the School of Global Policy and Strategy at UC San Diego. The result? Guidelines that are meant to empower the Museum's decision-making and voice across three key areas:

ADVOCACY PRINCIPLES

We will entertain topics that pertain to our expertise to preserve our scientific reputation and nonpartisan position. We will also ask ourselves if our involvement will make a difference that outweighs potential negative outcomes.

PARTNERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

We will pursue mutually beneficial partnerships with organizations that have complementary, non-conflicting missions, visions, values, and position statements to reach defined, time-limited goals.

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

We will constructively shape our dialogue with external players while also seeking opportunities to tell our story in ways that highlight our scientific expertise and leverage our partnerships.

Museum scientists look for fungus in Sierra de las Cacachilas, an extremely biodiverse and mountainous region in Baja California Sur.



Coming Together Matters

Our role as a convener was evident with high-profile events organized by outside organizations choosing us as a venue. Hosting these events—along with our own programs like the State of Biodiversity Symposium—places The Nat at the forefront of vital conversations around community and the environment.

Last fall, The Nat served as the host venue for 1% for the Planet's Global Summit, an organization that connects for-profit companies from around the world with environmental organizations and nonprofits.



We also hosted the San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative's annual Regional Recap. Participants learned about the network's major accomplishments and connected on climate research and resilience.

In April, civic leaders, media, and the interested public gathered at The Nat for the annual State of the County address in which the Board of Supervisors shared their vision for the future of our region.



We continued this momentum by hosting the 30x30 Partnership Summit for the California Natural Resources Agency, which brought together conservation leaders from around the state and across disciplines.

Serving as a convener means working together toward a better future for all.

The Nat isn't just a space where the public can appreciate nature, it's also a collaborative hub—throughout the year, we convened professionals in the environmental and climate worlds, governmental agencies, nature lovers, and more.



Talk of the Town (and Country)

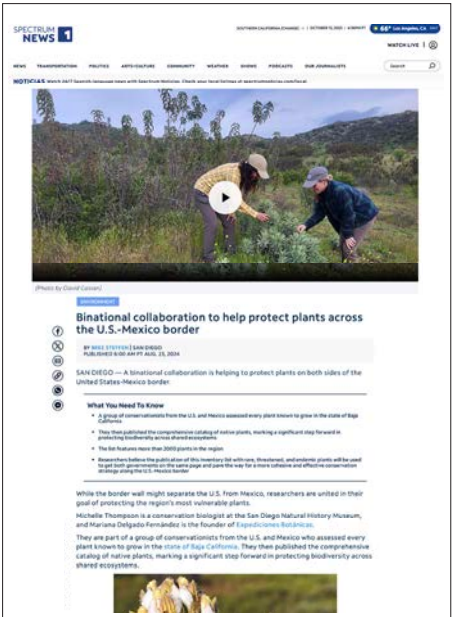
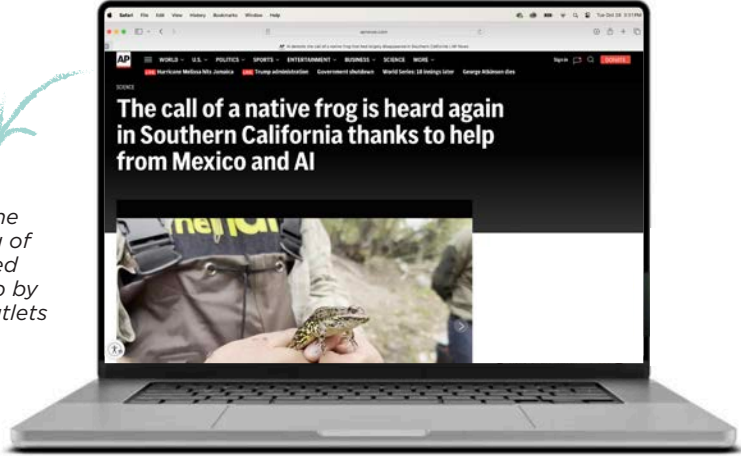
The Nat made headlines both in San Diego and across the country. These stories showcase new exhibitions and programs, but more importantly, they reveal how we're "more than a physical museum." From groundbreaking scientific research to community-driven conservation initiatives and environmental advocacy, this coverage illustrates how we're protecting biodiversity and creating lasting impact.

When outlets share our story, they don't just inform—they mobilize supporters, attract collaborators, and demonstrate how museums can be catalysts for change.

Landing a story in The New York Times about our new Paleo Center was the highlight of our year.



The Associated Press story about the successful breeding of California red-legged frogs was picked up by dozens of media outlets across the globe.



Local media outlets featured The Nat in a multitude of stories, from major endowment news to binational conservation work.

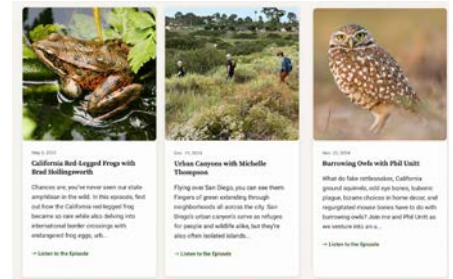
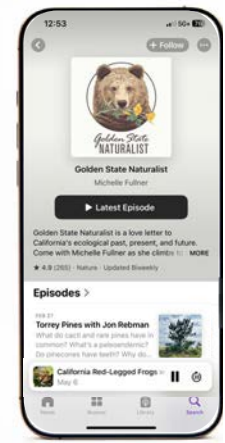


Nat Geo's Albert Lin and Kili Yuyan visited The Nat for a feature about San Diego's natural diversity that reached people across the country.

The San Diego Union-Tribune featured a 150th anniversary cover story as well as a trio of nature-centric op-eds authored by Nat leadership and community figures.



Museum scientists discussed San Diego's flora and fauna in not one, but four, episodes of Golden State Naturalist, which ranks in the top 1% of podcasts globally.



CBS was one of many stations that covered the opening of Amazeum in the Basement. Here, Karlene Chavis interviews Exhibits Director Abi Karkenny.



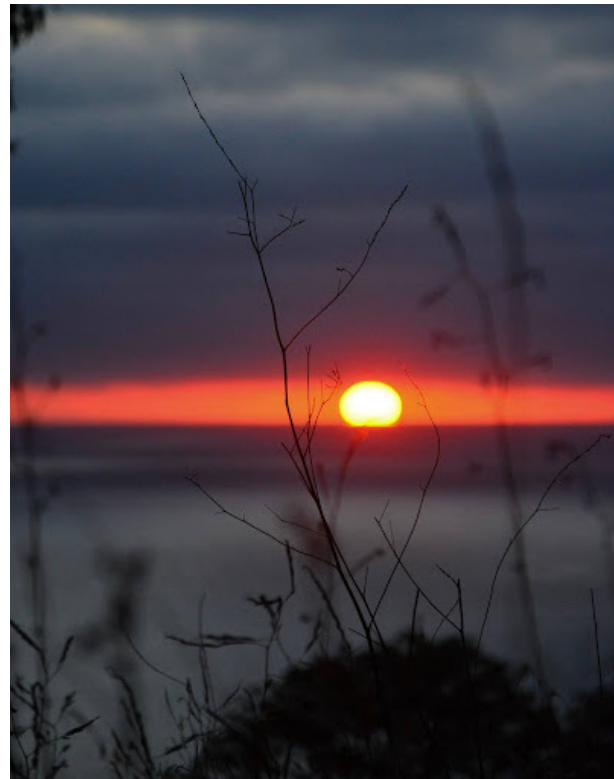
Healing Through Nature

We are proud to be recipients of a generous planning grant from the Conrad Prebys Foundation to explore how San Diegans experience wellness and improved health through nature.

In partnership with professional evaluators, our team conducted research to identify communities most in need of access to nature. We surveyed 379 participants, led eight focus groups, and carried out several interviews with key community groups and organizations. To ensure youth were represented, we asked 11 high schoolers from different parts of San Diego to photograph nature in their daily lives, discuss barriers to access, and share how being in nature is beneficial to them.

With the goal of sharing resources and experiences about nature and wellbeing, we're developing a region-wide approach for community healing through nature by bringing together experts and community organizations actively working in disproportionately affected communities. Together, we'll leverage the power of nature to foster physical, mental, and emotional well-being for individuals and communities using equitable, inclusive, and relevant approaches.

Some of the incredible nature photography captured by San Diego high schoolers to elevate nature in their daily lives.



Better Together

We believe that collective action is key to conservation success in our region. Here are just a few examples of more than 50 partnerships that make our work possible:

We are proud to enter our 7th year of partnership with Botanical Community Development Initiatives and Next Generation Sonoran Desert Researchers through our participation in the Border BioBlitz—a binational community science project.

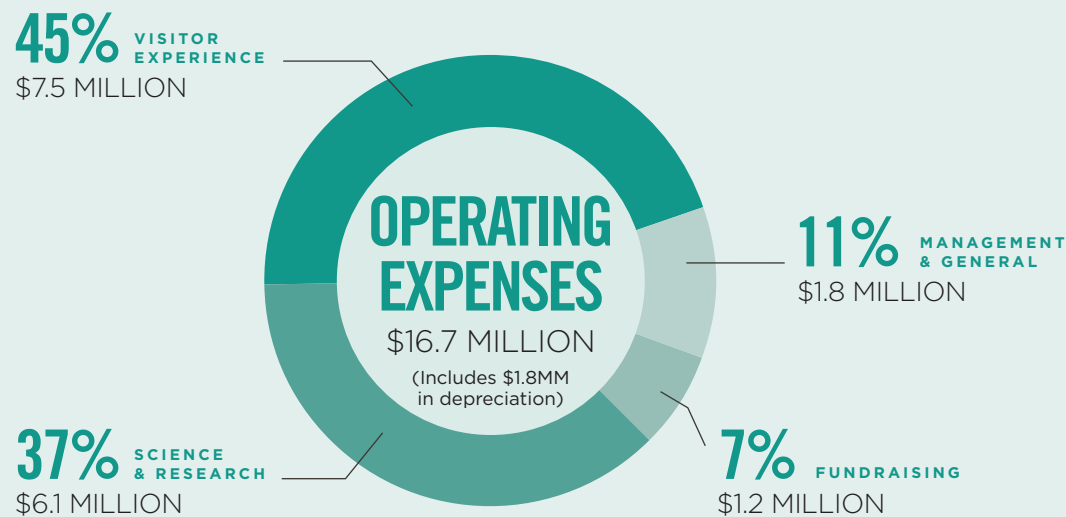
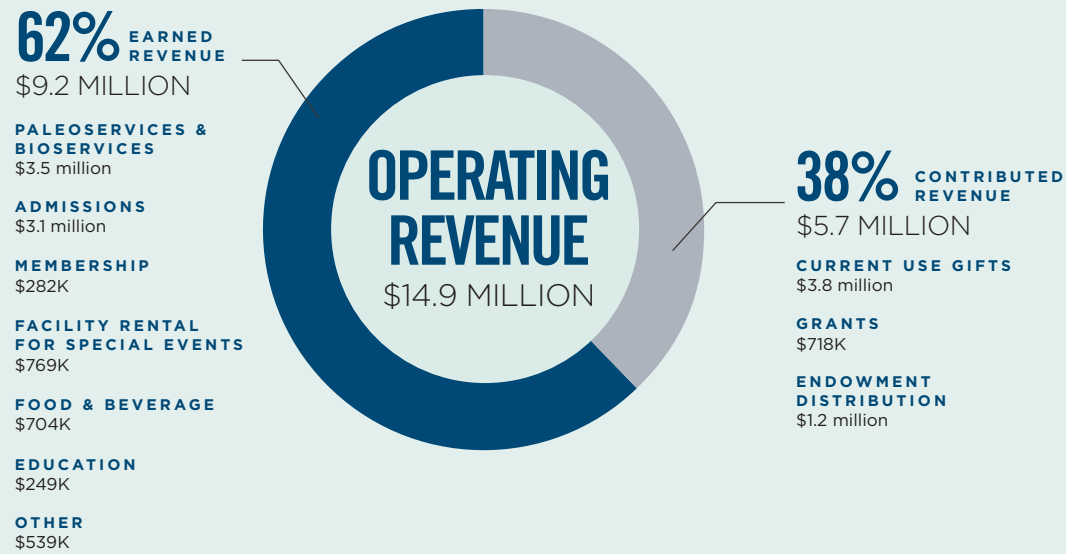
We have also developed strong partnerships with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and San Diego Bird Alliance, collaborating on 10 community engagement events this year.

San Diego Canyonlands and Groundwork San Diego-Chollas Creek are instrumental to our Healthy Canyons Initiative, leading canyon restoration efforts and helping us develop field guides with local high school students.

Finally, we joined the San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative, a hub for climate professionals seeking to advance solutions to climate change in our County.

One of several urban canyons being studied in Chula Vista as part of our Healthy Canyons Initiative.





Financial Overview

The Nat’s 150th year continued a trend of strong financial and operating performance, including opening new exhibits, establishing new amenity partners, and completing work on several capital projects funded through the 150th anniversary capital campaign. Year over year, both operating revenues and operating expenses (before depreciation) decreased by approximately 3% to \$14.85 million, reflecting the start of a return to a post-campaign operating state. The Museum finished the fiscal year with a modest operating surplus of \$6,000, before depreciation.

OPERATING REVENUE

Income from our earned revenue portfolio grew 4% over the prior year, generating a combined \$9.2 million. Most of this increase came from our environmental consulting businesses, BioServices and PaleoServices, growing a combined 12% year over year. The Museum welcomed 328,000 general admission guests—the highest level in nearly a decade—increasing revenue 2% year over year.

Facility rentals rebounded from the prior year (when garden and elevator construction affected availability), increasing 25%. Education programs continued their steady growth, adding 6% in revenue, while membership declined by 4%. Midway through the year, the Museum transitioned its café and retail operations from in-house to capable local partners, The Craft Taco and Gold Leaf. The reduction in amenity

revenue of \$280,000 was more than offset by \$310,000 in expense savings.

Reflecting a wind-down of 150th anniversary activity, current-year contributed revenues and releases trended back to normal levels, decreasing \$780,000 compared to the prior year. Grant revenue increased by 45% with the addition of awards for local biodiversity research and projects from federal and foundation sources. Continued strong market conditions contributed nearly \$4 million in gains to the endowment portfolio, which provided \$1.67 million in operating support. Excess cash was held in Treasuries, generating \$475,000 in returns.

OPERATING EXPENSE

Operating expenses (after depreciation) decreased by 3%. More than 82% of expenditures were in programmatic areas—Visitor Experience and Science and Research—totaling \$13.77 million. Management and General represented 11% of expenditure and Fundraising 7%.

Personnel expenses increased slightly (2%) to \$9.5 million due to additional hiring for new grants, cost of living adjustments, and improved retirement match. Notably, 64% of all expenditures were directed towards staff in the form of wages and benefits. The costs to run our visitor amenities—café and gift shop—decreased through reduced staffing and cost of goods sold as those functions were outsourced mid-year.

Facility expenses decreased by 20% thanks to reduced repair needs and consolidation of the offsite warehouse into the lower-level exhibition and Paleo Center. Lastly, advertising expenses remained at elevated levels in support of 150th anniversary programming and events but decreased slightly by 4%.

CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

The 150th anniversary capital campaign progressed through its final stages with tremendous success, raising an additional \$4.5 million and securing commitments for another \$8 million for the endowment in upcoming years. We received payments on pledged endowment gifts, adding \$6.4 million to the fund. As a result of this successful campaign, we completed construction and opened the \$6 million lower-level Paleontology lab and visible collections space—aptly named Amazement in the Basement—to much fanfare and visitor delight. We completed design, engineering, and pre-construction of the planned replacement of our Atrium skylight roof; it is expected to finish in spring 2026.

BALANCE SHEET

The Museum’s balance sheet continues to thrive, strengthened by capital campaign contributions and market gains. Total assets grew to \$83 million, while liabilities declined to just over \$2 million. The Nat’s cash position decreased to \$11 million, as capital campaign funds were deployed towards

projects. Property and Equipment increased by \$555,000, after \$1.8 million in accumulated depreciation. Overall receivables dropped by roughly 33%, as payments on campaign pledges arrived.

The Museum’s endowment grew 23% to \$37 million, while \$4.25 million was collected on capital campaign pledges and added to the fund, supporting our CEO and Herpetology endowments. The investment portfolio appreciated another \$4 million over the year. For the first time in the Museum’s history, the annual endowment draw exceeded \$1 million. The Museum is also listed as a beneficiary in several charitable remainder trusts. While the account balances in these funds appreciated over the year, the Museum’s recorded interest decreased \$1.3 million as the result of a change in accounting practices.

The Nat’s liabilities dropped by a quarter year over year to \$2 million, due largely to payment of construction retention on capital projects. Remaining liabilities are approximately equal parts deferred revenue, accrued payroll, accrued paid time off, and accounts payable. At year-end, the Museum had a current ratio of 7.6 and a leverage ratio of just 0.03.

Additional details of The Nat’s financial health can be found in the audited financial statements posted on sdnat.org/about-us.

FORCE FOR NATURE

Valle de los Cirios

THANK YOU

July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025

We are deeply grateful to the many donors who supported the Museum this year through new gifts and pledge payments.

\$150,000 AND ABOVE

Alumbra Innovations Foundation at the recommendation of Christy Walton
Anonymous
City of San Diego
John E. Ford Family Fund, DAFgiving360
Joan* and Irwin Jacobs
Laub Family Trust
Conrad Prebys Foundation
J.W. Sefton Foundation
The Iris Sage Fund, DAFgiving360 at the recommendation of Nita and Henk van der Werff
State of California,
Natural Resources Agency

\$50,000-\$149,999

Anonymous
Mona Baumgartel and John DeBeer
Stephen and Mary Birch Foundation
California Institute for Biodiversity
Tracy and John Downing,
Downing Family Foundation
Hervey Family Fund
Carol and Henry F. Hunte Fund,
Fidelity Charitable
JiJi Foundation
Patrons of the Prado
Price Philanthropies
San Diego Foundation
Dr. Seuss Foundation

\$10,000-\$49,999

Patrick L. Abbott
Steve and Susan Bell Fund,
Chicago Community Foundation
Dr. Priscilla Bennett
Beyster Family Foundation Fund IV
J.F. Beyster Fund
Vicki and Thomas Blackman

Jefferey Block Giving Fund,
National Philanthropic Trust
J.P. Boyce Donor Advised Fund,
Morgan Stanley
Susan and Richard Breisch
Althea M. Brimm, in memory of
Daniel J. Brimm, DAFgiving360
Sarah and Steven Bronson, DAFgiving360
William A. Ladd and Anita I. Busquets Fund,
Schwab Charitable
The Cavnignac Family Fund,
Schwab Charitable
Janet Dort
Patrick Dugan
H. Glenn Dunham
Andrew and Kathryn Garman Family Fund,
Fidelity Charitable
Global-LG LLC
Judy Gradwohl
Robert and Helen E. Grant Foundation
Dr. David E. and Barbara Groce
Miriam and Michael Guberek
Tom and Jo Hazard
Diana Herron
Institute for Law and Systems Research
Conny Jamison
Jenny and Richard Johnson
David B. Jones Foundation
Elizabeth Keadle
KPBS **
Las Californias Fund, Schwab Charitable
Las Patronas
Alan G. Lehman and Jane A. Lehman
Foundation
The Gilbert J. Martin Foundation
Eleanor and Jerome Navarra,
DAFgiving360
ResMed
The Rice Family Foundation
Susan and Bryce Rhodes Family

Nancy J. Robertson
Ms. Anne Schwartz
Ellen Browning Scripps Foundation
Philip Unitt

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The Museum offers a unique and memorable event venue for many throughout the year. To ensure success for all events the Museum partners with a group of exclusive preferred vendors who are familiar with the Museum and offer a complete range of services.

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In Memoriam

These individuals are members, donors, and volunteers who have passed away this fiscal year. We are thankful for their commitment to the Museum and wish to honor their memories.

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Carole Hertz

Influential “Shell Lady” and community scientist Carole Hertz passed away last fall at the age of 92. Her role in organizing The Nat’s marine invertebrate collection is legendary—especially since she was entirely self-taught.

Originally from Brooklyn, New York, Carole and her husband Julius moved to San Diego in the late 1950s. In 1972, Carole brought an interesting shell to the Museum to have it identified. Investigating the specimen, which was a wavy turban (*Astraea undosa*), unlocked a new passion for Carole. She began volunteering in the marine invertebrate department and took care of the collection for over 30 years. Throughout, she also became president of the San Diego Shell Club, founded and edited the journal *The Festivus*, co-wrote over 100 academic papers, and described 13 new species.

Carole leaves behind a legacy of passion and dedication to her work that remains an inspiration to all.



Dick Schwenkmeyer

Longtime volunteer and supporter Dick Schwenkmeyer passed away in spring 2025, at the age of 96. Dick’s connection to the Museum began in his early teens as a member of “The Specialists Club,” founded by Charles Harbison, who was then curator of entomology. After Dick’s retirement, he returned to The Nat as a volunteer, contributing his time and talents to the herpetology and botany departments.

In herpetology, Dick worked on a notable three-year project to improve documentation of jarred specimens. He also personally contributed at least 450 specimens to our collections. As a parobotanist, he spent years collecting plant specimens for the San Diego County Plant Atlas, expanding our understanding of local flora.

A lifelong lover of the outdoors, Dick explored the wilds of Baja California and the canyons of San Diego County, always eager to support the Museum’s research. He was a generous donor and a proud member of the Live Oaks Society.

His curiosity, dedication, and passion for nature left an indelible mark on The Nat and will be deeply missed.

Drew C. Stokes (1970-2025)

The death of renowned bat expert Drew Stokes was a grievous loss to the Museum, California biology, and regional conservation.

Drew spent much of his youth discovering his love of nature—collecting insects and lizards, encountering his first bat, and even being bitten by a snake. He later attended Grossmont College and graduated *cum laude* in biology from San Diego State University.

Drew knew the route to a career studying bats required practical experience not taught in schools, so he walked into a California State Parks office and asked biologist Karen Miner to mentor him. The next year, he was an official employee on a project to create a bat inventory thanks to his enthusiasm, dedication,

and capabilities. Drew also collaborated with many grassroots environmental organizations, where he assisted homeowners with their “problem” bats and educated people about their value. He quickly became skilled at public outreach and media communication.

He worked at the Museum for 18 years, pursuing his primary passion: bat conservation through bridge surveys, disease monitoring, and rare species research. Drew’s work toward practical bat conservation extended from the deployment of bat houses to the development of long-term management plans. His favorite field work was in multidisciplinary surveys in which he worked alongside his colleagues in broader studies. To the end of his life, his scientific curiosity never waned.

Drew Stokes uses a bat detector to monitor echolocation calls in La Jolla in 2022. “Seeing bats fly around and watching their echolocation calls is so rewarding, especially once you know how to distinguish between the different species,” said Drew. “Watching bats do their thing is probably my favorite part of my job.”



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