Project Management

The Carrizo Plain National Monument is owned and cooperatively managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and California Dept. of Fish and Game and The Nature Conservancy.

When You Visit

- Services (gasoline, food, water) are not available.
- Stay on designated roads. No off-road use. Dirt roads are impassable or closed when wet.
- A permit is required for a fire outside of a firering. Permits are available at the BLM Bakersfield office.
- Plants, artifacts, and rock art are protected: so please don't remove or touch them.
- Do not harass wildlife or livestock.
- Leave No Trace when hiking and camping. Pack out what you pack in. Remember to bring what you need (gasoline, water, etc.) because this is a remote area.
- Follow hunting regulations.
- Painted Rock is closed March 1 thru July 15. Tours are available. Please call ahead.

For More Information

- Goodwin Education Center. Dec - May (805) 475-2131Thursday - Sunday or BLM June - Nov (661) 391-6000.
  Or write to: Goodwin Education Center
  HCR69 - P.O. Box 3087
  Santa Margarita, CA 93453

CARRIZO PLAIN
National Monument

The Closer You Look - The More You See

Pocketed between the coastal ranges of eastern San Luis Obispo County lies the austere, yet inviting, Carrizo Plain. Here in this remote part of California where ravens and prairie falcons dip and rise with the play of the wind and wildflowers color the hills each spring, it's still possible to look out over hundreds of miles of open space and to watch stars spread across a dark sky. If you're lucky, you may even trade glances with a curious kit fox before it ducks underground.

There is, on the Carrizo, a wildness - wildness on a scale that allows us to imagine what much of California was like 300 years ago. Known to the Spanish as "Llano Estero," or salt marsh plain, this arid and treeless basin harbors the largest remaining example of the habitats that were once abundant in the southern San Joaquin Valley. Most of this surviving habitat is protected within the boundaries of the 250,000 acre Carrizo Plain National Monument where an array of rare plants and animals, including the greatest concentration of threatened and endangered vertebrates in the state, continue to thrive.

An Apparent Past

Physical forces began shaping the Carrizo into a distinct geographic feature about 30 million years ago. As the bordering Temblor and Caliente mountains were pushed upward, movements along the San Andreas and San Juan faults caused the land in between to subside, forming a closed basin. Runoff from the adjacent slopes collected there creating a vast lake which gradually filled with the rich, soil-forming sediments that support life on the plain today. Soda Lake, the centerpiece of the plain , is all that remains of this prehistoric sea. One of the largest undisturbed alkali wetlands in the state, the 3,000-acre lake provides important habitat for migratory birds, including shorebirds, waterfowl and a quarter of the state's wintering sandhill crane population. With no outlet, the water that pools in the lake during the winter evaporates, leaving behind a glistening expanse of sulphate and carbonate salts that appear to ripple and sway in the heat waves of summer.

Nowhere does the Carrizo flaunt its geologic past as it does on the northeastern edge of the plain where the San Andreas Fault lies at the base of the Temblor Mountains. Here stream channels suddenly shift up to one-half mile north as they cross the faultline, and fault-trimmed ridges rise sharply from the plain to form the Panorama and Elkhorn Hills. This complex and corrugated topography, the most spectacular along the fault's 650-mile long corridor, is best viewed in the long, soft shadows of early morning and late afternoon.

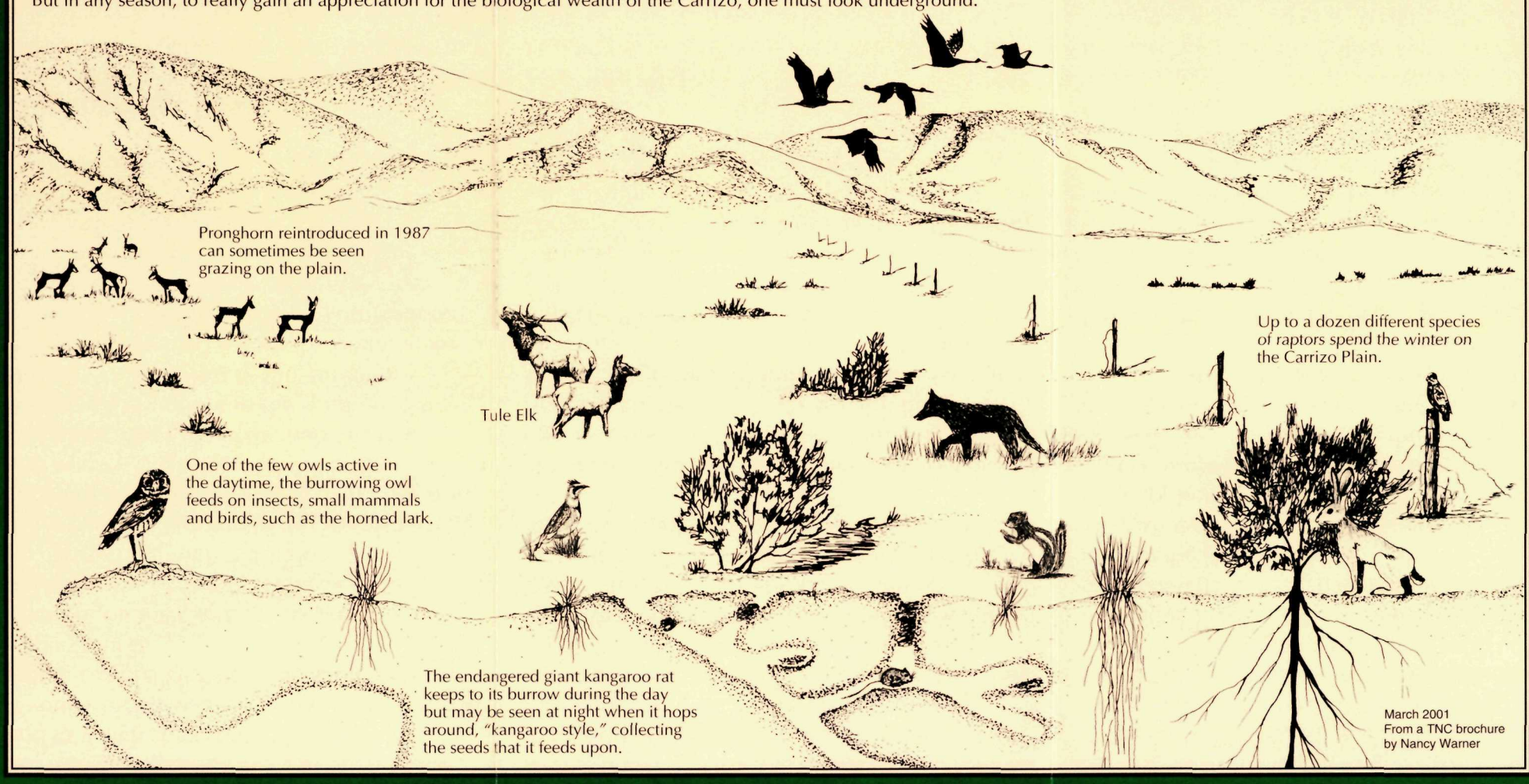
Human History

Much of the Carrizo's human history, like its geologic past, can be read directly from the land. Bedrock mortars and pictographs that can be seen in Carrizo provide evidence that both Chumash and Yokut Indians frequented the area in prehistoric times. Probably attracted to the game-rich Carrizo grasslands for hunting and gathering as well as trading and ceremonial purposes these native peoples experienced an environment that underwent dramatic changes when herds of livestock from the Spanish missions began to graze the land in the early 1800s.

Great herds of horses, cattle and sheep thrived on the diverse Carrizo vegetation. Eventually this grazing destroyed much of the native flora. Seeds of exotic plants, many of which were inadvertently carried here in the hair, wool and feet of the Spanish livestock, found the range a perfect place to germinate and grow. Today, more than half the grasses and other flowers that bloom on the Carrizo each spring, as in most grasslands across the state, are plants native to Europe and Asia.

Dryland grain farming joined ranching as a major human use of the Carrizo Plain in 1885 when the first homesteaders began to settle here. It was not until 1912, however, and the advent of mechanized agriculture, that large-scale farming became possible. In the years between the two world wars, vast acres of grassland were plowed even though the Carrizo's limited and unpredictable rainfall, averaging 8-10" per year, made such ventures risky. The plowlines still visible along the foothills bordering the plain serve as reminders of those former days.

Despite the effects of past land uses, the natural communities of the Carrizo Plain have maintained much of their original abundance and complexity. More than a dozen species of reptiles and amphibians, 100 species of birds and 45 species of mammals live seasonally or year-round in the Carrizo's spacious grasslands, shrublands and wetlands. This richness is particularly evident in the winter when resident wildlife species are joined by huge flocks of sandhill cranes, and again in the spring, when a profusion of wildflowers carpet the land. But in any season, to really gain an appreciation for the biological wealth of the Carrizo, one must look underground.



The Underground Landscape

A combination of many burrowing animals, deep-rooted plants and microscopic organisms, such as bacteria and fungi, makes the soil one of the most dynamic habitats on the Carrizo. Coyotes, kit foxes, ground squirrels and kangaroo rats are just a few of the animals that excavate burrows to escape predators and the relentless summer sun. Their old and deserted burrows, in turn, provide homes for a host of other dwellers, including burrowing owls, blunt-nosed leopard lizards, rattlesnakes, tarantulas and legions of bombardier beetles.

Burrowing animals do more than find protection when they dig underground. By turning and mixing large quantities of soil, fertilizing it with their wastes, and dispersing seeds, they also play an important role in maintaining plant communities on the Carrizo. Like animals, more than half the plant life on the Carrizo is hidden below ground. Native perennial plants, such as common saltbush and desert needlegrass, survive the drying effects of the Carrizo's sun and wind by tapping deep water sources with their enormous root systems. This strategy is markedly different from that of shallow-rooted annual plants, which escape the Carrizo's harsh environment by flowering, setting seed and dying before the dry summer heat sets in.

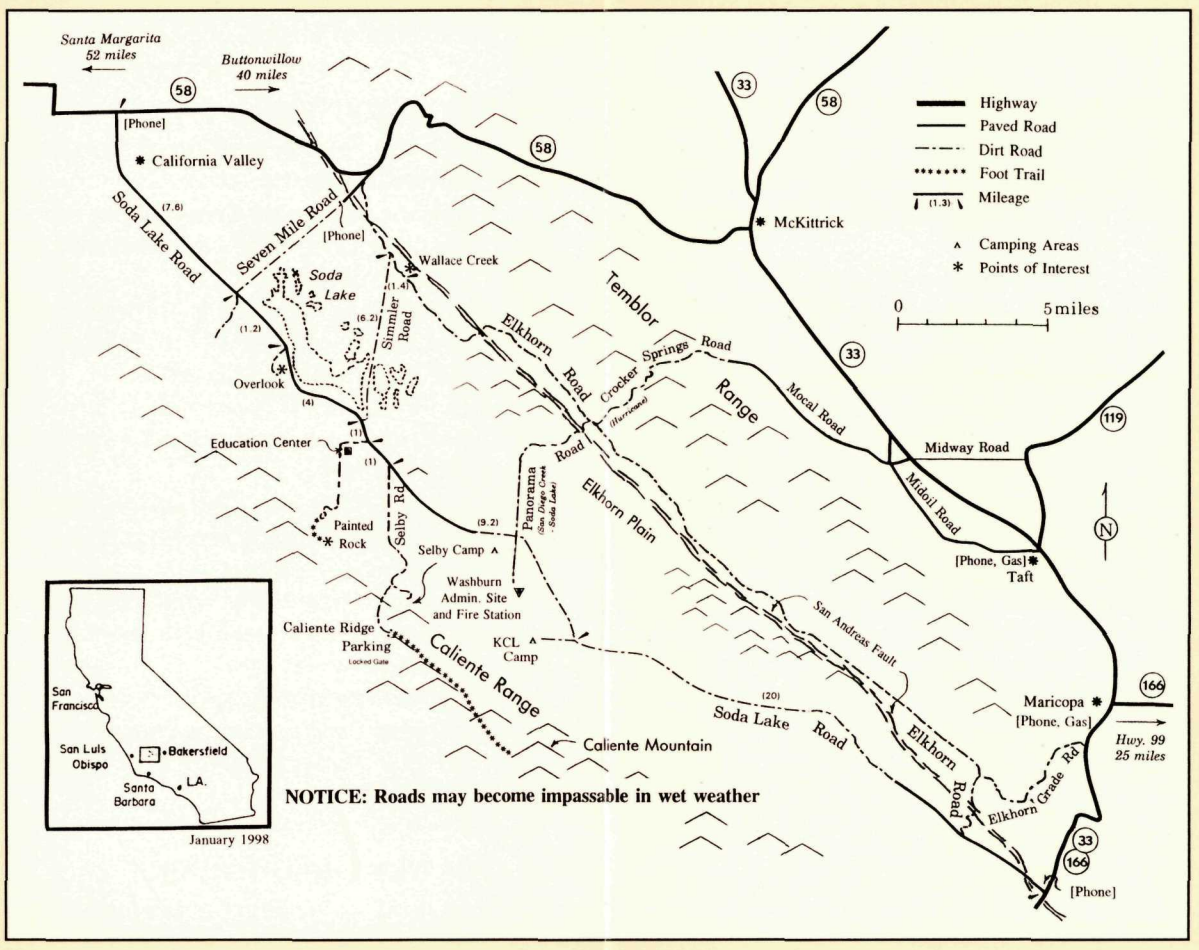
Looking Back, Going Forward

Current management on the Carrizo is designed to focus on maintaining native animal and plant species, while conserving unique natural and cultural resources and recreational opportunities. Areas once farmed or overgrazed are being revegetated with native grasses, shrubs, and trees, where they are known to have occurred. Herds of tule elk and pronghorn, eliminated by uncontrolled hunting in the late 1800s and early 1900s, have been reintroduced to their former range.

Other steps are being taken to restore the Carrizo Plain. Cattle grazing is being used as a tool to shift the competitive balance between the exotic annual and the native perennial grasses. Cattle are allowed to graze the exotic annual grasses that come up in the early days of spring. Before the later blooming native perennials begin their period of rapid growth the cattle are taken off the range. Years of this type of management should favor the reestablishment and expansion of the Carrizo's native flora.

Natural history studies of the Plain's many imperiled plants and animals are also underway. This research will help shape management strategies for sensitive species, like the blunt-nosed leopard lizard and the California jewel flower, on the Carrizo Plain and elsewhere.

Carrizo Plain National Monument



Directions: Via Hwy. 101, take Hwy. 58 east to Santa margarita. From there travel 52 miles east to California Valley. Turn right on Soda Lake Road and head south 8 miles to the northern boundary of the Carrizo Plain National Monument. Via I-5 take Hwy. 58 west 40 miles to Soda lake Road and California Valley. From Highway 99, travel west on Hwy. 166 for about 25 miles to Maricopa. Continue on Hwy 166 about 10 miles to Soda Lake Road. Note: Most of the southern portion of Soda Lake Road is unpaved.

Access: The Carrizo Plain is open year-round but wet weather may cause dirt roads to be temporarily closed. To protect resources, stay on open roads.

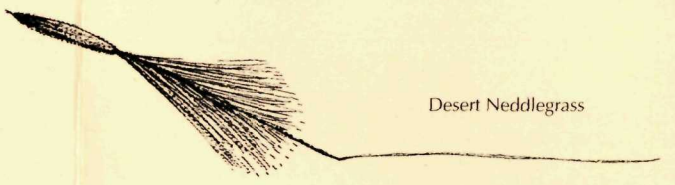
Climate: Arid; precipitation averages 8-10 inches per year. Cold nights, cool days and moist in winter; hot and dry in summer when temperatures often exceed 100 degrees.

Facilities: Bring all water that you will need. On-site primitive camping is available at the Selby and KCL Campgrounds. The nearest towns offering predictable services are Buttonwillow, about 50 minutes to the North, or Santa Margarita, about one hour to the west. Taft is 50 min. to the East.

San Joaquin Kit Fox

I'd like to volunteer in the following area(s)

- ❑ Any projects proposed
- ❑ Building, repairing or removing fences
- ❑ Facilities maintenance/construction
- ❑ Assisting/monitoring in research projects
- ❑ Serving as a docent, e.g., helping lead fieldtrips



Desert Neddlegrass