CAUGHT ON CAMERA

Cameras are everywhere these days, and the ones along The Toll Roads capture more than just cars on the road. Thanks to strategically placed motion-sensing cameras near undercrossings, culverts and fencing, we get a rare glimpse into the lives and activities of rarely seen native animals.

The cameras, triggered by a combination of heat and motion, have taken thousands of images and video of local wildlife at its most candid: mountain lions, deer and spotted skunks running, prowling, sunbathing, sniffing and sleeping. Environmental specialists routinely review the footage. Their aim is to observe and monitor the animals’ behavior and movement patterns and make improvements to the habitat, fences or undercrossings to ensure the animals stay healthy and safe.

The busiest thoroughfare for wildlife is a route that passes under the 241 Toll Road. It’s there, in April that we grabbed this video of a spotted skunk who appeared to be dancing for the camera. Animal experts tell us that the sleek nocturnal creature wasn’t trying to entertain us with his acrobatic moves. His walking handstand was actually meant to intimidate and scare away predators. The dance is often followed by a defensive spray of the skunk’s smelly oil. If you see a spotted skunk dance like this in front of you, turn around and walk away fast!

WILDLIFE FENCE ON THE SMALL SCREEN

Did you know that mountain lions can leap over 10-foot-tall fences? That’s just one fun fact that you’ll learn watching Cox OC Connection’s latest episode, which features our award-winning wildlife fence and Chief Environmental Planning Officer Valerie McFall. The public affairs show takes viewers on an up-close-and-personal look at the state-of-the-art fence, which promotes driver and wildlife safety by protecting mountain lions, mule deer, bobcats and other wildlife living in the Santa Ana Mountains from passing cars.

The wildlife fencing project was designed as a result of our joint study with the University of California, Davis, which included GPS tracking of mountain lions to learn about their movements. The 10- to 12-foot-tall fence was built to blend into the environment; many drivers don’t notice it while driving the 241 Toll Road. The project is part of The Toll Roads’ larger commitment to protecting critical habitat and wildlife corridors, and one of hundreds of innovative and diverse environmental programs and initiatives that benefit Orange County.

Cameras around the fence enable The Transportation Corridor Agencies (TCA) and UC Davis researchers to monitor wildlife activity. We are at the beginning of a three-year study of the new fence’s effectiveness in keeping wildlife and drivers safe, while allowing the area’s animals the freedom to roam in surrounding open spaces.

“TCA’s camera monitoring at wildlife crossings is helping us to understand the factors that make for successful and safe wildlife crossing structures, information that we are using in advising other highway agencies around the region as they construct or improve crossings. The cameras also allow us to gain information about wildlife behavior that is difficult to obtain in any other way. We at UC Davis’s Wildlife Health Center have been pleased to be able to partner with TCA to have a positive impact on wildlife both locally and elsewhere.”

Dr. Winston Vickers, Associate Wildlife Veterinarian, UC Davis Wildlife Health Center

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