



## Animals need avenues, too

By Rebecca Unger  
Hi-Desert Star

Published: Saturday, July 16, 2011 2:32 AM CDT

MORONGO BASIN — The Hi-Desert’s communities are connected with homes of native wildlife. As humans build houses and shopping centers and roads, we put roadblocks across the migration routes of plant, insect and animal species.

Caroline Conway, outdoor education coordinator for the nonprofit Wildlands Conservancy, brought some solutions with her to the Hi-Desert Nature Museum Thursday.

When saving species, it’s the spaces in between the preserves and habitats that are important, Conway told the museum’s Brown Bag Lecture listeners.

The educator talked about a statewide study by South Coast Wildlands to find the links between wildlife habitats. Important local links occur between the San Bernardino Mountains and the Little San Bernardino Mountains, between the San Bernardinios and the San Jacinto Mountains, and from Joshua Tree National Park to Death Valley.

“The study looked at vulnerability and irreplaceability,” Conway said. “This applied to ‘keystone species’ like large, roaming mammals, and endemic species like fringe-toed lizards that live in a tight geographic area.”

The linkages need to allow day-to-day movement for animals, insects and plants, as well as maintain migration paths. These corridors must allow the animals to adapt and re-colonize after development, natural disasters or the growing effects of climate change. The movement of species is necessary to keep a healthy mix of genes in local populations, Conway explained.

“What choices do species have if they can’t change or adapt quickly enough to stressors?” she questioned. “They go extinct, or they move. And in order to move they must have corridors.”

Conway praised researchers at Joshua Tree National Park and Big Morongo Canyon Preserve for their accurate animal counts.

“We know there are bighorn sheep, bears and bobcats passing through the Morongo Grade, and another corridor is the natural river channel passing under Highway 62 near Desert Hot Springs and the Mission Creek Preserve,” Conway said. “The animals will attempt to cross the highway when they don’t have the corridors available.”

The nature professional's lively presentation ended with practical things anyone can do to protect local wildlife, and avoid tragic interactions between the wild and civilized.

- Drive slower to prevent roadkill;
- Keep pets and domestic animals in predator-safe enclosures;
- Don't leave food and water for pets outside;
- Divert night lighting down, not up;
- Keep aware of proposed Caltrans and construction projects and their effects on wildlife.



The elusive bobcat, photographed here by L. Dean, ranges from mountain to desert habitat. Highway crossings can be perilous. (L. Dean photo)