

Long-tailed Weasel - *Mustela frenata*.
Long and slender; reddish-brown, with
a yellowish belly. HBL about 12 inches.

Wood Rat - *Neotoma sp.*

Two species occur locally: Dusky-footed - *N. fuscipes* - in wooded canyons; and Deser - *N. lepida* - on hot, scrubby, rocky hillsides. Both have naked ears and thinly haired tails. Dark above; belly white.

Roof Rat - *Rattus rattus*.

Introduced. Naked tail and ears; HBL about 3 to 4 inches; grayish belly. Often seen in palm trees in town.

Deer Mouse - *Peromyscus*.

Several local species in different habitats. These are the common local field mice. All have large naked ears and mostly white bellies; tails are thinly haired.

California Vole - *Microtus californicus*.

A short-tailed, grayish all over mouse occurring in open fields; ears partly hidden in fur; tail about one-half the HBL.

Pocket Gopher - *Thomomys bottae*.
Often found burrowing in gardens. Brownish all over; ears small, tail less than the 6-7 inch HBL; usually some white on chin.

California Mole - *Scapanus latimanus*.
May make burrows in gardens. No visible ears; plush-like fur. Very large front paws; naked tail. HBL 4-5 inches.

Within a short distance from San Luis Obispo, a traveler can find numerous other large mammals that make the area an attractive destination for nature observation. One such area is the Carrizo Plain, located 50 miles east of San Luis Obispo. The Carrizo Plain represents a remnant of the original Central valley. The natural area in the Carrizo Plain covers more than 200,000 acres and is home to elk, proghorn antelope, mountain lions, bobcats and fox. It is also home to the following endangered species: the San Joaquin Antelope Squirrel, the Giant Kangaroo Rat, and the San Joaquin kit fox.

Rarely Seen Local Mammals

Black Bear - *Ursus americanus*.
Local type is dark brown rather than black. Occurs in local mountains.



Badger - *Taxidea taxus*.
Prominent black and white face marks.

Western Spotted Skunk - *Spilogale gracilis*. Black and white all over.

Mountain Lion - *Felis concolor*.
Has been spotted in town.

Merriam's Chipmunk - *Tamias merriami*.
Has lengthwise stripes on body.

Shrew - *Sorex*.
Several local species.

Bats - several local genera which include the Pallid Bats, Pipistrelles, Red Bats, Free-tailed Bats, and several kinds of small mouse-eared bats. Not usually encountered; can be seen on summer evenings, swooping for insects attracted by street lights.

Marine Mammals

San Luis Obispo is only about 12 miles away from the Pacific Ocean at Morro Bay, Avila and Pismo Beach. Several marine mammals can be observed along our coast.

Sea Otter - *Enhydra lutris*.
HBL about 4 to 5 feet. Seen in rocky areas along coast in Morro Bay Harbor.



California Sea Lion - *Zalophus californianus*.
Seen offshore on rocks.

Northern Elephant Seal - *Mirounga angustirostris*. HBL up to 17 feet. Seen north of San Simeon.

Harbor Seal - *Phoca vitulina*.
Seen on offshore rocks near Shell Beach, Montana de Oro, Morro Bay and Cambria.

Gray Whale - *Eschrichtius robustus*.
Migrates November - March a mile or 2 offshore.

Humpback Whale - *Megaptera Novaeangliae* - occasionally seen.

MAMMALS OF SAN LUIS OBISPO



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Produced by the City of San Luis Obispo
Natural Resources Protection Program



Mammals are animals which have backbones, fur or hair, give birth to live young, and nurse their young. They differ from other backboned animals, such as birds (which have feathers), reptiles or fish (with scales), and amphibians (with moist skin), all of which lay eggs. Most people refer to mammals as "animals," even though this term can apply to any living thing which can move. Mammals make up an important part of the wildlife of any region, but due to their secretive habits, most of them are not readily seen.

San Luis Obispo County, in central California, includes vast areas of sparsely populated wild country, providing homes for a wide variety of mammal species. The Los Padres National Forest extends eastward from the City of San Luis Obispo. Hunter-Liggett Military Reservation and Camp Roberts, to the north, preserve large acreages of undeveloped land. The eastern part of the county includes many land parcels in the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management. Throughout this region are many privately owned ranches which also provide protection for mammals and other wildlife.

The wild mammals still found in the vicinity of San Luis Obispo include both native species, known to the Indians, and introduced species, brought here with the arrival of European settlers. None of the mammals listed in this guide are dangerous. Most mammals are cautious when near humans, and are usually active at night to avoid people. This guide lists the best known mammals in our area, in order of relative size. Mammal size can best be judged by estimating the head and body length (HBL).

Land Mammals of San Luis Obispo

Mule Deer - *Odocoileus hemionus*.



Named for their large ears. The local form has a narrow black line extending

down the middle of the tail. Deer may be hunted in the fall, and are considered a game species. They may eat garden plants, or even crops grown by ranchers. Males develop antlers with 1-5 or more points on each side which are shed in January or February.

Coyote - *Canis latrans*.

Dog-like, with large pointed ears; HBL about 2.5- 3 feet. Eats squirrels, rats and mice, and occasionally cats or even small dogs. Known to carry rabies. May occasionally be heard "singing" at night.



Bobcat - *Lynx rufus*.

Somewhat larger than a domestic cat, with long legs and a short tail (3 to 6 inches) that is white underneath. Preys on rabbits, rats, mice, and other small mammals.



Raccoon - *Procyon lotor*. Darker grayish-brown, with blackish rings around the tail, and a dark "bandit" mask across

the eyes. HBL about 2 feet. Often found near water. May knock over garbage cans, and can annoy dogs.

Gray Fox - *Urocyon cinereocargenteus*.

Gray body color, with reddish fur on the neck and flanks and a dark stripe along the top of its tail. HBL about 2 feet. Prefers chaparral and wooded areas; occasionally climbs trees.

Opossum - *Didelphis virginiana*.

Introduced from the eastern U.S. Has naked tail and ears, and a pointed nose. Scavenges for any food at night. HBL about 2 feet.



Black-tailed Jackrabbit -

Lepus californicus.



Prefers open areas; can damage crops. Preyed upon by coyotes and bobcats. HBL about 18 inches.

Striped Skunk - *Mephitis mephitis*.

Black with two white stripes. Feeds on insects and small animals. HBL about 18 inches.

Brush Rabbit - *Sylvilagus bachmani*.

Small, dark brown; HBL about 11-13 inches. Prefers brushy areas. May damage garden plants. **Cottontails** are larger and lighter in color; found in the county's eastern and northern parts.

Western Gray Squirrel - *Sciurus griseus*.

Belly white; large bushy tail. HBL less than 12 inches. Daytime active, mostly in large trees.

California Ground Squirrel -

Spermophilus beecheyi.

Prefers open fields; may climb trees, but normally lives in underground burrows. Belly tan; tail skimpy. HBL about 1 foot. Daytime active.



Muskrat -

Ondatra zibethica.

Dark brown fur. Tail is naked, scaly, and flattened from side-to-side. Introduced into Laguna Lake in the 1930s. HBL about 10 inches.

