

Bear Creek Stables

Outdoor educational and docent opportunities





A living classroom: Integrating ecology and education

Bear Creek Stables has operated equestrian activities almost continuously since the 1930s when it was part of the Tevis Estate. Since then, the stable grounds have become a home to a wide range of native bird and bat species that have adapted to, and rely on, the presence of the paddocks, stalls, and barn structures. This unique location is not only steeped in history but is also offers hospitable habitat to a variety of year-round native and migratory birds that thrive in this special environment.

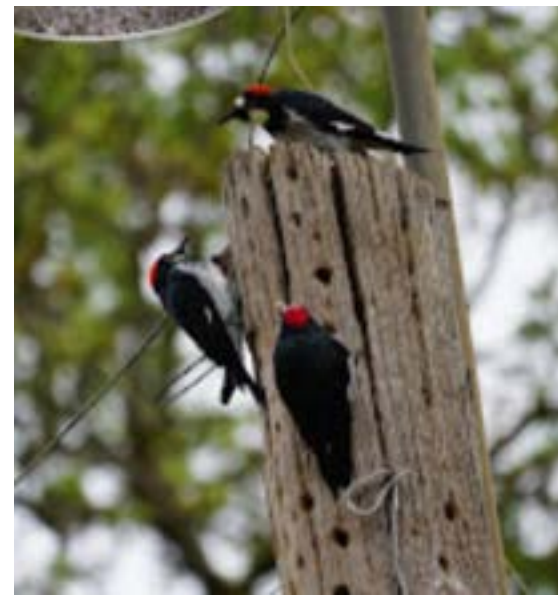
This ecological-human interface provides Midpen with a valuable opportunity to further its mission to provide environmental science education programs.

The Mission of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space

“To acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity; protect and restore the natural environment; and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.”



Red-winged blackbird



Acorn woodpeckers



Barn swallow



House finch



California quail



Killdeer



Scrub jay



Brewer's blackbird



Black Phoebe



Stellar's jay



Oak titmouse



Great horned owl



Red shouldered hawk

The diversity of birds at Bear Creek Stables offers unique opportunities for docent tours and school field trips



A natural outdoor classroom

Similar to the program offered at Skyline Ridge's David C. Daniels Nature Center, a "Spaces and Species" curriculum offered at Bear Creek Stables would focus on the main theme of appreciating and caring for natural resources with a specific focus on how native species have been able to adapt to the stable environment.

Bear Creek Stables presents an invaluable opportunity for Midpen to expand its award winning and unique "Spaces and Species" curriculum* in alignment with California curriculum standards.

* https://www.openspace.org/sites/default/files/ss_dnc_brochure.pdf

Bear Creek Stables is an opportunity to expand Midpen's award-winning "Spaces and Species" program



A science education program aligned with California curriculum standards

◆ Learn about biodiversity

Field trips aimed towards 3rd-5th graders, led by Midpen's volunteer Outdoor Education Leaders, would explore ecological diversity, adaptation, and the interrelationships between plants, animals, and humans specific to the grounds of the stables.

◆ Explore habitats

Students will learn about the "natural neighborhoods" of the stables by visiting the acorn woodpecker granaries located by the lower arena, the killdeer habitat just below the bat houses, and learning about nest building inside the horse stalls.

◆ Investigate patterns

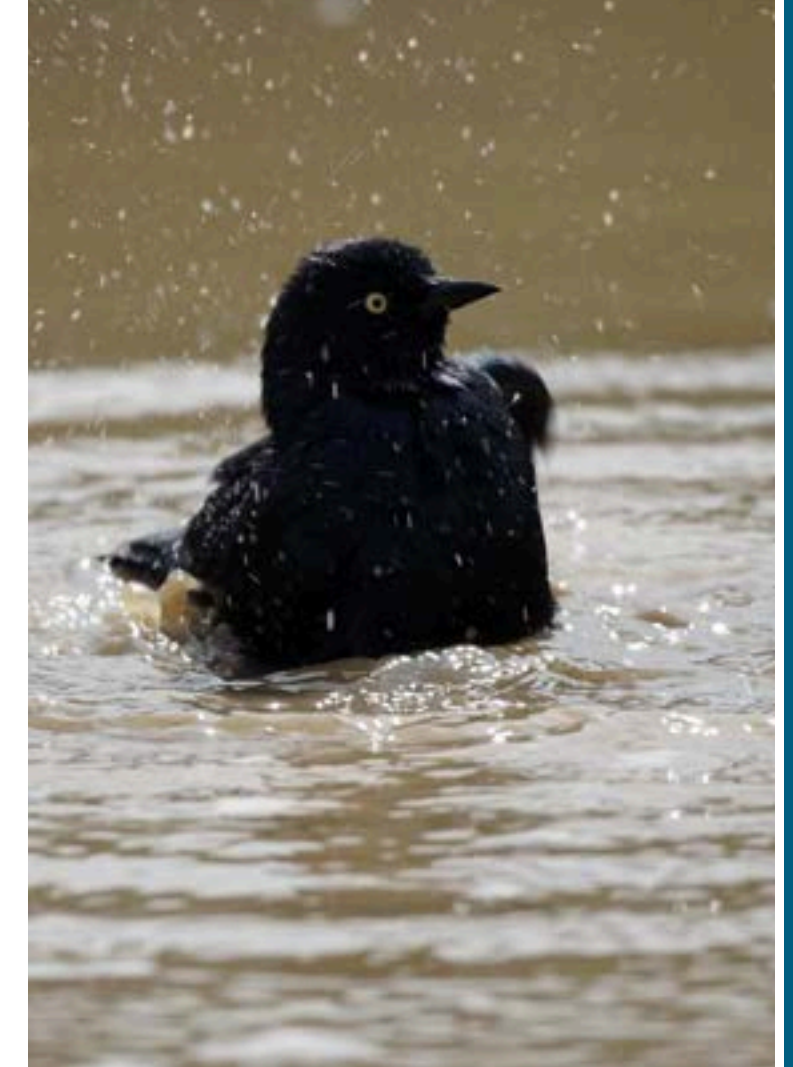
Students can learn about unique facts about how bird species have adapted to the stables.

Fun fact: Barn swallows and Brewer's blackbirds never share the same stall for nest building.

Docent-led birding tours: A deeper dive into species diversity

Leveraging local birding expertise to engage visitors in migratory bird watching.

Silicon Valley is home to an avid birding community. Midpen's own docent community, (there are several birders on its roster) could offer birding tours, especially those timed with the arrival of migratory bird species such as the barn swallow, golden-crowned sparrow, and killdeer. Santa Clara Valley Bird Alliance (SCVBA) could also put birding tours on its roster of field trips. One of Midpen's own docents is also a tour guide for SCVBA.



A three-stop docent approach

Docents will guide visitors through an exploration of synanthropy, which refers to how certain species like acorn woodpeckers, barn swallows, and killdeer have adapted to thrive alongside human-made structures at Bear Creek Stables.

Using three bird species to highlight native adaption to the stables

◆ Barn swallows

These fun migratory arrive in the hundreds to nest and raise young in generational nests that have been built inside the stalls and barn buildings.

◆ Killdeer

Another migratory bird species, killdeer take advantage of the sandy arena and access to water to raise chicks at the stables.

◆ Acorn woodpeckers

Large communities of these year-round native residents have created granaries to store thousands of acorns in the barn buildings and wooden posts in the lower area of the stables.



Barn swallows: The aerial acrobats of Bear Creek Stables

Bear Creek Stables is a spring destination for barn swallows arriving from their wintering grounds in Central America. Barn swallows are the fastest swallows, reaching speeds of around 45 mph as they whip through the air, catching insects mid-flight. Barn swallows are voracious hunters, catching as many as 60 insects per hour and up to 850 a day.

Barn swallows are also the only forked swallow species in North America. The eaves of the horse stables are favored spots for the mud nests of these birds.

Fun fact: It takes about 1,300 trips for a pair of barn swallows to create a single nest. Nests last 10-15 years and are used year after year by returning swallows.



Killdeers: Nature's Deceptive Protectors



Bear Creek Stables offers one of the few prime killdeer nesting areas away from the common shore breeding grounds of this migratory bird. The sandy/gravelly soil and access to water make the stables a welcoming place for this member of the plover family. The stables offer a unique view into the nesting and rearing behavior of the killdeer as precocial chicks (this means their young are capable of walking as soon as they hatch) are often seen running around the arena and on the pathways. Always nearby, killdeer parents will often engage in distraction display by feigning a broken wing to distract any potential predators (that includes you!) away from their chicks.

Fun fact: Killdeers engage in "distraction display," where they pretend to have a broken wing to lure predators away from their nests.



Acorn woodpeckers: The hoarders of the stables

Down in the lower arena, acorn woodpeckers gather in large communities to maintain several granaries that store hundreds of acorns into holes in the wooden poles and the side of the breezeway.

Each acorn is carefully fit snugly into each hole. As the acorn dries out and shrinks, woodpeckers will spent hours moving the acorns into smaller holes.

Fun fact: Acorn woodpeckers form large extended family communities to collectively manage these granaries. A group of acorn woodpeckers is known as a bushel.

