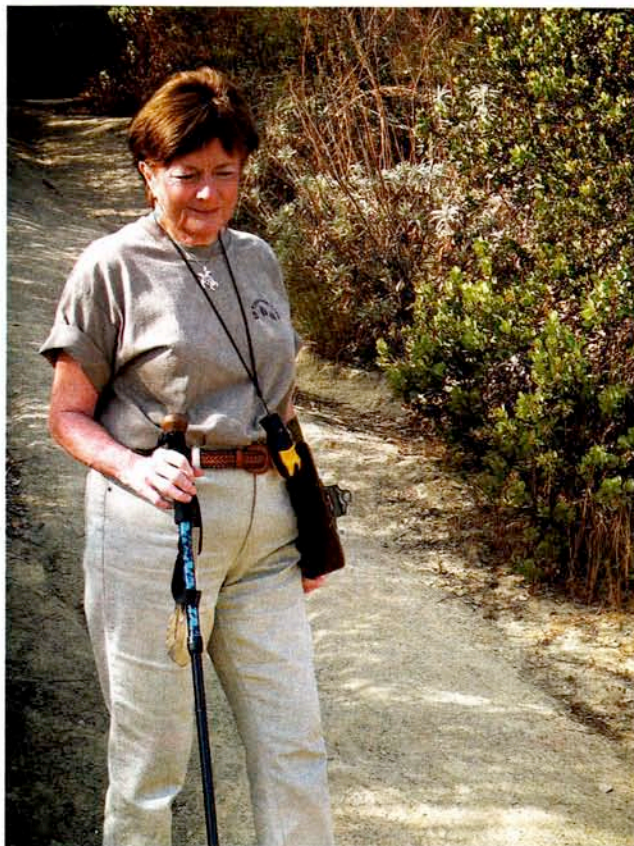


Ann Hunt

Senior Tracker, San Diego Tracking Team

BY LOUISE JULIG ■ PHOTOGRAPH BY JAN BILLINGTON

Wildlife tracking is not a lost art. As one of the senior trackers and leaders of the consortium of volunteer teams that make up the San Diego Tracking Team, Ann Hunt conducts quarterly wildlife surveys throughout San Diego County, and the data are used to monitor key wildlife species and track animal movement. Hunt, who is retired from a 30-year career with IBM in Silicon Valley, became interested in wildlife tracking after listening to a presentation by Susan Morse, a nationally known naturalist and tracker. She soon met Barry Martin, an expert tracker who had done extensive work in Peñasquitos Canyon. With a handful of other local trackers, they founded the San Diego Tracking Team. Hunt has now been tracking wildlife in San Diego County for more than 10 years.



Q: How did you get interested in wildlife tracking?

Hunt: My husband and I moved to San Diego in 1995 and started enjoying the beautiful parks here by walking and hiking. We went on a diet and lost a bunch of weight, and we started walking. I used to walk at Blue Sky Reserve, and the trails had a wonderful coating of fine dust that I'd see lots of tracks in. I'd wonder what I was seeing. It really all came from curiosity.

Q: Did it feel like you'd gotten new eyes after your first tracker training?

Hunt: Well, the eyes develop slowly. After the first training, you can go out on a survey as part of a team. Having four sets of eyes or more, you see

things a lot better, and you don't miss as much. We often ponder what something could be or what it's not, having different opinions on what we're seeing. We only actually record it if we're dead certain, but sometimes it takes some discussion to get dead certain. You need a good amount of what we call "dirt time."

Q: What are some of the animals you've identified over the years?

Hunt: There's a specific set of animals we're looking for, and we've pretty much identified all of them at one point or another. There's bobcat, coyote, gray fox, mule deer, striped skunk, badger, wood rat, opossum, raccoon, bighorn sheep, black bear, black-tailed

jackrabbit, cougar, kit fox, burrowing owl, long-tailed weasel, ringtail, roadrunner, and spotted skunk. We identify the animals by track, scat, browse [plants an animal has chewed on], den or bed areas, claw marks, scent markings, rubs, fur or feathers, evidence of predation, or a live sighting.

Q: How many wildlife surveys do you do a year?

Hunt: I've done as many as seven a quarter, usually leading five and attending two more as part of a team of three to four people.

Q: What do you like about working with newly trained volunteers?

Hunt: Everybody will say, "I see something!" But then I say, "Well, what are you

seeing?" Asking questions rather than telling them what they're seeing helps them figure it out. It's like anything else; you need to build up confidence that you're seeing it right.

Q: What's the most rewarding part of doing this work?

Hunt: Having helped set up the San Diego Tracking Team, and having seen it go from nothing to something. Barry and I always joked about it moving at glacial speed, but only when you really look back at where you were and how far you've come do you appreciate how much you've actually done. **W**

For more information on the San Diego Tracking Team, visit sdtt.org.