

## DRY WASH WOODLAND VEGETATION COMMUNITY



The deserts of San Diego County include an interlaced network of small washes and drainage courses. These drainages support vegetation that is specialized to capitalize on a level of underground water that is closer to the surface. This vegetation consists of a low growing, loosely formed woodland with a number of distinctive plants. Dominant species and indicators of this community include the sweet smelling Desert Lavender in the mint family, Desert Ironwood, in some locations, Catclaw acacia and two types of Mesquite, Saltbush, Smoke tree and Desert willow. In some of the larger canyons, Washingtonia fan palms may occur in this community or in the nearby riparian woodlands.

Within the desert environment, the Dry Wash Woodland habitat is where most of the bird life nest and proceed through their reproductive cycle. Common bird species in this woodland include the Verdin, Black throated sparrow, and Phainopepla. In areas where Mesquite is extensive, Gambel quail may also be found.

Each of the dry wash channels and flow courses may fill with water during a heavy rainfall event usually associated with summer thunderstorms. On occasion, remnants of tropical storms that travel up the Sea of Cortez or cross over from the southern part of Baja California will flow into the area, dropping heavy rainfall within a period of hours that may consist of an amount greater than what normally falls in a year's time. This water flows rapidly in flash floods that cause erosion in these streams and flow channels. Strong flash floods may uproot vegetation and scour clean the bottom of the stream channels. However, as a result of these scouring events, there may be new growth of shrubs including seedlings of Cacti. A number of species are specifically *adapted to the conditions following storm scouring* and will not germinate unless the seed coat has been abraded by transport in water and ground through a slurry of sand and gravel.



Courtesy of the County of San Diego  
Department of Planning and Land Use  
Multiple Species Conservation Program  
5201 Ruffin Road, Suite B  
San Diego, CA 92123  
[www.msccp-sandiego.org](http://www.msccp-sandiego.org)