

## GRASSLAND VEGETATION COMMUNITY



Grasslands that occur in San Diego County can be divided into two types; one that is composed mostly of native, perennial grasses and herbs, and one that has a large component of annual grasses which originated in the Mediterranean region. Since colonization of the San Diego area, land disturbance by heavy cattle grazing and agricultural activities have created large areas of annual grasslands in areas that were originally native grasslands and shrublands (including Coastal sage scrub and Chaparral). Native grasslands are now quite rare and occur in the hills south of Poway, Wright's Field in Alpine, parts of Camp Pendleton, Ramona, and Rancho Guiejito east of Valley Center. The annual grasslands dominated by Mediterranean species occur in these same areas and additionally in the Black Mountain area west of Rancho Bernardo, Otay Ranch, and near Warner Springs. San Diego County contains 147,200 acres of grassland. The vast majority of it is annual, also known as non-native, grassland. As development occurs, grasslands of both types are becoming limited.

Some grasslands also support vernal pool habitat where water pools due to clay or hardpan soils. These areas support unique plant and animal life because of their unique physical characteristics. The pools dry up in the summer and the plants and animals can remain dormant in the soils for years.

When Grassland habitats are preserved a variety of plant and animal species are automatically protected too. Plant species present in native grasslands include several species of: Bunch grasses, Blue-eyed grass, Checker mallow, and a number of bulb species including Wild hyacinth, and Golden stars. The Annual grassland, sometimes referred to as non-native grassland, is dominated by Wild oats, Mustard, and Brome grasses.

Both Native and Non-native grasslands are important for a variety of wildlife including: Golden eagles, Grasshopper sparrows, Horned larks, Meadowlarks, and small mammals that include the endangered Stephen's kangaroo rat.



Courtesy of the County of San Diego  
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