



## CNDDDB and BDB Newsletter

Biogeographic Data Branch  
Department of Fish and Game

January 2011

Dear Friends,

This is the tenth edition of a periodic newsletter letting you know of important updates and changes in the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), and, in this edition updates that pertain to VegCAMP, the Vegetation Classification and Mapping Program.

Please feel free to share this email with your staff or with others who didn't receive it. If you have colleagues who would like to receive this, just let us know by emailing [BDB@dfg.ca.gov](mailto:BDB@dfg.ca.gov) to update our list of recipients. You can also access this newsletter, and previous CNDDDB newsletters, at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/biogeodata/cnddb/>.

### January 2011 NEWS

#### CNDDDB – 2010 Review

In 2010, the CNDDDB updated many species, particularly in the California deserts, the Sierran foothills, and a few other places. The deserts were a top priority due to the thousands of acres proposed for energy development in the near future.

Botany concentrated on dozens of plants in the Desert, a few Delta plants, Orange County, Santa Clara County (where NCCP/HCPs are being developed) and the Sierran foothills. Zoology also concentrated on the Desert, but also updated many Sierran and Klamath species, due to fish stocking issues. The updated plants are too numerous to list, but the animals included the following:

|                                   |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Pacific fisher                    | burrowing owl               |
| Alameda whipsnake                 | Pacific tailed frog         |
| San Diego black-tailed jackrabbit | gray-headed pika            |
| So. Calif. rufous-crowned sparrow | California tiger salamander |
| California mountain kingsnake     | coast horned lizard         |
| foothill yellow-legged frog       | California red-legged frog  |
| Sierra Madre yellow-legged frog   | two-striped garter snake    |
| silvery legless lizard            | coastal whiptail            |
| Santa Ana sucker                  | desert pupfish              |
| San Bernardino kangaroo rat       | Stephens' kangaroo rat      |
| Western pond turtle               | Arroyo chub                 |
| California wolverine              | bald eagle                  |
| Delta smelt                       | Mohave ground squirrel      |

In 2010 we added or updated 6,480 plant and animal EOs for a mean of 540 EOs added or updated per month.

The top 5 counties for new or updated EOs in 2010 were:

- San Bernardino (1,219 EOs)
- Riverside (828 EOs)
- San Diego (588 EOs)
- Los Angeles (307 EOs)
- Imperial (291 EOs)

As of January 2011, 30.0 % of the occurrences in the CNDDDB have a “Site Last Seen” date within the last 10 years (2001-2010) and 84.3% have an Accuracy Class of 5 or better (80 m circular features, specific and non-specific polygons, 150 m & 300 m radius circles).

### **CNDDDB Zoologist Darlene McGriff retires**

Jan 31, 2011 is Darlene McGriff’s last official day with the Department of Fish and Game. She is on to bigger and better things. For awhile at least, CNDDDB will leave this position unfilled due to a hiring freeze. Please bear with us during this transition. Your special animal questions should be directed to Brian Accord, [bacord@dfg.ca.gov](mailto:bacord@dfg.ca.gov). General CNDDDB questions can be directed to Roxanne Bittman, [rbittman@dfg.ca.gov](mailto:rbittman@dfg.ca.gov).

### **Change in CNDDDB Data Update Schedule**

During 2010, the data update cycle was once every two months rather than once/month. We are reverting to monthly updates. This means that your Username/Password will be good for only one month now to access RareFind 4, BIOS and the Data Download pages. Use the Data Download page ([http://www.dfg.ca.gov/biogeodata/cnddb/rf\\_ftpinfinfo.asp](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/biogeodata/cnddb/rf_ftpinfinfo.asp)) to download new data for your desktop RareFind 3 and CNDDDB GIS project; note that these products must be in synchrony in order to provide you with the correct answers to your queries. You do not need to update RareFind 4 nor BIOS; DFG maintains both of those Internet products for you.

### **ArcGIS 10 Changes**

Along with the CNDDDB GIS data, we are now providing an example ESRI ArcMap project for ArcGIS 10 in addition to those that have already been provided for ArcGIS 8.3 and ArcGIS 9. This new project document illustrates how the CNDDDB data can be used and symbolized in ArcMap. Because ESRI is moving away from Visual Basic for Applications (VBA), the ArcMap 10 project does not embed the VBA functions for importing and exporting selections from and to RareFind 3. Instead, these functions are included as tools in an ArcGIS 10 Toolbox that resides in the C:\CNDDDB3\gis\tools\arcgis folder. Please note that the ArcMap 10 project and ArcGIS 10 Toolbox will not work in earlier versions of ArcGIS.

## **News from VegCAMP: New Terrestrial<sup>1</sup> Natural Community List**

Natural Communities (NCs) have been considered part of the Natural Heritage conservation triad, along with plants and animals of conservation significance, since the state inception of the Natural Heritage program in 1979. The CNDDDB continues to include occurrences of rare NCs despite the fact that funding for the NC part of the program was cut in the mid-1990s. Since that time, no new occurrences of NCs have been added. However, the importance of maintaining the NC layer in the CNDDDB has not diminished. Many of the 2500+ individual occurrences of the 96 terrestrial NCs with occurrences in the CNDDDB still have significance for conservation and their existence should be considered in the environmental review process along with occurrences of plants and animals tracked by the CNDDDB.

Since 1999, the Department of Fish and Game's Vegetation Classification and Mapping Program (VegCAMP) has undertaken the classification and mapping of vegetation throughout the state and, following California Senate Bill 85, Chapter 178, Statutes of 2007, also has assumed the role of standardizing vegetation nomenclature for California to comply with the National Vegetation Classification System (NVCS). The method of vegetation classification presented in the Second Edition of A Manual of California Vegetation (Sawyer et al. 2009) represents the vegetation classification standards for large-scale vegetation maps recently adopted by the state. These state standards meet the National Vegetation Classification System standards followed by federal agencies. The data-driven approach to sampling and classification presented in Sawyer et al. (2009) yields repeatable and defensible results that are useful for land use planning, effective conservation planning, and for fulfilling project requirements under the California Environmental quality act (CEQA). Use of the National Vegetation Classification System also facilitates integrating the program with similar ones from other states and countries to accurately assess the Global conservation status (rank) of vegetation types.

The VegCAMP website (<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/biogeodata/vegcamp/>) provides a link to background information. We recommend users visit the links presented there for further information about the National Vegetation Classification System. On our website, we have presented the current list of Alliances and Associations in three formats:

- [Natural Communities List Arranged Alphabetically by Life Form, Sept. 2010.](#)  
This is the currently active list, It is based on the Alliances and Associations described in The Second Edition of A Manual of California Vegetation (Sawyer et al. 2009).
- [Hierarchical List of Natural Communities with Holland Types, Sept. 2010.](#)  
The list is presented within the National Vegetation Classification hierarchy, the same arrangement displayed in Appendix 3 of the MCVII minus the “group” level, which is still under active development at the national level. Within this hierarchy, we have placed the natural communities as described by Holland (1986) that are currently found in the pick list in CNDDDB Rarefind. Users more familiar with Holland types can see the approximate relationships of those types

---

<sup>1</sup> Aquatic Natural Communities are not covered here or in the second edition of A Manual of California Vegetation (Sawyer et al. 2009).

to alliances and associations, and thus transition to the State's new classification system.

- [Full Natural Community Hierarchy, Sept. 2010, Excel Version.](#)  
The Excel® version of the entire hierarchical classification contains primary and additional supporting references to the studies in which the types were described.

### **What happened to the earlier NC Element Occurrences?**

The short answer is: “They are still there.” Although the Holland (1986) classification system is no longer supported in the current vegetation classification, The CNDDDB and its products, RareFind and BIOS, still portray Natural Community Element Occurrences that were identified using this older classification system.

Many CNDDDB NC elements, which were based on Holland (1986), match well with the current list of alliances and associations. For example, Valley Wildrye Grassland, Buck Brush Chaparral, Elephant Tree Woodland, Central California Sycamore Alluvial Woodland, and Mendocino Pygmy Cypress Forest are easily converted to alliances and associations. However, others such as Northern Claypan Vernal Pool, Southern Maritime Chaparral, and Serpentine Bunchgrass Grassland are not easily translated. There is a complex relationship between CNDDDB NC elements and today's view of vegetation classification – in some cases, there is a one-to-one relationship, but in most there is a many-to-one or many-to-many relationship. Furthermore, in most cases no recent surveys have been made of old CNDDDB NC occurrences to ascertain the proper identity based on today's classification standards. We think it imprudent to remove these elements from the CNDDDB before assessing them and reclassifying them in terms of the currently accepted state and national standards for vegetation classification. For the time being, each Element Occurrence Record will have a brief note inserted in the “General Comments” field explaining that the site should be considered as having conservation significance until it has been re-surveyed, re-classified, and updated.

### **Further questions?**

If you have remaining questions about vegetation classification or existing Element Occurrences please contact Project Leads:

- Todd Keeler-Wolf, Senior Vegetation Ecologist, [tkwolf@dfg.ca.gov](mailto:tkwolf@dfg.ca.gov) or
- Diana Hickson, Senior Biogeographer, [dhickson@dfg.ca.gov](mailto:dhickson@dfg.ca.gov)