

THE MOHABE GROUND SQUIRREL WORKSHOP



**RIDGECREST
KERN COUNTY, CA**

JUNE 4-6, 2026
JUNE 4: ONLINE LECTURE
JUNE 5 OR 6: FIELD

Photos by Don Hardeman Jr.

**Mohave Ground Squirrel
Conservation Council &
Western Section of
The Wildlife Society**

Description: The Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Council (MGSCC), in partnership with The Western Section of The Wildlife Society present a workshop designed to cover the natural history, regulation, and survey techniques of the Mohave ground squirrel (MGS), a California state threatened species endemic to the Mojave desert. One day of lecture will take place virtually on June 4, followed by rotating sessions in the field learning techniques for capture, identification, and processing of desert squirrels. Sightings of Mohave ground squirrel are based on skill, luck, and forces beyond our control. Participants choose one field excursion (either June 5 or 6) during registration in addition to (optionally) one day walking trapping grid lines with experts.

CDFW Statement: Authorization from CDFW to work independently with MGS under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) requires more experience than can be provided by this workshop. However, this is a great opportunity to acquire information and training on the natural history of MGS, field sampling techniques, habitat requirements, and conservation planning. Completion of the workshop will provide participants a foundation to start building the qualifications needed to obtain a CESA Memorandum of Understanding to capture and handle MGS, or to be designated as a qualified biologist for MGS in a CESA Incidental Take Permit.

Registration

Before you register

1. Log in to your TWS-WS account to get the student/member rate.
2. We cannot accept American Express
3. Registration is based on a first-come, first-served basis.
4. Please make sure you check your email on the registration form, as the system may auto-populate an old email.
5. Each person attending the workshop must fill out their own registration and payment.
6. Registration is not secured until you pay by credit card.
7. **State & Federal employees**, however, may pay by check if you A) register to secure your spot (and skip the payment option - you won't get a confirmation email, but I will see your registration) and B) email the workshop coordinator at workshops@tws-west.org. We will hold your spot for 3 weeks. Registration is payable by check or credit card and must be received or postmarked by March 5, 2026. Please make it out to the address below with the name of the workshop and your name in the memo line:

TWS – Western Section
PO Box 6756
Albany, CA 94706

Please Register at this Link:

<https://user.tws-west.org/store.php?e=MGS2026>

What Happens Next? After registration, you will receive detailed information about the field course one month prior to the event.

Waitlist Policy: To be placed on the waitlist, you must fill out a registration form. If placed on the waitlist, you will not be charged. If spots open up, the first person on the waitlist will have 48 hours to accept the registration up until 5 weeks prior to the event, after which participants will have 24 hours. It is always a good idea to put yourself on the waitlist because if additional opportunities arise, you will be the first alerted. Priority in waitlists is also given to employees of firms not already represented in the participant list.

Cancellation and Refund Policy: To receive a refund of workshop registration fees, we must receive your cancellation no later than 24 days before the first day of the workshop. All refunds are subject to a \$50 processing fee. Afterwards, there will be no refunds, including for reasons such as inclement weather, Federal and State budget issues, furloughs or other events beyond the control of TWS-West. However, registration may be transferred to another individual for a \$25 transfer fee. If the workshop is canceled due by the Section, you will be refunded.

Fees

Registration Categories	Cost (Early Bird Registration)	Cost (after March 1)
Full Workshop (Virtual and 1 Field Day: June 5 OR 6)		
Member, TWS Western Section (Note that TWS Membership is separate from TWS-WS and is not applicable)	\$525	\$545
Non-Member Rate	\$575	\$595
Student/Early Career Professional - Members Only (limited to 10 registration). Additional scholarship opportunities can be found here.	\$350	\$370
Virtual Portion Only (1 Class Day: June 4)		
Virtual Lecture Only	\$95	
Optional Advanced Add-On (1 Field Day: June 5 OR 6)		
Advanced Trap Grid Prerequisite is to have taken the field portion of this workshop in the past or be taking it during this workshop. (limited to 20 per day)	\$155	\$175

The maximum enrollment is **35 people per day**. After the class is filled, a wait list will be kept. A minimum of **60** participants must register by **May 15** or the class will be canceled and you will be refunded in total. The deadline for signups is June 1, 2026.

Locations

Field Location

The exact location of the field portion of the workshop will be provided after you have registered. However, it will be within a 30-minute drive from the town of Ridgecrest in Kern County, California. Likely location is near Cuddeback Rd.

Lodging

Lodging is not included as part of this workshop. However, participants are welcome to camp on our field site, if you let us know in advance by filling out this information in the welcome questionnaire.

Additionally, a certain number of discounted rooms will be held at the [SpringHill Suites in Ridgecrest](#), California.

SpringHill Suites Ridgecrest

113 E. Sydnor Avenue
Ridgecrest, California 93555 USA
(760) 446-1630

To join the room block, please call the hotel at 760.446.1630

Group Name: Wildlife Society

The room block covers nights between June 4 and 6.

Alternative Lodging Options

- [Dreamland](#)
- [Mulberry Farms-High Desert Camping](#)
- [Ridgecrest Hotels](#)
- [Red Rock Canyon State Park Camping](#)
- [Dispersed Camping on BLM Land](#)
- [Dispersed Camping near Cuddeback Rd \(very close to workshop\)](#)



Virtual Lecture

The **lecture portion** of the workshop on June 4, will take place virtually by Zoom and will not be recorded.

Zoom

Prior to the workshop, please have [Zoom](#) downloaded on your computer and have tested all your microphones, etc. so you are not caught off-guard by technical difficulties during the event.

Field Rotations

You will be able to sign up for either June 5 or 6 for the field rotations.

Field Rotations Involve:

- **Camera traps**

You will look at ways to set up a camera trapping grid to maximize remote capture of Mohave ground squirrels.

- **Grid layout**

You will be able to see how to bait a trapline for Mohave Ground Squirrel

- **Grid walk**

You will check traps with an expert and (luck willing) potentially observe a capture of a squirrel.

- **Botanical/Habitat Walk**

You will identify forage species for Mohave ground squirrel with a botanical expert.

- **Excavations**

You will learn how to excavate burrows.

Advanced Trap Grid Option

You may (optionally) also sign up to trap the Advanced Trap Grid on the alternate day, but only if you also sign up for the full workshop or have taken it in the past.

Signing up for **The Big Trap Grid Option** means you will be spending 12 hours on the trap line with experts, from 6 AM to 6 PM. The idea is that you will participate in a full day of trapping, as in, open traps at sunrise, check again in a couple hours, check a second time a couple hours later, then check/close traps a few hours later depending on weather conditions. You'll get a taste of what we do when we trap for research or clients.

Note you will not be able to handle a Mohave ground squirrel during the workshop, including during the Advanced Trap Grid. Nor can we guarantee that you will see one. However, assisting with the big trap grid will give you the highest possibility of viewing one. Participants who sign up for the June 5 option will also be enlisted in helping pack up the trapline - which is also a great experience.

If you also signed up for the full workshop, you need to select the opposite day for the trap line, since they run concurrently with the field rotations.

Anyone interested in volunteering before or after the workshop, please fill out a volunteer form on the [MGSCC Website](#).

Overview Schedule

(Subject to Change by Instructors)

Session 1 Introduction, History, and Agency Involvement

8:30 - 8:45: Housekeeping (Ivan Parr, Adam Walters, Kathy Simon)
8:45 - 9:15: Introducing the Mohave Ground Squirrel (Dr. Phil Leitner)
9:15 - 9:30: CDFW's Roles in MGS Conservation (CDFW - Katrina or Austin)
9:30 - 9:45: USFWS and MGS (Jeremy Bisson)
9:45 - 10:00: Food Habits of MGS (Barbara Leitner)
10:00 - 10:15: Q&A

Break: 10:15 - 10:30

Part 2 Status and Management

10:30 - 10:45: Introduction to Special Studies (Kathy Simon)
10:45 - 11:00: Status of MGS Genetics (Dr. Marjorie Matocq)
11:00 - 11:15: Annual Cycle and Demography (Dr. Phil Leitner)
11:15 - 11:30: Q&A

11:30 - 12:30 Lunch Break

Part 3: Long-Term Monitoring

12:30 - 12:45: Developing Large-scale, Spatially Explicit Survey Design (Dr. Sean Murphy)
12:45 - 1:00: Goals, objectives and design of the pilot study funded by WCB and BLM (Dr. Todd Esque)
1:00 - 1:15: Longevity (Barbara Leitner)
1:15 - 1:30: Drone Mapping and MGS Habitat (Dr. Ken Nussear and Hannah Potts from UNR)

1:45 - 2:00: Q&A Panel

2:00 - 2:15 Break

Part 4: Special Research and Field Methods

2:15 - 2:30: MGS Captive Breeding/Translocation (Dr. Sharon Poessel)
2:30 - 2:45: DOD and MGS (Julie Hendrix)
2:45 - 3:00: Diurnal Timing in MGS (Barbara Leitner)
3:00 - 3:15: Live Trapping Methods (Kathy Simon)
3:15 - 3:30: Variable Approaches to MGS Camera Trapping and Data Analysis (Ed LaRue)
3:30 - 3:45: Permitting (including mitigation) (Ed LaRue)

3:45 - 4:00: Session 3 Q&A Period

4:00 - 4:15: Break

4:15 - 4:30: Fun facts about MGS Activity Patterns Based on Trail Camera Detections (Barbara Leitner)

4:30 - 4:45: Wrap Up and Announcements for Tomorrow (Adam Walters, Kathy Simon, Ivan Parr) for Field Portion

Field Portion Rotations - Participants will choose 1 of the following days

June 5, 2026 - Field Portion

7:00 - 7:30: Field Group 1 Registration
7:30 - 8:00: Assignments and Locations
8:00 - 4:30: Field Group Mega 1 Field Time
Break into 8 groups to do:

- Camera traps (Bruce)
- Camera stations (Ed)
- Grid layout (Leo)
- Grid walk
- Botanical/Habitat Walk (Denise)
- Excavations
- Lunch Break (synchronized)

Alternative Option: Walk Big Trap Grid 6AM to 6PM

June 6, 2025 - Field Portion

7:00 - 7:30: Field Group 1 Registration
7:30 - 8:00: Assignments and Locations
8:00 - 4:30: Field Group Mega 1 Field Time
Break into 8 groups to do:

- Camera traps
- Camera stations
- Grid layout
- Grid walk
- Botanical/Habitat Walk
- Excavations
- Lunch Break (synchronized)

Alternative Option: Walk Big Trap
Grid 6AM to 6PM

Meet before dawn and run 50-100 traps.



Photo by Freya Reder

Preparation

Virtual Lecture

The **lecture portion** will take place virtually by Zoom in Webinar Format on June 4. It will not be recorded.

Zoom

Prior to the workshop, please have [Zoom](#) downloaded on your computer and have tested all your microphones, etc. so you are not caught off-guard by technical difficulties during the event.

Check-In and Coffee Hour

Coffee hour (see schedule below) is an opportunity to speak with the instructor, test your features, and socialize before the workshop.

Requirements

Zoom downloaded (free/basic version is just fine) to your device prior to the workshop. Headphones or head-set are recommended to improve sound quality, but not required (by now we probably all know if our systems work well). It is recommended you make sure you have the latest version of Zoom, [here](#).

Internet / System Requirements

If you have not used Zoom before, please run some teleconference tests to ensure that you have enough bandwidth to run Zoom. You can find a list of [system requirements here](#).

Field Equipment List

- Sunglasses
- Sunblock
- Hat
- Water
- Snacks
- Lunch
- Windbreaker/layers
- Change of clothes for changing weather
- Rain gear (just in case)
- Small notebook for the field
- Pen/pencil for the field
- Handouts/data sheets provided in the classroom portion
- Camera
- Backpack or field pack
- Walking stick
- Optional: GPS on NAD 83
- Alcohol/QUAT to decontaminate your footwear and equipment between field sites to avoid the spread of rabbit hemorrhagic disease

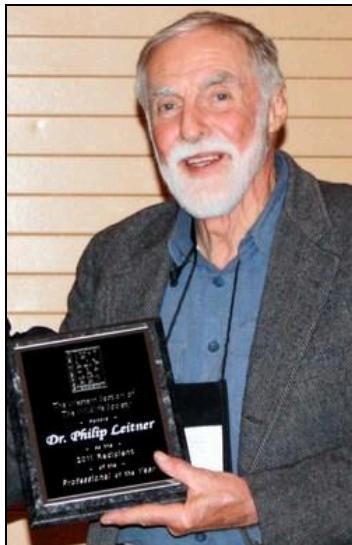
Lead Instructor Profiles



Kathryn Beuscher Simon

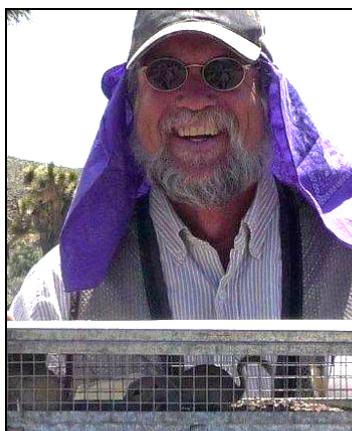
Kathy spent her first few years out of college working at the Forest Service in Fire and Wildlife, and in the Peace Corps in the Philippines and Senegal. She first fell in love with working with Mohave ground squirrels at Edwards Air Force Base in 1993 as a young biologist at Tetra Tech, trained by Mark Allaback and David Laabs. Since then, she has worked with MGS throughout the range, from commercial projects such as housing developments during the housing boom, to road projects and large-scale camera studies at Fort Irwin, to more recent solar projects. She has worked for large and small consulting firms, and was the

founder and President of Ironwood Consulting for over ten years before returning to work on her own at Sunrise Consulting LLC. She has also participated in the MGS Technical Advisory Group for over 20 years and worked on volunteer efforts for the species since that time to gain more knowledge of range boundaries and genetics.



Dr. Phil Leitner (recorded)

Dr. Phil Leitner is recognized as the foremost authority on Mohave ground squirrel. Dr. Leitner grew up on a Montana cattle ranch but came out west for school. One of his first memories was his parents purchasing a pet white-tailed antelope squirrel for him on a road trip out west. While that squirrel managed to escape, Phil was instilled with a love for small mammals. He has studied bats since the 1950's and squirrels since the 1980's. Dr. Leitner has served as dean of science at his alma mater, St. Mary's college. His work on MGS has earned Dr. Leitner the Raymond F. Dasmann Award.



Ed LaRue

A founding member of Circle Mountain Biological Consultants, LLC, Ed LaRue is a familiar face and name to southern California ecologists. From 1998-1994, he worked for the BLM on the West Mojave Coordinated Management Plan. Although his background is in entomology, Ed now specializes on Mohave ground squirrel and desert tortoise, serving on both the MGS Technical Advisory Group since 2016 and the Mohave Ground Squirrel CC since 2022. You may also know him as the Master of Ceremonies for the Desert Tortoise Council workshop.



Barbara Leitner

Barbara Leitner is a Renaissance woman in the world of consulting, well-known for her work on Mohave ground squirrel, but also in rare plant science, horticulture (her garden is featured on the Bring Back the Natives Garden Tour), and range management. In addition to being a principal for Leitner Environmental Consulting, Barbara served as President of the East Bay Chapter of the California Native Plant Society. She is the winner of the William Penn Mott Jr. Environmental Award for her volunteer work with nonprofits such as Friends of Orinda Creeks and Native Here Nursery.

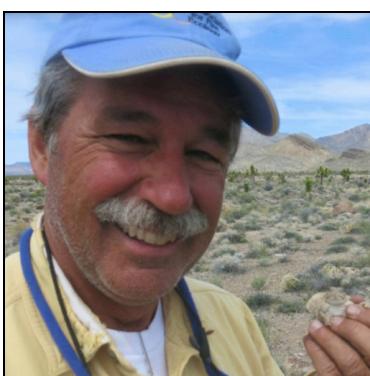


Adam Walters

Adam Walters is a general biologist. After a variety of different biological field projects for Federal and State wildlife agencies around the western United States he became involved in biology work in the Mohave Desert over 15 years ago. He has been working with Mohave Ground Squirrels for over 10 years now. He has gained great respect for all species that have evolved to survive in the extreme ecological variety of the Desert Southwest.

Jeremy Blisson

Jeremy is a Fish and Wildlife Biologist with the US Fish and Wildlife Service Mojave Desert Division. He has a BS in Wildlife from Humboldt State University and an MS in Zoology from the University of Hawaii at Manoa where he studied albatross diet. His passion is to catalyze partnerships and landscape level projects which lead to improved wildlife habitat conditions.



Dr. Todd Esque, Research Ecologist

Todd Esque is a Research Ecologist with the US Geological Survey, Western Ecological Research Center working from the middle of the Mojave Desert in Boulder City, Nevada. His research focuses on the resilience of desert plants and animals to persist in the face of disturbances such as fire, invasive species, climate change, and development. Todd has been studying Mohave Ground Squirrels (MGS) since about 2007 when he led a multi-disciplinary team on a species distribution modeling study sponsored by the California Energy Commission. Todd worked with another team associated with the last TWS MGS workshop to develop the Conservation Research Action Plan for the Mohave Ground Squirrel.

Drawing from that plan, Todd's team collaborated with the Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Council to design a pilot study to monitor distribution and demography of Mohave Ground Squirrels.



Denise LaBerteaux

Denise LaBerteaux is a co-owner of EREMICO Biological Services, LLC, a small, woman-owned firm that offers services in a variety of environmental fields since 1987. Ms. LaBerteaux specializes in wildlife and plant studies in the desert regions of California and Nevada. Her work includes wildlife and plant inventories, T&E and other special status wildlife and plant surveys, baseline botanical studies, vegetation community mapping, population monitoring, habitat evaluations, impact assessments, mitigation

planning, and environmental compliance monitoring. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Zoology from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a Master of Science degree in Biology from Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff. Her first experience with Mohave ground squirrels (MGS) came in 1980 when she was a seasonal biologist at the Naval Air Weapons Station, China Lake (NAWSCL), California. She and her co-workers assisted BLM biologists with a trapping study for MGS east of Cuddleback Lake in San Bernardino County. Later, she conducted several presence-absence trapping surveys on NAWSCL for project-related biological resources assessments. From 1992-1994, Ms. LaBerteaux was a member of the MGS Working Group and continues to participate at the MGS Technical Advisory Group meetings. As a consultant, Ms. LaBerteaux has conducted live-trapping surveys since 1987 and camera-trapping surveys since 2015. She currently serves as a Board Member at Large with the Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Council.



Dr. Marjorie Matocq

Dr. Marjorie Matocq is a professor of Population & Evolutionary Genetics and the director of the Ecology, Evolution and Conservation Biology graduate program at the University of Nevada, Reno. Her research is focused on a number of ecological and evolutionary questions at the interface of intra- and interspecific processes. Her research program is heavily collections-based and integrates traditional field and morphological data with molecular and genomic methods to elucidate pattern and process at several spatial and temporal scales. The majority of my work continues to focus on members of the *Neotoma fuscipes* species complex.

Projects in the Matocq lab focus on studying patterns of geographic population genetic structure and the processes underlying such patterns. Because the current geographic distribution of genetic diversity is determined by a complex interplay of ecology, demography, and population history, our studies are performed at various spatial and temporal scales. To study the processes underlying patterns of genetic diversity and subdivision, we combine modern molecular genetic techniques with morphological and field studies.

Dr. Sean Murphy

Sean is a Biologist at U.S. Geological Survey's Western Ecological Research Center, where he conducts research to inform conservation and management of terrestrial wildlife in the Southwest. His expertise is in developing spatially explicit methods for population-level estimation and monitoring of wildlife demographic, genetic, and spatial parameters; restoration, recovery, and conservation of imperiled terrestrial mammals; and carnivore ecology and management.



Dr. Sharon Poessel

Sharon Poessel is a Wildlife Biologist at USGS. She conducts research on a variety of mammal and bird species, and has been involved with Mohave ground squirrels since 2020. Her research focuses on understanding the movements and habitat use of animals across the landscape and using this knowledge to advance the conservation of wildlife species. She also has experience with captive breeding programs for endangered species. More recently, her research efforts have been directed toward the deserts of southern California, examining ecological questions pertaining to species of conservation concern.



The Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Council

The Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Council (MGS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization functioning to assure the survival of Mohave ground squirrels (MGS; *Xerospermophilus mohavensis*) in collaboration with government, academic, and conservation organizations, and to disseminate information to inform environmental policy and encourage public appreciation for the species.



COVID Policy

The Western Section of The Wildlife Society follows California State, Center for Disease Control, County, City, and The Wildlife Society guidance on COVID restrictions.

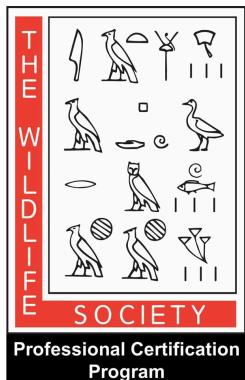
If you have recently been diagnosed with or exposed to COVID-19, please consult and adhere to the CDC Isolation and Exposure Calculator. Please do not attend if you have a suspected or confirmed case of COVID-19. Alliance policies and protocols may be updated at any time based on CDC and/or local or state public health guidelines as needed.

By attending the workshop, you assume all of the risk of contracting COVID-19 and agree to hold the Section harmless.

Code of Conduct

All TWS-WS events will adhere to the following code of conduct:

<https://tws-west.org/the-wildlife-society-code-and-ethics-policy/>



The Mohave Ground Squirrel workshop qualifies for 9 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) in Category I of the Certified Wildlife Biologist® Renewal/Professional Development Certificate Program.

Contact Workshop Manager for Questions: Ivan Parr, workshops@tws-west.org