Cameras and Critters: The Secret Life of a Wetland Preserve | Swaner EcoCenter

07/21/2025

Nestled between a major interstate, bustling shopping area, cozy condos, and idyllic neighborhoods sits an unsuspecting environmental oasis. Swaner Nature Preserve doesn't seem like much, to the passerby it may seem like an empty swath of grassland. If you look closer, you may notice a family of kestrels teaching their scraggly fledglings to fly and hunt, a momma moose and her two calves feasting on fresh willow branches, or a lonely badger sneaking into its cool den.

Swaner Preserve is host to 52 species of animals, not including nearly 170 species of birds. Approximately 80% of animals in Utah will utilize a wetland during their lives, but only 1% of Utah is made up of wetlands and 75% of those wetlands surround the Great Salt Lake. The Preserve's wetlands serve as an essential resource for animals that live in or pass through Park City, acting as a place for critters to rest, cool off, forage, access water, raise young, and more.

In our mission to restore critical wetland habitat, camera traps are a resource we use to monitor wildlife on the Preserve and help direct conservation efforts. Our conservation team generally has 3-5 camera traps deployed during the summer at any given time. This helps us know what critters are using the Preserve and how they are using it. Camera traps or "trail cams" are motion sensor cameras, built to withstand the elements. They are often used by hunters, wildlife researchers, and wildlife enthusiasts. Our team strategically chooses areas with signs of wildlife activity to place the trail cams. The cameras are mounted to a t-post, existing post, or tree. The cameras then capture images for 2-3 weeks before our team collects and sorts through imagery to separate blank photos and identify animals in the photos.

So far, our camera traps have captured a variety of wildlife across the preserve. On Kimball Creek, a Great Blue Heron perches on the streambank, fishing for its next meal. Mule Deer cautiously lead their fawn through the willows, grazing along the way. Fox and coyotes scurry past. The occasional butterfly lingers on the grass long enough to be captured in a photo. Trail cams are an important resource for conservation and outreach at Swaner Preserve, and helpful to habitat restoration for the species that live there.

Our camera traps require a whopping 8 AA batteries each! Which can be wasteful(and not to mention expensive!), this year we switched to PaleBlue AA rechargeable batteries to further our mission to preserve and restore natural lands both on and off the Preserve. Want to cut down on your single battery use? Check out our gift shop, where we sell reusable PaleBlue batteries! Looking to borrow a camera trap and see what critters are in your yard? Reach out to USU Extension Summit County, contact Elizabeth Cohen.

Check out recent sightings below and previous years' highlights here.


```
(function() { document.querySelectorAll('.carousel-
control[data-slide="prev"]').forEach(function(prevControl)
{ prevControl.setAttribute('aria-label', 'Previous'); });
document.querySelectorAll('.carousel-control[data-
slide="next"]').forEach(function(nextControl)
{ nextControl.setAttribute('aria-label', 'Next'); });
```

```
document.addEventListener('DOMContentLoaded',
function() { // Query all images within the
fourColumnCarousel inside embed-feed const
images = document.querySelectorAll('.embed-
feed .fourColumnCarousel .img-fluid'); images.forEach(img
=> { // If the image alt attribute is empty or missing,
set it to "Article thumbnail" if (!img.getAttribute('alt') ||
img.getAttribute('alt').trim() === '') { img.setAttribute('alt',
"Article thumbnail"); } }); }); })(); // Closes the IIFE
```

Location, Hours & Contact

Physical & Mailing Address
1258 Center Drive
Park City, Utah 84098

EcoCenter Hours
Wednesday – Sunday, 10 am – 4 pm

Email
swanerecocenter@usu.edu

Phone
435-649-1767

Directions, Parking, & Transit View Staff Directory

- Swaner EcoCenter Facebook page
- Swaner EcoCenter Instagram page

Events

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<script type="text/javascript" src="//www.trumba.com/
scripts/spuds.js"></script> <script type="text/javascript">
$Trumba.addSpud({ webName: "extension-swaner-
ecocenter", spudType : "upcomingpreview" , spudConfig :
"SpudConfig2" , teaserBase : "https://extension.usu.edu/
swaner/calendar" }); </script>  View Full Swaner Preserve
& EcoCenter Calendar
```