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Orocopia Mountains

Endangered Desert Legacy



Location: The Orocopia Mountains area is located in the Colorado Desert, in Riverside County, to the east of Mecca and the south of Chiriaco Summit. The area is located to the north of the Chocolate Mountains Aerial Gunnery Range, to the south of Interstate 10 and Joshua Tree National Park, to the east of the Mecca Hills Wilderness, to the northeast of the Salton Sea, and to the west of the Chuckwalla Mountains Wilderness. This area abuts the existing Orocopia Mountains Wilderness area in four separate locations.

Management Agency: Bureau of Land Management, Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office

Description: The area provides a striking landscape of open desert valleys, ridges, and dramatically colored and eroded canyons, primarily created by the San Andreas Fault. The canyons and washes are deep and often extremely long, with exposed walls, shaded in red, brown, yellow, and black. Elevations range from about 130 feet to about 3,000 feet.

Wildlife and Plants: The area is habitat to several at-risk species including the protected desert bighorn sheep, the threatened desert tortoise, and the endangered triple-ribbed milk-vetch. Numerous other species can be found here, including the Alverson's foxtail cactus, American badger (photo above), chaparral sand-verbena, cheeseweed owlfly, Cove's cassia, Deep Canyon snapdragon, Emory's crucifixion-thorn, Harwood's milk-vetch, Las Animas colubrine, Latimer's woodland-gilia, Mecca-aster, Orocopia sage, pallid bat, pallid San Diego pocket mouse, Palm Springs pocket mouse, and pocketed free-tailed bat. A species of plant new to science, *Euphorbia jaegeri* (Orocopia Mountains Spurge) (photo above, used with permission of Keir Morse), was recently found in the Orocopia Mountains; it has been found in only one other location.

The Orocopia Mountains area has been designated critical habitat for the desert tortoise. The California Department of Fish and Wildlife has also recognized this area as a wildlife migration corridor.

Activities: This area is frequented by hikers, campers, bird watchers, nature enthusiasts, photographers, star gazers and others seeking the solitude and beauty this area offers. Scientists and archeology enthusiasts enjoy visiting this area, due to the discovery of fossilized remains of prehistoric animals resembling horses, camels, deer, and ancient marine mollusks in this area. Traces of historic trade routes used by indigenous people have also found here. Off-roaders traverse several trails located near this area, including the Meccacopia Jeep Trail, Red Canyon Jeep Trail, and the Bradshaw Trail. Bighorn sheep and mule deer live in the Orocopia Mountains, making this area desirable to hunters.

