

“Capturing” Wildlife in the McDowell Sonoran Preserve

One of the priorities of the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy (MSC) is to understand how climate change and urban stressors affect natural resources in Scottsdale’s McDowell Sonoran Preserve. To accomplish this, we conduct long-term monitoring of animal and plant species.

Since 2016, MSC has been using wildlife cameras (pictured to the right) to non-intrusively document mammals in the Preserve. This passive monitoring technique enables us to determine wildlife populations in different areas of the Preserve and how development, recreation, and other pressures affect species presence and movement.



This past year, we designed a wildlife camera study with over 60 cameras deployed across the entire Preserve using global standards. We selected locations that would be the best for capturing the entire mammal community and a few ground-dwelling birds, like the Greater Roadrunner (left).

Stewards were instrumental in setting up the wildlife cameras (right). In addition, many stewards are trained in species identification through photos. This data will enable us to know what species are present, their movement, and relative habit use. Over time, these parameters identify trends that are used to inform management decisions.



So far, we have found that the Preserve supports a diverse wildlife community. With our new study design, we are capturing more cryptic species such as skunks, badgers, and mountain lions. We have even documented a new skunk species, the American hog-nosed skunk! (left)