

Although Pinnacles National Park is not home to such charismatic megafauna as bison, bears, or blue whales, it supports healthy populations of many kinds of smaller animals such as bobcats, bats, and bees. There are 149 species of birds, 49 mammals, 22 reptiles, 8 amphibians, 69 butterflies, 40 dragonflies and damselflies, nearly 400 bees, and many thousands of other invertebrates.

While we often associate certain animals with particular habitats, many animals require more than one type of habitat to meet all of their needs. For example, bats that roost in caves may forage for insects above water, dragonflies that spend most of their lives near water may hunt above chaparral, and animals living throughout the Park will leave their usual habitat to visit watering holes. Subsequently, some of the best wildlife habitat is near the edge where one type of habitat meets another. Much of Pinnacles is covered by a mosaic of different habitats, resulting in a great diversity and abundance of habitat edges. Miles of hiking trails traverse these edges, offering great wildlife viewing opportunities.

Pinnacles is also a place of edges on a broader geographic scale. It is at the interface of northern and southern, coastal and inland, wet and dry. For example, the Bernardino dotted-blue butterfly and the phainopepla reach the northernmost extent of their ranges near here, and the chestnut-backed chickadee is not found much farther south. Demonstrating the interplay of wet and dry, a Gabilan slender salamander and a desert night lizard may live together in the same decaying log.

Aside from being a place of edges, Pinnacles is also an island. It is an island of fairly intact natural habitat in a sea of growing human development. Pinnacles and the surrounding area is the only home of the big-eared kangaroo rat, Gabilan slender salamander, Pinnacles shield-back katydid, and Pinnacles riffle beetle. But it is also a refuge for many common species typical of California. We may currently take these species for granted, but as natural habitats throughout California continue to diminish, these species will become much less common and widespread. The Park was once home to the California grizzly bear, black bear, and foothill yellow-legged frog, and, in 2003, after a hiatus, again became home to the California condor. Though humans have extirpated some of the large animals, and we have lost certain vulnerable species, healthy populations of many animals appear to be strong within Pinnacles' protected boundaries.

In order to protect wildlife at Pinnacles, animals may not be fed, captured, or harassed in any way. Binoculars are a great tool for observing all sorts of wildlife from butterflies to frogs to falcons, because they provide a close-up view from a distance that does not disturb the animals. If you have an interesting wildlife sighting, please take careful notes on where, when, and what you saw and report it to a Park employee.