

# Monday Newsmaker: Ginny Short protects nature at Coachella Valley Preserve

James Folmer, The Desert Sun 9:15 p.m. PST December 15, 2013



(Photo: Nick Bolland/The Desert Sun)

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Ginny Short manages the Center for Natural Lands Management's Thousand Palms and McCallum Oases Preserve and the Dos Palmas Preserve. She also conducts conservation easement compliance activities on several conservation easements held by the center in the Coachella Valley.

Joining the center in 2007, she brought with her over 10 years of experience in biological monitoring, habitat restoration, and GIS and statistical analysis.

She has many years of monitoring experience, including surveying for least Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii pusillus*), willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii*), nesting birds, Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard (*Uma inornata*) and rare plants such as the Coachella Valley milkvetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *coachellae*) and Mecca aster (*Xylorhiza cognata*).

She also has many years of banding experience with terns raptors, and songbirds. She is experienced in wildlife rehabilitation, with training as a docent at the Los Angeles Zoo and the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium in San Pedro. More recent interests include studying the reptiles and amphibians of Southern California and the ecology and natural history of the Desert Pupfish (*Cyprinodon macularius*). Short has experience working with many listed and vulnerable species.

Short received a bachelor's degree in biology from California State University, Long Beach, and completed her master's degree in evolution, ecology and organismal biology from the University of California, Riverside, in 2008.

(**VIDEO:** Ginny Short talks about her favorite places at the Coachella Valley Preserve) (<http://www.mydesert.com/videonetwork/2925369897001>)

**QUESTION:** You've been manager of the Coachella Valley Preserve for the Center for Natural Lands Management since 2007. How did you land this position?

**ANSWER:** I have always been passionate about the desert southwest. I am also an avid conservationist. This position allows me to bring together my expertise in arid-land ecology and my passion for conservation. The mission of the Center for Natural Lands Management coalesces nicely with my interest in preservation, perpetual management, education, appropriate public use and cooperative management. I love the stark and extreme landscape of the preserve from the enigmatic palms to the creosote scrub under bright blue desert skies and am honored to be a part of the center's mission.

**The 880-acre preserve is part of a larger system that covers over 18,000 acres. Much of the land around the preserve is owned by the federal Bureau of Land Management and is designated as an Area of Conservation and Ecological Concern. And it is contiguous to the remote Indio Hills State Park and the sand-blown habitat of the endangered fringe-toed lizard. Tell us about the overall mission.**

Yes, there are multiple partners co-managing the Coachella Valley Preserve. In addition to the BLM and California State Parks, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service together with Center for Natural Lands Management comprise the major landowners in the Coachella Valley Preserve.

The preserve was formed to conserve an ecosystem that ultimately provides some of the sand that forms the beautiful sand dunes on the southern edge of the preserve. Ongoing management aims to keep that ecosystem healthy and functioning, including wind- and water-driven forces. The system is set aside for several rare, threatened and endangered species found only here in the Coachella Valley.

**What kind of animals do you see on a regular basis? What rare sightings do you recall? Yellow bats? Rosy boas? Swainson's hawks? Pupfish?**

Interesting question. Unfortunately, many people will only see a fraction of the wildlife here, as many of these animals are active in our desert summer, and tend to be dormant in the winter when most people visit. Winter visitors will see birds including the iconic Phainopepla and perhaps the Great Horned Owl that inhabits many of the palms oases. Bobcats are often spotted slinking through the palms or down a desert wash.

I have seen yellow bats, but those are best spotted on our fabulous Night Hikes with the help of a bat detector. We get a lot of birds in migration, including, but not limited to, great flocks of soaring Swainson's hawks.

**Your trail stewards and docents are all volunteers. How many are there? Are volunteer opportunities available?**

We do not charge an entrance fee, so the help of our fabulous volunteer force is essential. We always have room for more! It is a fun job, getting to know the people from all around the world who visit this preserve.

Docents work in a distinctive Palm Log cabin and have the opportunity to learn about the history of the preserve and answer visitors' questions as well as help them to discover, enjoy and appreciate the preserve. You will learn about the cabin, the fault, the trails and the critters that live here. We are often in need of additional docents to staff the Visitors Center.

**The San Andreas Fault runs right through the preserve. Is that your most popular attraction?**

Yes, the Mission Creek branch of the fault runs through the Thousand Palms Oasis Preserve. Much of the McCallum trail either follows the fault or parallels it. It is certainly one of the first questions many of our visitors ask: "Where can I see the fault?"

Unlike other regions we can't show you a crack in the ground. However, the palms are growing where water is seeping up through the fault in "fault springs". You may notice several palm oases along the foot of the Indio Hills. When you see these palms you are seeing one of the many fault features that are evident along the fault.

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