Increased hiking and mountain biking are associated with declines in urban mammal activity

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Outdoor recreation can have negative consequences for many wildlife species (Larson et al. 2019, 2016; Monz et al. 2013; Sato et al. 2013). Increasingly, parks and preserves are embedded in a landscape of urban and suburban development (Radeloff et al. 2010), intensifying the exposure of remaining wildlife populations to human activity (Larson et al. 2018). In California, several research groups have studied wildlife responses to recreation in parks and preserves within densely populated coastal cities. Some of the resulting studies have documented negative effects, including declines in native mammal occupancy and detection rates (Patten and Burger 2018; Reed and Merenlender 2008) and reduced daytime activity (George and Crooks 2006), while others have found limited effects of recreation on wildlife occupancy and detection rates (Markovchick-Nicholls et al. 2008; Reilly et al. 2017). Managers need context-specific understanding of the nature and severity of recreation effects on wildlife to sustainably manage recreational use in protected areas, the vast majority of which are open to the public (Leung et al. 2018; UNEP-WCMC and IUCN 2019).

Experimental tests of recreation effects on wildlife can provide valuable insight into species' responses to human activity by minimizing variation in other factors that affect wildlife, such as residential development and vegetation composition. However, fewer than one-third of studies of recreation effects on wildlife include an experimental component (Larson et al. 2016), and a large proportion of experimental treatments exclusively measure immediate reactions of wildlife to an approaching human, often using flight initiation distance (e.g., Ikuta and Blumstein 2003; Jorgensen et al. 2016; Keeley and Bechard 2011). These immediate responses cause increased energy expenditure and can trigger trade-offs between

foraging and flight behaviors (Duchesne et al. 2000), but it is less clear how they may translate into longer-term habitat degradation due to the regular presence of recreationists. It can be logistically difficult to experimentally alter the level of recreation on a trail segment or within a defined area, but when successfully implemented such studies have documented increased presence of nest predators (Gutzwiller et al. 2002) and reduced numbers of bird territories and bird species richness (Bötsch et al. 2017).

Conservation of mammals in densely populated and fragmented habitats such as southern California requires an understanding of the suitability of remaining habitat patches (Crooks 2002; Ordeñana et al. 2010), many of which receive high levels of recreational use (Larson et al. 2018). In this study, we assessed whether increased recreation rates were associated with reduced habitat suitability for native mammals. We conducted an opportunistic, quasi-experimental study of recreation effects on mammals using a before-after-control-impact (BACI) design, taking advantage of the closure and re-opening of an existing recreational trail in an open space park in San Diego, California. We expected that at impact locations (sampling points on the trail that was closed and re-opened), hiking and mountain biking would increase and wildlife activity would decline after the trail re-opened, while human and wildlife activity would remain similar at control locations (sampling points on trails consistently open throughout the study) within the same reserve.

The study was conducted in Black Mountain Open Space Park (32.984, -117.117) in San Diego, California, USA, which is owned and managed by the City of San Diego. The park is 951 ha, comprised primarily of coastal sage scrub and chaparral vegetation communities with some riparian and native and non-native grassland habitats. Dense suburban communities surround the park, and it contains approximately 32 kilometers of multi-use trails visited primarily by hikers and mountain bikers. The park also permits leashed dogs on the trails.

We established a total of seven sampling points on official and unofficial trails within the park in January 2017. Two points were located along the Miner's Ridge loop trail ("impact points", Figure 1), which was closed to public access from January 2017 until April 2018 for testing and remediation of elevated levels of arsenic detected in the soil. Five points were located along nearby trails not affected by the closure ("control points"; Figure 1). Point locations were selected as part of a larger project using a spatially balanced random design using the RRQRR algorithm on rasterized trail network data (Theobald et al. 2007).

To monitor human and mammal activity, we installed one motion-triggered camera (Bushnell TrophyCam HD Aggressor) at each sampling point, housed in metal security boxes and affixed to metal poles pounded into the soil facing recreational trails. We did not bait the cameras to avoid influencing animal activity (Wearn and Glover-Kapfer 2019). Cameras were programmed to take two photos per trigger with a five second delay between triggers. We began monitoring human and mammal activity at the impact points in late October 2017, leaving cameras running continuously until after the trail re-opened in April 2018. At the control points, we collected data between November 2017 and February 2018. After the trail re-opened, cameras operated at all seven sampling points for at least four weeks, ending in June 2018 (Table 1).

The seven cameras captured over 80,000 photos during the study period. Many of these were "false triggers" caused by rapidly growing vegetation, high temperatures, and wind, mostly in the mid-morning to late afternoon. Therefore, we randomly subsampled 20% of photos between 11 am and 5 pm at all sampling points to reduce time spent sorting
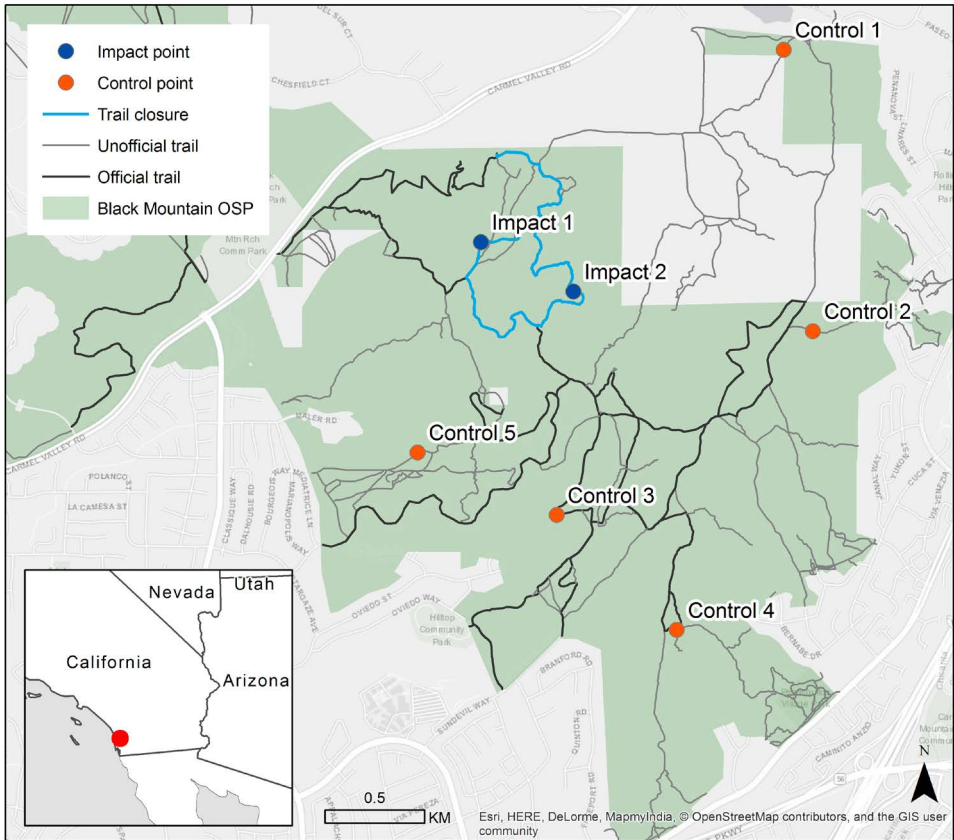
Figure 1. Location and sampling design of the before-after-control-impact (BACI) study conducted in Black Mountain Open Space Park in San Diego, CA, USA.

Table 1. Dates of camera data collection before and after the trail re-opened at impact and control sampling points at Black Mountain Open Space Park. Cameras were not installed or did not operate correctly on all days between the first and last sampling day; the "total days" columns report the number of days on which cameras were operational.

	Sampling effort before trail re-opened			Sampling effort after trail re-opened		
Point	First day	Last day	Total days	First day	Last day	Total days
Impact 1	1 Nov 2017	17 Apr 2018	134	19 Apr 2018	31 May 2018	43
Impact 2	1 Nov 2017	17 Apr 2018	168	19 Apr 2018	28 Apr 2018	27
Control 1	12 Dec 2017	1 Feb 2018	26	18 May 2018	30 May 2018	13
Control 2	12 Dec 2017	1 Feb 2018	26	4 May 2018	31 May 2018	28
Control 3	18 Nov 2017	13 Dec 2017	5	4 May 2018	30 May 2018	22
Control 4	18 Nov 2017	22 Dec 2017	26	4 May 2018	30 May 2018	28
Control 5	19 Nov 2017	22 Dec 2017	21	4 May 2018	31 May 2018	29

photos. Photos were organized in the Colorado Parks & Wildlife Photo Warehouse (Ivan and Newkirk 2016). Humans appearing in photos were categorized by activity (pedestrian, cyclist, equestrian, or vehicle) and animals were identified to species, except for brush rabbit (*Sylvilagus bachmani*) and desert cottontail (*S. audubonii*), which are difficult to distinguish in photos and were both labeled "rabbit."

To assess changes in human activity before and after the trail re-opened, we compared mean people per day at impact and control points using a non-parametric Wilcoxon-Mann-Whitney test since the data are counts. To assess changes in mammal habitat use before and after the trail re-opened, we used single-species occupancy models for each mammal species with sufficient detections using the R package *unmarked* (Fiske and Chandler 2011). Detection data were pooled into 5-day sampling occasions, resulting in ten survey occasions with five before and five after the trail re-opening. We did not include habitat covariates because minimal changes in habitat occurred between the sampling periods and because our primary goal was to investigate the interaction of treatment (control or impact sampling point) and time period (before or after the trail re-opened). Therefore, treatment and time period were the only variables included in the models, and we included the interaction (treatment*period) to test whether species showed a response to the trail re-opening. When a species was predicted to occur at all or nearly all sampling points, we assessed changes in detection probability rather than occupancy as a measure of relative activity or frequency of habitat use (Lewis et al. 2015; Wang et al. 2015).

Across all sampling points and time periods, there were an average (± 1 SD) of 12.2 ± 21.7 hikers, 7.2 ± 10.0 cyclists, 1.7 ± 3.2 dogs, and 0.01 ± 0.2 horseback riders per day at each sampling point, as well as infrequent motorized vehicles (park staff or utility personnel) at one sampling point where the trail was drivable. These recreation rates are relatively low compared to other parks and preserves in the region (Larson et al. 2018). People did not cease using the trail while it was closed, with the two impact points averaging 18.0 ± 15.8 and 20.4 ± 14.9 people per day during the closure (Figure 2). However, human activity approximately doubled at the impact points after the trail re-opened, averaging 38.2 ± 28.9 and 38.9 ± 19.6 per day (time period differences: $P < 0.001$). At the control points, human activity was similar between time periods (all $P > 0.33$) except for Control 5, which averaged 5.7 ± 8.1 people per day before and 23.2 ± 13.0 after the trail re-opened ($P < 0.001$). Control 5, located on an unofficial trail, is not part of the most obvious loop routes that could be made using the closed trail, but it could be connected with a longer loop route using unofficial trails, and therefore may have experienced depressed visitation rates during the closure period. Therefore, we ran additional occupancy models in which Control 5 was considered an impact point to ensure our results were robust to this possibility.

Mammal species we detected included rabbits (*Sylvilagus spp.*, total photos n = 537), coyotes (*Canis latrans*, n = 409), bobcats (*Lynx rufus*, n = 135), California ground squirrels (*Otospermophilus beecheyi*, n = 22), black-tailed jackrabbits (*Lepus californicus*, n = 4), raccoons (*Procyon lotor*, n = 2), and mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*, n = 1). However, only the bobcat, coyote, and rabbit were detected frequently enough for analysis. Bobcats were detected at six out of seven sampling points, and coyotes and rabbits were detected at all seven points; accordingly, we used detection probability rather than occupancy as our primary variable measuring changes in frequency of habitat use for all three species. At sampling points where they were detected, each species was detected at least once before and after the trail re-opening.
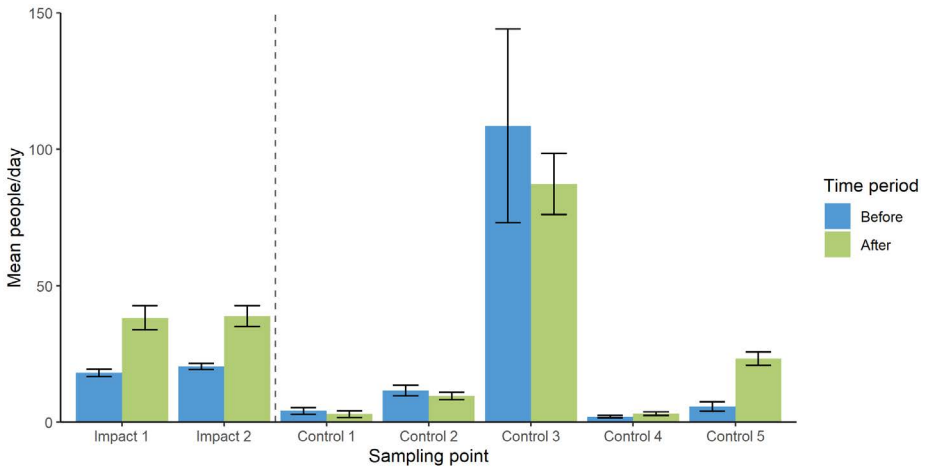
Figure 2. Human activity (mean people per day) before and after the Miners Ridge Loop trail re-opened at impact and control sampling points at Black Mountain Open Space Park. Error bars show one standard error. Differences between time periods were significant ($p < 0.05$ using a t-test) at Impact 1, Impact 2, and Control 5. The vertical dotted line divides the impact points (left) from the control points (right).

Occupancy models showed that detection probability was reduced at impact points after the trail re-opened for bobcats and coyotes, while remaining approximately the same at the control points (Figure 3). The effect was particularly strong for bobcats, with detection probability dropping from 0.90 ± 0.09 to 0.40 ± 0.15 at impact points after the trail re-opened while detection probability at control points increased slightly from 0.53 ± 0.13 to 0.65 ± 0.12. The interaction of treatment*period for bobcats was significant ($z = 2.15$, $P = 0.03$). Coyotes were detected at impact points during nearly every occasion before the trail re-opened (detection probability of 1.00 ± 0.001) but afterwards detection probability dropped to 0.70 ± 0.14, while detection probability increased slightly at control points from 0.79 ± 0.09 to 0.82 ± 0.08. However, the interaction term was not significant for coyotes ($z = 0.14$, $P = 0.89$). Rabbit detection probability did not differ significantly in relation to time period or treatment (interaction term $z = 0.52$, $P = 0.61$). Results did not change for bobcats or rabbits when Control 5 was considered an impact rather than a control point, but for coyotes patterns became less clear, with detection probability dropping more at control than impact points after the trail re-opened.

The number of sampling points was small due to the opportunistic nature of our study, limiting our ability to detect an effect of altered recreation rates on wildlife activity. Therefore, the fact that we still observed reduced activity rates by bobcats and, to a lesser extent, coyotes is particularly notable. Our findings echo those of previous studies in the region, which have found that these species and other mammals avoid human presence on short time scales (same-day occurrence; Patten and Burger 2018), and restrict their activity
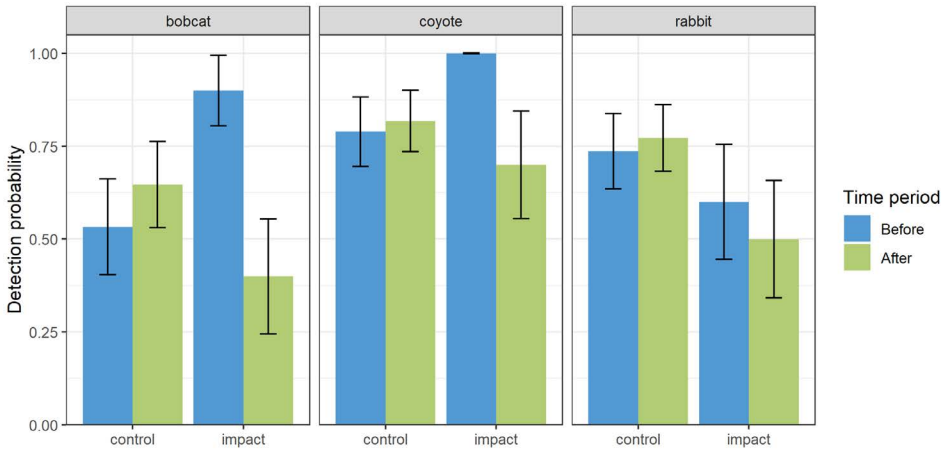
Figure 3. Predicted detection probabilities from single-species occupancy models for bobcats, coyotes, and rabbits before and after the Miners Ridge Loop trail re-opened at impact and control sampling points at Black Mountain Open Space Park. Error bars show one standard error. The interaction term for treatment*period was significant ($P < 0.05$) for bobcats.

in high human-use areas (George and Crooks 2006). We observed greater responsiveness in bobcats than in coyotes. While both carnivore species have shown sensitivity to recreation in previous studies (Patten and Burger, 2018; Reed and Merenlender 2008), coyotes can be relatively tolerant of human disturbance due to their adaptable behavior and omnivorous diet (Riley et al. 2003; Ordeñana et al. 2010). We did not observe changes in rabbit activity rates in connection with increased human activity, or by extension, reduced predator activity. Their smaller home ranges compared to bobcats and coyotes may mean that they are less able to shift their within-home range habitat use in response to short-term changes in human and predator activity.

Previous studies have also found that these species may shift their diel activity patterns to be more nocturnal in areas with higher human use (George and Crooks 2006; Reilly et al. 2017; Wang et al. 2015; Nickel et al. 2020). While shifts in diel activity patterns may have occurred in our system, overall activity levels were lower after the trail was re-opened, indicating than any temporal shift did not completely mitigate effects of human presence. However, despite changes in activity levels (as measured by detection probability), we did not observe changes in the occupancy status of the sampling points, suggesting that while the habitat may have been somewhat degraded, it was not completely unsuitable after the trail re-opened. Given the relatively small size of the park and its highly developed surroundings, reduced use of impact points by bobcats and coyotes likely indicates a partial shift in habitat use to other areas of the park. Bobcats slightly increased their use of the control points after the trail re-opened, perhaps suggesting such a shift, though this difference was negligible for coyotes.

Future experimental manipulations at larger spatial and temporal scales could help assess the consistency of our findings, increase the precision of estimated detection probability parameters, and assess responses of additional wildlife species. The opportunistic nature of our study design resulted in spatial separation of the impact and control points,

which may have limited their ability to serve as true replicates due to spatial autocorrelation (Legendre 1993). A true experimental design with randomly assigned treatment and control locations would provide stronger evidence of recreation effects, such as the study by Bötsch et al. (2017) which documented reductions in bird territory establishment in response to low levels of recreation compared to areas with no recreation. Coordination with volunteer groups and docent-led programs or using recorded human voices (e.g., Suraci et al. 2019; Ware et al. 2015) could make it more feasible to experimentally apply treatments that simulate higher levels of recreation.

Though the level of human activity approximately doubled after the trail was re-opened, we speculate that the difference may not have been obvious to recreationists. Forty people per day, approximately the average level of use after the trail re-opened, is still low compared to many other San Diego-area parks and preserves (Reed et al. 2019). However, this difference appears to have been perceptible and meaningful to wildlife, and perhaps crossed a critical threshold of disturbance causing reduced rates of use of the trail. Accordingly, habitat degradation near trails due to human disturbance is likely common across parks and preserves across the region.

Our findings highlight that wildlife can respond rapidly to changes in the levels of human disturbance, even when they have experienced similar levels of disturbance previously. Data collection for the 'after' period started immediately after the trail was re-opened and continued for four weeks. The observed reduction in detection probabilities suggests that bobcats, and to a lesser degree coyotes, may respond to changes in the relative intensity of human activity by rapidly altering their fine-scale habitat selection. Rapid avoidance responses to recreation have been previously documented for mountain caribou (Lesmerises et al. 2018) and bottlenose dolphins (Lusseau 2004), but it is not clear how short-term behavioral avoidance may translate to fitness or population impacts (Bejder et al. 2006). Higher recreation intensity was presumably not novel to these individuals since the trail had been open to recreation for many years prior to our study, which suggests that the animals were not fully tolerant of prior levels of human disturbance. It is therefore possible that for these species, habitat degradation from recreation could be relatively quickly reversed if human activity was limited to lower levels, or spatially or temporally constrained. Land and wildlife managers often use seasonal closures to protect wildlife during periods of heightened sensitivity such as the breeding period (Burger and Niles 2013; Coleman et al. 2013; Richardson and Miller 1997), but the efficacy of these closures is rarely tested. The rapid response we observed suggests that targeted temporal closures could be a promising approach for reducing impacts of recreation.

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Conceived and designed the study: CLL, SER, KRC
Collected the data: CLL
Performed the analysis of the data: CLL
Authored the manuscript: CLL
Provided critical revision of the manuscript: CLL, SER, KRC

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