

How many different types of animals are there in Foothills Park?

Talk about a hard question to answer. First of all the answer depends on what you mean by “types.”

Animals are part of something called a phylogenetic tree, or tree of life, which categorizes all living things on the planet into groups. At its base is the simplest, most ancient single celled organism. There is a branch, or split, any time there is a significant enough difference to tell two organisms apart.

After many branches you reach a large group called the animal kingdom; after many branches inside the animal kingdom you reach smaller groups called families; some are definitely not in Foothills Park, some are very likely to be in the park.

Animal types that you are likely to be able to find in Foothills Park are: spiders (from tiny to big and hairy), mites and ticks (easily found after off trail journeys through tall grass), crabs and lobster (ok crawfish not “real” lobsters), millipedes and centipedes (hiding under or in stuff usually), dragonflies, cockroaches, termites, grasshoppers, true bugs, beetles, ants/bees/wasps (have a picnic they will come), fleas, flies, butterflies/moths, roundworms, flatworms, earthworms, snails, perches, salmon/trout, catfish, frogs, salamanders/newts, turtles, snakes, lizards, ducks/geese, other birds, pouched mammals (opossums), mice/rats/squirrels, humans (technically speaking we are animals), bats, deer (even toed ungulates with sheep and cows) and dogs/cats.

Each one of these groups has many different species in it (except our group, we are the only member of it found anywhere near here). Even though there only about 33 “types” of animals that are likely to be found here, there is a very good chance there are hundreds of species, there may even be thousands.

I went and stood in front of the interpretive center for a couple of minutes this morning and saw: a Steller’s jay, a dark-eyed Junco, a black phoebe, a woodpecker, lots of ants, two deer and a red-tailed hawk. I took a very brief sample, for a minute or two (and only counted things that I happened to see), and found seven species of animals. Imagine how many you might be able to find if you spent the day here and looked carefully. I did not turn over any rocks, roll over any logs, look in leaf piles, check trees carefully, crawl around in the grass, look in or around the lake, watch the sky, walk on any trails or do anything except stand still. There is a whole world of cool critters out there for you to find if you want to look for them.

Please remember though, we are first and foremost a nature preserve, the plants and animals live here, we just visit. If you move something, or pick something up, please put it back as you found it. The only things you should take home are pictures and memories and only leave behind footprints.