

Where are the animals hiding in Foothills Park? Also, where did you get the deer skulls?

The animals are hiding all over Foothills Park! It is possible that you were in the park right next to an animal and did not see it.

Most animals have something called “cryptic coloration” meaning that they blend in with their usual surroundings. This makes it much harder for other animals, especially predators (including us), to see them. One of the main colors you will see on an animal in this area is some shade of brown. For most of the year many of the natural features in this area are also some shade of brown; many small plants like grasses are brown colored much of the year, lots of rock outcroppings are brown, tree trunks are brown, shady areas in the woods are at least dark or somewhat brown colored.

Many animals also have patterns on their skin/fur. A young fawn has lots of white spots on its body, this helps to break up the fawns outline making it harder to see. Gopher snakes are dark brown and light brown; if they are out in the open, like on a trail, they are easy to see, if they move into the grass they are very hard to see.

Most animals are also afraid of, or at least nervous to be around, us. We, even kids, are much bigger than many animals. The best thing for a scared animal to do is to hide, or move away from something scary. An animal that is being very still, in an area that it blends in with is very hard to see. Animals that are small enough can usually find something to hide, under or behind if they are afraid making it even more difficult to spot them.

My recommendation is to come back to the park on a variety of days, at various times of the day and walk on various trails. Try to be quiet and keep your eyes open. If you are not big and scary, animals will be less likely to try and hide from you. And don't forget the little animals, banana slugs are cool to find – remember they are the color of a fallen bay leaf and can be very hard to spot.

Most of our deer skulls were found in either Foothills Park or the Enid W. Pearson Arastradero Preserve by park staff, visitors or volunteers. The skulls that look clean and very neat were found very shortly after the animal died. The ones that look dirty and broken may have been outside exposed to the weather for years before someone spotted it. Sometimes we find an entire skull, sometimes just a lower jaw or the upper jaw or just an antler. It all depends on how lucky we are that day.