

Where are the animals in the morning? Dexter Age 6

I have two quick answers to this question: I don't exactly know and where ever they want to be.

There are some mornings when I arrive at work and see lots of animals everything from birds and bunny rabbits to coyotes, bobcats and deer. There are other days when don't see any animals at all!

The animals in Foothills Park (and our other open space preserves) are wild animals; we do not try to control them. Many factors make them hard to see or cause them to be somewhere that people are not.

This time of year (late spring/early summer) many young animals are being born, the mothers want to protect their babies and keep them out of sight, away from big, scary possible dangerous things like people.

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.

If the last few paragraphs look familiar, it is because I borrowed them from the "Where are the animals hiding in Foothills Park" Ask A Ranger question, the answers are just about the same.

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