



Don't Feed the Ground Squirrels!

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No Feeding Wildlife Ordinance to be Enforced at Berkeley's Cesar Chavez Park Warnings & \$100 Citations will begin in October

Berkeley, Calif. (September 29, 2014) — Enforcement of a new Berkeley ordinance prohibiting the feeding of wildlife in city parks and other public spaces will begin in October, with minimum fines of \$100 after the initial “warning” period and up to \$500 for multiple infractions within a year.

The ordinance enforcement — coupled with bright new “No Feeding” signs and brochures at Cesar Chavez Park — is aimed at safeguarding wildlife such as ground squirrels and gophers that could be harmed by food handouts. While people sometimes think that feeding wildlife is “kind,” it in fact endangers animals by causing malnutrition and overpopulation, spread of disease and loss of fear of humans.

The stakes at Cesar Chavez Park go beyond ground squirrels. The squirrels have a symbiotic relationship with Burrowing Owls—an at-risk “species of special concern”—as the owls depend on ground squirrels for their burrows to find shelter when they arrive each winter at Cesar Chavez Park.

The improved signage at Cesar Chavez Park and related fines are the result of a successful collaboration between the City of Berkeley, WildCare, Golden Gate Audubon and In Defense of Animals plus concerned individuals who worked over the past 4 months to develop a non-lethal approach to the City's “Rodent Abatement Pilot Plan,” which would have involved killing native ground squirrels and gophers.

The City of Berkeley hastened to pull its plan from the table when public outcry reached significant proportions. The plan was in response to the regional water board's requirement to reduce populations of burrowing animals perceived to be a threat to the landfill cap.

WildCare, Golden Gate Audubon Society and In Defense of Animals applaud the City for moving away from its original lethal plan in exchange for a compassionate and effective means of returning squirrel populations to naturally lower levels. This approach can serve as a nation-wide model for other parks faced with similar challenges where human feeding of wildlife has created an imbalance in wildlife populations.

For additional details and background:

Ground Squirrels: www.wildcarebayarea.org/feed

Burrowing Owls: goldengateaudubon.org/conservation/burrowing-owls/

Guardian Credo: <http://www.idausa.org/campaigns/the-guardian-campaign/the-guardian-credo/>

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