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An Integrated Approach to Understanding Behavioral Responses of Free-Living Mammals to Human-Induced Rapid Change

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Dr. Jennifer E. Smith and her students received a grant from Save Mount Diablo's **Mary Bowerman Science and Research Program** in 2018.

The grant, "An integrated approach to understanding behavioral responses of free-living mammals to human-induced rapid change," supported research addressing an an important issue in ecology, the ability for wildlife to cope with human-induced rapid environmental change.

A team of five undergraduates quantified variation in behavioral responses of a free-living mammal, the California ground squirrel, to being approached by humans. They found individual squirrels were consistent in their responses to human threats and that these consistent individual differences occurred along an urban gradient.

Beyond this, social factors and life stage of the animals influenced their sensitivity to humans. The team is currently working to understand whether the genetic composition of social groups further influences risk taking.

This collaborative research is part of the long-term project on the behavioral ecology of California ground squirrels at Briones Regional Park and led by Dr. Jennifer Smith, Associate Professor of Biology, at Mills College in Oakland, California (Behavioral Ecology Lab: www.JenniferElaineSmith.com).

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Top photo: Juvenile California ground squirrels emerging from below-ground burrow. Photo by Jennifer E. Smith.

Bottom photo: Adult and juvenile California ground squirrels socializing above ground. Photo by Jennifer E. Smith.

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