

SAMIA FOSTER

CALIFORNIA NATURALIST CAPSTONE PRESENTATION
LAKE TAHOE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
JUNE, 2021

[This presentation is geared towards elementary school kids and is meant to be in a classroom format. No props required.]

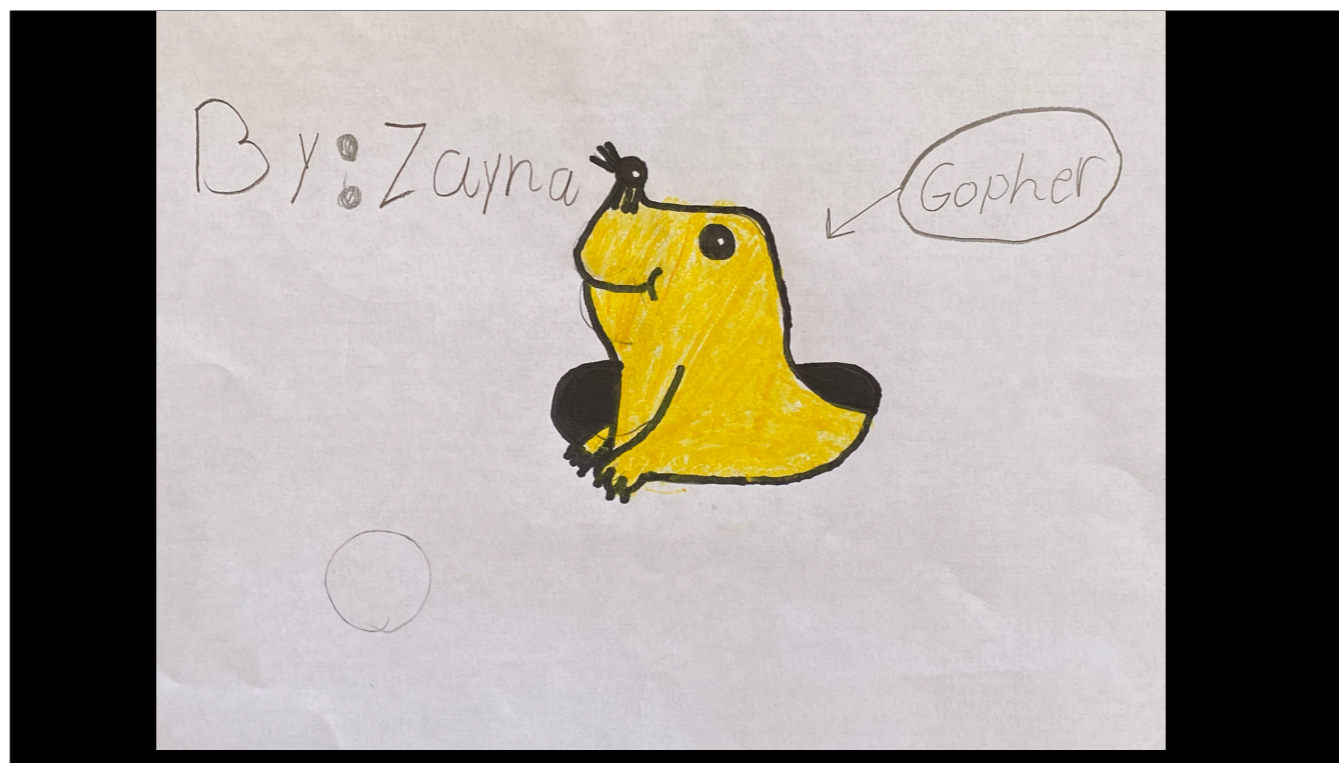
Hello! My name is [insert your name] and today I'd like to talk with you about a very special animal that lives in California.



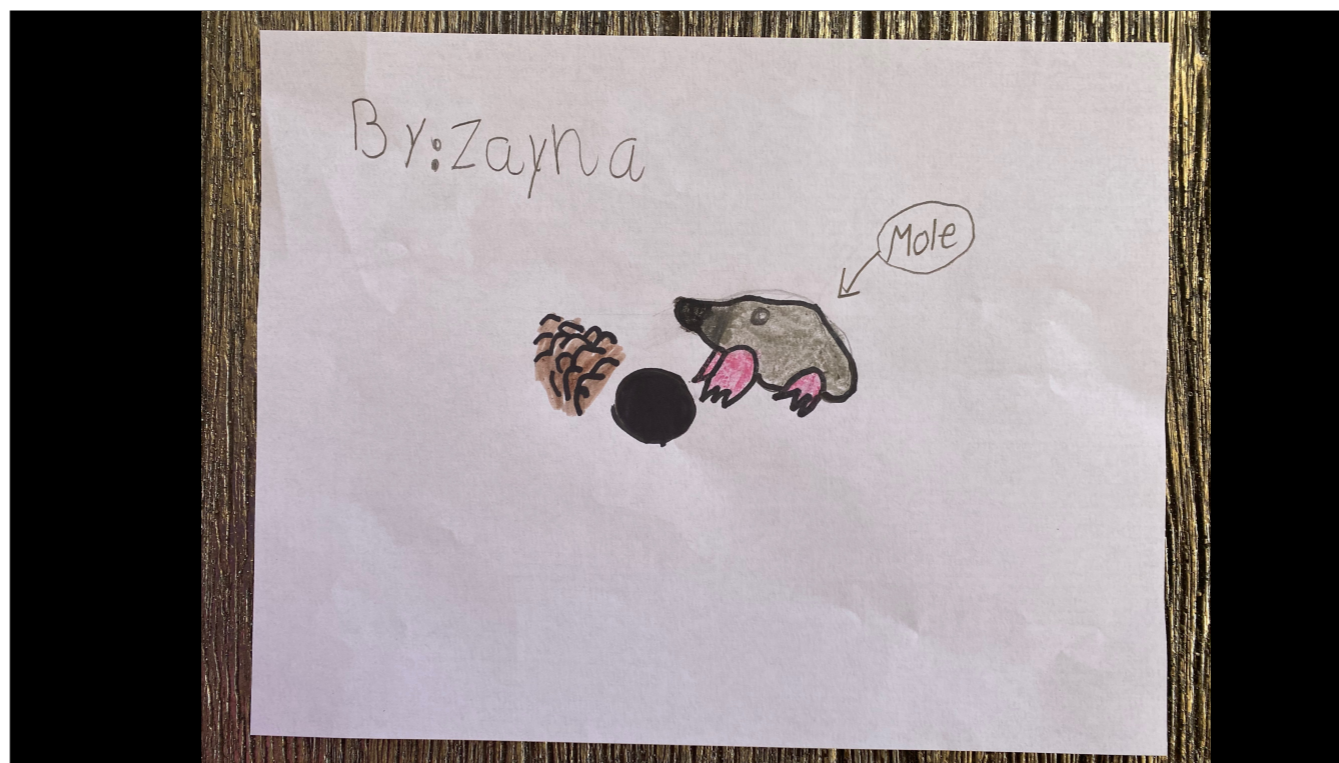
This animal nests in holes in the ground like this one. Can anyone guess which animal it might be?

[Give the group some time to think about this and to offer some ideas. If you have the time, you could have the kids draw the animal they think lives in this hole.]

Who thinks it's a mammal? Who thinks it's a reptile?



Do any of you think that a gopher lives in this hole?



What about a mole? These are both really good guesses, but they're not quite right.



Who thinks it's a rattlesnake? Maybe some other type of snake?



This nest actually belongs to a bird! Did anyone guess that? Have you ever heard of a bird that lives underground? Pretty strange, isn't it? But not if you're a burrowing owl!



Burrowing owls are pretty small for owls, but their long legs make them appear taller. They are about as tall as a soccer ball. They have a round head, bright yellow eyes, white eyebrows, and brown feathers with white spots. Male and female burrowing owls look alike, although the female owls are a bit larger.



Burrowing owls live throughout western North America and in a very large part of South America.

[Advance slide - photo will remain the same but a burrowing owl call will play]

This is how the owls call one another.

BURROWING OWLS IN CALIFORNIA

- Throughout most of the state except mountainous areas and northern coast
- Many live here all year, especially in the warmer areas (deserts, Central Valley)



In California, burrowing owls live throughout most of the state, except for areas in mountains and along the northern coast. Most burrowing owls living in California live here all year, but some are only here in winter or spring.

[Advance slide; picture will stay the same, but owl alerts will sound]

This is what the owls sound like when they alert each other about possible danger.

HABITAT

GRASSLANDS, SHORT VEGETATION,
AGRICULTURAL AREAS



Burrowing owls at the city of San Jose's owl preserve. (Photo courtesy City of San Jose)

Burrowing owls live in grassland and desert areas. Because they live mostly on the ground, they prefer areas with short vegetation where they can find food more easily. They primarily eat insects like grasshoppers and beetles, but they will also eat small mammals like voles.



While burrowing owls can fly, they prefer to be on the ground. You will usually find them standing near their burrows, but you may be able to spot them running along the ground as they hunt. They will often perch on a fence post or tree branch.

BURROWING OWL NESTS
ABANDONED BURROWS



Burrowing owls prefer to use burrows abandoned by other animals for their nests and for places to roost. They will use burrows created by prairie dogs, squirrels, badgers, and even tortoises. They can create their own burrows, but only if they can't find ones already made.

BURROWING OWL NESTS

ARTIFICIAL BURROWS



Burrowing owls will also use artificial burrows made from pipes, tubes and rocks. These burrows are usually located in areas where development has destroyed the owl's habitat. They can also be in agricultural areas, where the owls use drainage pipes and culverts as nests.

Can you think of a reason why they want to live underground?

[Give the kids a chance to answer before advancing the slide]

WHY DOES AN OWL BURROW UNDERGROUND?

- Cooler temperatures in hot climates
- Spend less energy building roosts and nests
- Hide from larger predators



In hot areas like the desert or much of California during the summer, the temperature underground is much cooler. That is one reason why the owls like to burrow. The owls can also save energy by using burrows that already exist. They are a bit lazy that way! And it's really hard for larger predators to see you if you're hiding underground.



Unfortunately, burrowing owls are declining in number, mainly due to loss of habitat. So whenever you're out in grassy or desert areas in California, make sure to look for burrowing owls on the ground. And since they hunt during the day, there's a good chance you could spot one. If you do, watch it for awhile — they're pretty entertaining!