



Girl Scout Educates Community on Rodenticide's Effects on Wildlife

Molly McNulty from Newbury Park, CA, earns her Gold Award

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Molly McNulty is a senior at Newbury Park High School. After noticing an increasing amount of reports on the death of regional predators, such as mountain lions, from the consumption of rodenticide, she became inspired to educate her community on the impact of these harmful chemicals on wildlife. Focusing on local owl populations, she noted that the owl boxes at a nearby elementary school needed to be revamped as well. Seeking to both protect the community's owl population and give them a safe resting place, Molly set out to begin her journey to the Girl Scout Gold Award.

Molly began by researching the harmful effects of rodenticide on animals. "People in my community use rodenticide to kill rats, rather than other ways to get rid of rodents," she said. To learn more, she reached out to three different wildlife experts: Sean Anderson, an environmental studies professor at California State University Channel Islands; Cathy Schoonmaker, an urban wildland conservation specialist; and Jaclyn DeSantis, head of the Ojai Raptor Center.

As a local mountain lion expert, Mr. Anderson educated Molly on rodenticide and its effects on wildlife. Molly was also able to attend an Arbor Earth Day festival where she met with additional rodenticide presenters. She joined Cathy Schoonmaker to assess the owl boxes at Sycamore Canyon School and discuss more optimal locations, while Jaclyn DeSantis gave Molly a tour of the Ojai Raptor Center facility and helped coordinate owl adoptions for the new boxes.

The previous owl boxes at Sycamore Canyon School had holes that were too small, were facing the wrong direction and did not have sunroofs for shading. Molly reached out to the school's principal, Mr. Hedin, for permission to install a new owl box in the school's garden. Roslyn Stewart, a member of the Home Owner's Association, donated an owl box to Molly that had been made by a local Boy Scout by following instructions from the Ojai Raptor Center. With the help of her dad and grandpa, Molly modified the box by adding a sunroof, staining it, and attaching a pole. They brought all of the supplies to the school and gave the maintenance crew, including Sycamore Garden Coordinator and Molly's project advisor, Jo Louie, instruction on how to install it.



Molly arranged for a pair of barn owls from the Raptor Center to be rehomed in the new boxes, which was done in a presentation in front of the school. They were able to borrow a ladder from the fire department to reach the tall boxes. "About 200 people showed up, and Jaclyn DeSantis and I each did a short presentation before the release," she said. "I handed out flyers that summarized my presentation, as well as some stickers that were donated to me by the Santa Monica Mountain Fund. After, everyone gathered in the parking lot to see Ms. DeSantis place them in the box."

Additionally, Molly gave presentations and led workshops in each fifth-grade classroom at Sycamore Canyon School. She taught students about the dangers of rodenticide and how owls are an alternative, natural way to get rid of rats. Mr. Anderson lent her a mountain lion pelt and skull for the classrooms to view. As part of the workshop, students were also provided real owl pellets to dissect and signed a pledge to stop using rodenticide.

Through bake sales at baseball fields, homemade cookie sales, a Home Depot donation, and Sycamore Canyon Garden PTSA donation, Molly was able to cover all of her project's expenses. This included an array of materials for the owl box, packaging and ingredients for the bake sales, fees to rehome the owls, and owl pellets for the fifth graders' workshops.

Articles about Molly's project were featured in a local magazine and newspaper, further educating the public on the impact of rodenticide. Molly hopes that the newly installed boxes at Sycamore Canyon School will lead to additional generations of local barn owls. "The audience at the owl rehoming presentation was very engaged," she said. "I convinced most of my audience to stop using rodenticide. This will lead to [fewer] deaths of the local wildlife and possibly even a population increase." Molly also provided the fifth-grade teachers at the school with her presentation and worksheets so that they could continue the workshop in future classes.

In particular, Molly would like to thank Jo Louie, Mr. Hedin, and Jaclyn DeSantis for the advice, guidance, and coordination throughout her project. "My project could not have been possible without the help of my team," she said. "I got to know many wildlife professionals in my area, and I learned that in the future I may be interested in a career in zoology or environmental science. I learned that I could make so much of a difference in my community and I gained more confidence in my leadership skills."

To learn more about the Girl Scout Gold Award and how you can begin creating lasting change in your neighborhood and beyond, click [here](#).

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