

NATIVE FLORA & FAUNA FACTS WITH SFC

Discovering the Home of a Trapdoor Spider

By **DAVID M. WEBER**
Sierra Foothill Conservancy docent

Alright, first the disclaimer. Although this is an article on the Trapdoor Spider, I am neither an expert nor

even a budding field biologist. I'm just a hike docent for the Sierra Foothill Conservancy (SFC) who loves being outside, loves spending time on the SFC preserves, and loves to watch the raw

excitement in hike participants (both young and old) upon discovery of something new and fascinating in our natural world.

The home of the Trapdoor Spider immediately comes to mind.

As a newly-minted docent helping to guide a hike along the Discovery Trail on the McKenzie Preserve back in 2012, Ron Bohigian (highly-experienced hike docent with a background in biology and my hike mentor) asked me if I had ever seen the home of a Trapdoor Spider—heck, I had never even heard of a Trapdoor Spider. As we progressed along the trail Ron started looking at the steep cut along the mountain side of the trail. Finally, he stopped, smiled, and with a tiny stick slowly opened a “door” that was larger than a quarter and shaped like a sideways “D.” Wow, how cool is that! My excitement drew the attention of some younger members of a couple of families on this hike who came running over: their excitement, their ooohs and aaahs, and their

barrage of questions reminded me of why I do this! I was now determined to find one. I was unsuccessful that day, but after some mentoring by Ron, have now become an expert at finding the humble abode of many a Trapdoor Spider.

Finding the homes of Trapdoor Spiders is one of the many highlights of hiking the McKenzie. It is rare that I do not find the door to the home of a Trapdoor Spider when hiking along the Discovery Trail on the McKenzie Preserve during the winter or early spring.

On February 1, I was leading the Tabletop Hike on the McKenzie with a group of friends from work. While talking with one friend, as the pair of us walked along the Discovery Trail, I shared about the home of the Trapdoor Spider. He was intrigued, and now bound and determined to find one. I found the first and second one, but now that he knew what to look for, it was only a matter of time. About 15

yards down the trail from me he called out—from the excitement in his voice I could tell he had found one! Keith Williams was now a newly-minted expert in finding the extraordinary home of the Trapdoor Spider (see accompanying photo). I'm sure he will now share this experience of discovery with someone else down the road.

Come join us on a hike of the SFC's McKenzie Preserve to see if you too can find the door to the home of a Trapdoor Spider. I can't tell you all of the scientific details about this spider, but I can share the excitement of discovery with you, and if that doesn't do it, to actually feel the smooth, delicate and effortless movement of the silk-hinged door will certainly leave you amazed in wonder of our natural world!

Happy Trails!

Dr. David M. Weber is the Lead Psychologist for Clovis Unified School District. He has been leading hikes on the McKenzie and other SFC preserves since 2012.



A Trapdoor Spider home on the McKenzie Preserve is shown closed (above left) and open (above right). The spiders dig their homes about five inches deep and line them with silk.
DAVID WEBER PHOTOS

Round pen

CONT. FROM PAGE 1

L.C. was a painting contractor, but he and Vivian also liked to rodeo, a passion Sies shares. Sies is well-versed in the rodeo arts: mainly team roping, but also tie-down roping and steer wrestling, depending on the size of the cattle. “I’m not too big,” he allows. With a win, he can make twice as much in an afternoon of jackpotting as he earns in a month training horses, but it’s a gamble.

Standing in the center of the pen, he works a dark blue roan mare. With a flick of the wrist, his lunge whip sinuously curls and pops, never touching the mare, but keeping her moving.

He just got the horse. “This one’s been ridden, but probably not for about two years.” His friend wants to

be able to rope cattle with the mare, so Sies throws a rope across her to get her used to the feel.

“See how she’s licking her lips? That’s how you know you’ve got her attention.”

When she’s ready, she’ll transition to an arena where she’ll track a flag on a cable operated by pulleys. “I can tell this horse has all the tools,” says Sies. “She’ll be good in three months.” Usually it takes six to eight.

Sies sells livestock year-round, all types. Within eyesight were horses, poultry, sheep and swine. He also runs cattle on several properties. “I’m always looking for a way to make a dollar,” he observed. In addition to training horses, he gives riding and roping lessons, is a farrier, and throws a little fence on the side.

He’s known locally for his roping skills. To up his game, “I try to rope with people who are better than me—

but I got to travel a ways to find them,” he grins.

After working the mare for about an hour, he’s done for the day. “Whoa, whoa,” he gently coaxes, getting the mare to turn in. After a few minutes, she rolls in the silty dust. “That’s how horses adjust their backs,” he says, “like a person stretches when they wake up.”

He momentarily considers the fact that his is not a job where he can count on a regular paycheck and a retirement plan: “I probably wouldn’t want a real job anyway—I like what I do.”

(Grandpa L.C. Smith Jr. passed three days after this interview.)



This horse was part of a package deal. “Don’t even know if she’s been ridden yet. I already sold the other one,” said Sies.
NELSON PHOTO



Cliff Sies works the mare in the round pen inspired by one a friend built: “Old cowboy Jim Hamilton. He always had a motorcycle in the back of his truck.”
NELSON PHOTO

Our Community Sustains Us. We’d Like to Return the Favor.

Through the end of June, local personal “FOR SALE” and “IN SEARCH OF” want ads will be run **FREE OF CHARGE**, as space allows. Two printings per ad, 25 words per ad. Ads will be published in our print issue and posted on our website. Call 855-8100 or place your ad online at mountainpress.weebly.com