OMCA GALLERY OF CALIFORNIA NATURAL SCIENCES
Front End Summaries

These selected studies were conducted before the Natural Sciences gallery was reinstalled. Staff referred to them at during the gallery renovation at label-writing time and when illustrations were being drawn for the guide cards that would be located near the cases.

Borderline Case, May 1, 2003

This case represents the edges of two California habitats, Coastal Grasslands and Scrub. There are many species of birds, plants, and insects, but the drama of this case is between a brush rabbit foraging in the open and a gray fox watching from undercover of the scrub.

25 Groups were surveyed. They were asked to help us with the exhibit then told to ignore the current label and look inside the case making note of what stands out and what questions come to mind.

What was noticed first:
Animals, plants and animals were all listed. Interestingly, dryness was also a topic that came up.

After looking closer what else stood out:
Again, animals, plants and flowers were all listed. Additionally, dryness and the ground were listed, as well as the relationship between the rabbit and the fox.

What questions come to mind:
Other than critter/plant ID, location was the most popular question. Other questions that came up included:
- Fox/rabbit relationship & plant/animal ecology
- Animal activity
- Animal traits
- Moisture level/water source
- Big idea/purpose

Patchiness Case, May 22, 2003
This case represents the once-common Coastal Grassland habitat during the wet season.
Flowers are blooming, insects are pollinating, and a Black-shouldered kite has caught a vole.

Cued visitors were asked to view the case—without looking at the label—keeping in mind what stands out and what questions come to mind. Note: Some visitors were in groups, often resulting in more than one response for a single entry (percentages are based on entries—not total responses).

Visitor description
- A wide distribution of visitors was represented.

What did you notice first?
- The bird (76%) and flowers (32%) were noticed first by most visitors.

What else stands out for you?
- For 92% of visitors, the flowers were the next thing that stood out.
- Other things that especially stood out included: vole/mice (64%), brush/plants (44%), and the fact that the bird is preying on the rodent (36%).

What questions come to mind after looking at the exhibit?
- 48% wanted to know where they could see this in California and an additional 24% wanted to know what kind of environment this is.
- Other questions included, who's habitat? (28%), what are the various animals doing or what's going to happen next (24%), and the time of year/day/season (24%).

    Questions I also found interesting, although the percentages are not significant:
    - Water source (8%)
    - How can iris grow here (8%)
    - Climate (4%)

Chaparral Cases, May 27, 2004

This series of three cases focuses on the complex role that fire plays in the Chaparral environment. The scenes show the same patch of Chaparral before a fire, six months after a fire, and 5 years after a fire.

20 groups were surveyed on May 16 & 24, 2004. They were told that we are planning a reinstallation of our permanent gallery and that we want to keep this exhibit—but we want to make it better. They were asked to help us with the exhibit by ignoring the current labels, taking as long or as or as little as they like to look at the entire exhibit (I pointed out that it consisted of all 3 cases against this wall)—keeping in mind what stands out and what questions come to mind. Finally, they were told that, when they were through looking, I'd have five questions that would take about five minutes of their time. NOTE: Groups often gave several responses. Percentages are based on number of groups surveyed, not on number of responses.

Visitor Description:
A good overall distribution of ages except that no one under 5 is represented in this study.

What was noticed first:
- Flame poppies **55%** (11)
- Shrub 30% (6)
    - Manzanita 10% (2)
    - Charred limbs 5% (1)
- Birds 25% (5)
    - Kestrel 10% (2)
    - Roadrunner 10% (2)
- Rodent 20% (4)
    - Mouse 10% (2)
    - Rat 5% (1)

After looking closer what else stood out:
- Brush/trees **45%** (9)
- Birds **45%** (9)
    - Kestrel 30% (6)
    - Roadrunner 10% (2)
    - Quail 10% (2)
- Animal life inside brush **40%** (8)
- Rodents **40%** (8)
    - Mouse 20% (4)
    - Kangaroo rat 15% (3)
- Snakes 35% (7)
    - Garter snake 10% (2)
    - Rattle snake 5% (1)
- Cases are interesting/ the more I look the more I see 25% (5)

- Flame poppies 25% (5)
- Insects 25% (5)
    - Moth 20% (4)
- Dead/burnt wood 20% (4)
- Kestrel catching mouse 20% (4)

What questions come to mind:
- Plant/critter ID **45%** (9)
- What is the story of the three cases? 25% (4)
- Food chain/who eats who 20% (4)
- How does changing environment/fire affect plants & animals? 15% (3)
- Why the hillside backdrop [photo mural]/does it depict environment? 15% (3)
- Why/how do they live together in this environment? 15% (3)
- Would animals really ever live this close together? 15% (3)

Did you notice a relationship between the cases? How would you say they are related?
- Yes – got big idea **25%** (5)
- No 10% (2)
- Somewhat – could see some similarities between cases **65%** (13)
    - Similar animals 35% (7)
    - Similar shrubs 35% (7)
    - Similar rocks 20% (4)
    - All sparse/dry/harsh 20% (4)

How can we better present these cases so visitors will stop to learn their story?
- Use a single header for all three cases **65%** (13)
    - Suggestions included:
        - Steps to New Growth
        - This Is Chaparral
        - Cycle of Life
        - Life Cycle of Chaparral
        - Chaparral Cycle
        - Effects of Fire
        - When is fire good?
        - When is a forest fire a good thing?
        - The Burning of Chaparral
        - From the Flames
        - Cycle of Chaparral and Benefit of Fire
        - Nature's Natural Cycle
- Mention fire/importance of fire **50%** (10)
- Number cases **35%** (7)
    - Number cases "1-2-3" 35% (7)
    - Number cases "A-B-C" 5% (1)
- Use a linear placement to show sequence 35% (7)
- Use case title labels 30% (6)
    - Suggestions included:
        - Starts as/After a Fire/Re-growth
        - Beginning/Fire/After Fire to Rebuild
        - Did you know?
        - Maturity/mature stage
- Emphasize that they are the same scene 20% (4)
- Put labels out instead of inside/put on wall/put at eye level 20% (4)
- Use arrows from case to case 15% (3)
- Include image of burning chaparral 15% (3)
- Include poppy story (show seed breakdown) 15% (3)
- Somehow show chemicals and lightning/beginning of fire 15% (3)

- Have cases in the same position 15% (3)
- Use color photo [instead of b&w]/put red wash over ½ of b&w image/b&w image doesn't draw 15% (3)
- Define chaparral 10% (2)
- Talk about local Oakland fire/ Berkeley Hills 5% (1)
- Include sound of fire (what would sounds for each case be?) 5% (1)
- Use circular placement to show repeating cycle 5% (1)
- Current opening [between cases] is not welcoming 5% (1)
- Show people's houses in different stages of this environment 5% (1)
- Have docents explain 5% (1)
- Use step stools for kids 5% (1)
- Use audio to explain story 5% (1)
- Tell how often this happens 5% (1)

Confrontation Habitat Case, Feb 27, 2005
This case shows a standoff between a coyote and a wolverine. These fierce mammals seem to be on the verge of a battle over the body of a lifeless marmot.

16 Groups were surveyed on Feb 6 & 13, 2005. They were asked to help us with the exhibit then told to look at the entire exhibit, NOT to read anything, to take as little or as long to look as they like, and to keep in mind what stands out and what questions come to mind. They were then told that I'd have three questions for them whenever they were done looking. NOTE: Groups often gave several responses. Percentages are based on groups surveyed, not on number of responses.

Conclusions:
- 15 of 16 groups wanted to know the animal identification. Many wanted to know if the coyote was a wolf or a coyote while most wanted to know what the wolverine was—some wondered if it was a badger.
- Other than the three animals, the most noticed thing in the case was the fight.

Findings:
Visitor Description:
- Good overall distributions of ages except that there were more females than males (25/14) and more teens (13) and adults in their 40s (9) represented than any other age group.
    - Of the 18 visitor groups approached, there were 2 turn-downs (11% of those asked).
        - No English 50% (1)
        - No reason given 50% (1)

What was noticed first:
- Wolverine 75% (12)
    - How big the badger is (1)
    - Wolverine's teeth (1)
- Coyote 63% (10)
- Fight 38% (6)
    - Fighting over dead animal 13% (2)
    - Fighting over rodent 6% (1)
- Marmot 31% (5)

- o Marmot's hair (1)
- o Prey (1)
- Looking at each other 6% (1)

After looking closer what else stood out:
- Marmot 69% (11)
  - o Dead 19% (3)
  - o Baby badger (1)
  - o Marmot lying down (1)
  - o Blood in teeth (1)
- Wolverine 50% (8)
  - o Trying to steal food (1)
  - o Large canines on badger (1)
  - o Not a bear (1)
  - o Doesn't look native (1)
- Fighting 50% (8)
  - o Fighting over marmot 19% (3)
  - o Fighting for food 13% (2)
  - o Intimidation/aggression 13% (2)
  - o About to fight (1)
  - o Wolf attacking baby badger (1)
  - o Can't tell what fighting over (1)
- Coyote 44% (7)
  - o Coyote has prey (1)
  - o Coyote about to eat (1)
  - o Protecting food (1)
- Plant 25% (4)
  - o Seaweed (1)
  - o Bushy grass (1)
- Snarling/wrinkled snout 19% (3)
- Mouth/teeth 19% (3)
- PDB bottle (empty) 13% (2)
- Colors of animals 13% (2)
- Other things that stood out to one visitor group only:
  - o [Case depicts] different species
  - o Coyote & wolverine looking at each other
  - o Accuracy of display
  - o Ears down
  - o Looks like they have rabies

What questions come to mind:
- **Animal ID 94% (15)**
- Habitat? 19% (3)
- Why/what are they fighting over? 19% (3)
- Who's going to win? 19% (3)
- Other questions by 2 visitor groups (13%) only:
  - o Is small critter related to wolverine?
  - o What's happening between the coyote and the wolverine?
  - o Diet/how much food is available?
- Other questions by 1 visitor group (6%) only:
  - o What family is the marmot in?
  - o Is small critter food?
  - o Plant ID?
  - o Why are plants so small?
  - o What's PDB bottle for?
  - o Why no insects?

- What is the noise [could hear desert (?) noises in background]?
- Ecological cause & effect?
- Do they have rabies?
- Who killed the marmot?

Suggestions & additional comments (these were not requested):
- The artistic triangle creating tension is dissipated by the reflection in the glass. More of wolverine's hair should be standing up. Coyote's stance looks relaxed but facial expression looks aggressive. Stop reflection on back of glass. Want to hear sound.