

Treasure Island

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Photo Spotlight: Breathtaking Santa Cruz Island, part of the UCSB Natural Reserve System, is paradise for researchers and visitors

Treasure Island

by Sonia Fernandez



Located just over 20 miles off the coast of Southern California, Santa Cruz Island is the largest of the chain known as the Channel Islands. Countless UCSB researchers owe their careers, in part, to Santa Cruz Island.

?It?s like what Southern California looked like a hundred years or more ago,? said Lyndal Laughrin, director of the UCSB Santa Cruz Island Reserve.

Drought-resistant chaparral gives way to pine trees at elevation, endemic manzanitas spread across the landscape and native grasses are returning after decades of ranching and wine making. The scenery is vast and breathtaking, virtually unchanged from what the native Chumash witnessed in their millennia of existence on the island. The island?s geography makes it a strategic place to study a diversity of sea-dwelling life forms. Meanwhile, endemic species, cut off from their mainland counterparts for generations, have taken different evolutionary routes, earning the island comparisons to the famed Galapagos.

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