



BEST WESTERNER

Planes, trains, and amphibians

Look, on the runway—it's an airport wildlife biologist!

Scaring geese from a flight path? Guarding endangered amphibians? Identifying escaped animals on the taxiway? That's just a typical day at the office for 32-year-old Natalie Reeder, San Francisco International Airport's wildlife biologist, who helps keep birds far from planes while protecting such threatened species as the San Francisco garter snake and the California red-legged frog. *Sunset's* Megan McCrea lured the Bay Area native—she grew up in Lafayette and now lives in Berkeley—in from the airfield for a quick chat.

What drew you to SFO? I fell in love with the area—it's a unique, strange place, where no one would expect rare or interesting animals. It's in the middle of freeways and trains, but there are foxes, weasels, deer, and falcons here.

What's your typical day like? I'm running around quite a bit. I do bird surveys; I go to 17 locations three times each month, and I'll count the species I see.

I also manage a property across U.S. 101, to enhance the habitat for the frogs and snakes. I jokingly say that my job is to make more wildlife on the west side of 101 and less wildlife on the east side.

Canada geese have invaded the Bay Area—what about here? The geese try to build their nests

around the airport, but the TSA handlers often let the dogs run and play outside. If the geese sense that the dogs have been there, they'll stay away. We're lucky ... we only have to worry about birds. I was at a conference, and a biologist from Brazil said that they've had problems with an anaconda on the runway! In Alaska, you can have moose wander onto the airfield.

The animal you've been most surprised to see around SFO? When I'm doing bird surveys, I'm out near the end of the runway, by the bay. Sometimes I'll see leopard sharks swim right up to the seawall. Not long ago, I encountered a yellow-bellied marmot. It's a mountain species—it shouldn't be here. It got hit on

the road, and someone called me. I figured they had misidentified it. But I looked at it, and it was definitely a marmot.

Do you get called if there's a stowaway animal on a plane? Only if it's escaped. If it's found in someone's luggage, TSA will handle it. But I've heard of strange things found around the runways: turtles, snakes, a sea lion.

So there *have* been snakes on a plane? Well, if you think about it, you can go on the Internet and order snakes, right? How do you think they get to you? The thing is, you have to remember that they're more afraid of us than we are of them.

Any last thoughts for holiday travelers? It's interesting for people to consider that wildlife exists around airports, to think that, even in the concrete jungle, there are still animals living there. That, and people shouldn't worry about birds hitting their plane. It really doesn't happen that often.

BEST BAR

HOLIDAY CHEER

If you live in L.A. and spend your free time downtown, you may already know Westin Mitchell's work: His retro-Americana furniture populates Umami Burger and City Tavern. Now you can bring that look home—he's selling a handful of designs (desk, chair, a few lamps) in limited editions of 800 each, all made in his Arts District atelier. Our pick, which we wish we'd ordered before the holiday-entertaining season kicked off, is the Contour Bar Cart, a chariot-like affair of steel, leather, and walnut. With a cocktail cockpit this stylish, who needs to leave the house? The party will, obviously, be coming to you. hammerandspear.com. 🍸



FROM TOP: DREW KELLY; NINA DUNCAN