

Meet a Scientist: Dr. Seafha Ramos

Meet Dr. Seafha Ramos! She is a **wildlife ecologist**. Wildlife ecologists are scientists that study animals, habitats, and ecosystems. Scientists who study wildlife ecology ask: How do different animals live together and survive in their environment? What do the animals eat? Where do they sleep? Who are their predators? As a wildlife ecologist Dr. Ramos asks a lot of these questions!



Dr. Ramos is a member of the Yurok Tribe. She also has Karuk ancestry and is Chicana. Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) is an important part of her life. She practices TEK by gathering and processing traditional foods like acorns, participating in traditional ceremonies, and learning the Yurok language. The concept of TEK can be expressed as “hkelonah ue megetohl” in the Yurok language. In English, hkelonah ue megetohl means “to take care of the Earth.”

One of Dr. Ramos’ current projects is learning more about why there are so few Roosevelt elk in Yurok lands. They used to be plentiful in this area, but now are rare. Why is this? Dr. Ramos wonders if the elk prefer food more readily available in other locations. Could it be that the elk’s favorite foods are scarce in Yurok lands? She investigates elk diets by collecting their scat and running genetic tests on it to see exactly what the elk are eating. Wow! Ultimately, she hopes her work will help restore the elk population on Yurok lands.



Dr. Ramos and her niece

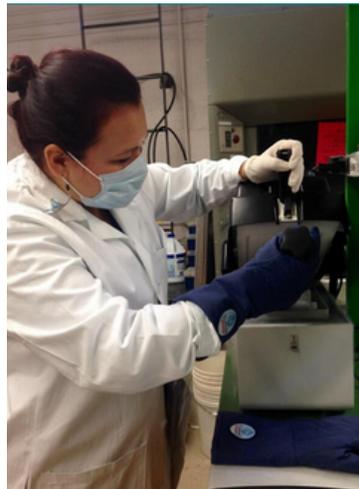
Why does Dr. Ramos want to increase the numbers of Roosevelt elk on the Yurok Reservation? There are two reasons. First, Roosevelt elk are culturally important to the Yurok Tribe. Elk are a traditional food and are important for materials for ceremonies. Second, increasing elk numbers will make a healthier ecosystem. Having a healthy ecosystem and Earth is important to the Yurok community.

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It is important to Dr. Ramos to conduct her research in a way that respects the culture and values of Indigenous communities. To gain a deeper understanding of Yurok values, she interviewed Yurok community members to learn more about their views on TEK. She aims to use this information, along with Western science approaches, in wildlife studies.

What might it look like to conduct ecological research that aligns with Yurok TEK values? One example is to respect animals and use “noninvasive methods,” when possible. “Noninvasive methods” are methods that do not require animals to be handled or trapped. (Handling or trapping can stress animals). For example, Dr. Ramos’ method of collecting elk scat, described above, is “noninvasive.”

Here are some more things about Dr. Ramos. She is from the Yurok villages Ahpah, ‘Ernerr’, and Weitchpus. She loves listening to music and reading. She also enjoys eating ice cream from time to time. She has mentored students and is featured on a “STEM Trading Card.” She encourages you to learn about animals and ways to keep our ecosystems healthy!



Dr. Ramos feels at home in the field or in the lab!