Minutes from my home are the steep hills and lush canyons of several open-space preserves. They provide a safe refuge for wildlife and a quiet respite for city dwellers like me. There is always the chance I’ll come across deer, bobcats, coyotes, rabbits, birds, or other wildlife. But my favorite encounters are with the lizards, insects, and other tiny creatures who often escape people’s view. If you get down close, you can see the amazing complexity of every part of their bodies, especially their eyes. My plea to hikers is to pay attention to the ground level, because some of these animals don’t move fast. I met this beautiful newt in the middle of a trail and couldn’t resist a closer look.

— Connie Pugh, Sunnyvale, California