

## My Mitzvah Project: Volunteering to Help Save The Pika

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My mitzvah project was helping a pika researcher at OSU Cascades. A pika is a small mammal with short limbs, a very round body, an even coat of fur, and no external tail. Pikas look kind of like rabbits but have short, rounded ears.

When I was 7, my dad brought me a pika stuffed animal after he hiked the John Muir Trail, and I immediately loved it because pikas are so cute. For many years I collected pika stuffed animals, and I got to see a real pika in person when I went backpacking with Toby and Dad. For my mitzvah project, I wanted to help pikas because they are at risk for extinction due to climate change.

Pikas don't like heat. They live in the mountains and hide in rocks and do not survive above 77 degrees. In 2003, the National Park Service began monitoring pikas in 16 National Parks. The Lava Beds National Monument, near Bend, was part of this. They installed cameras to count pikas. About a year ago, we saw an article in the newspaper about how some OSU Cascades scientists were involved, so I volunteered to help, and they said yes!

On Thursdays after school during the winter, I rode my bike to the lab at OSU and looked at photos taken at the lava beds. The scientists needed help looking through thousands of pictures to see if pikas were present. Every week I looked at about 1,000 photos. I also made note of other animals and if it was day or night. I saw squirrels, chipmunks, coyote, and mice, but the entire time I only saw two pikas!

The work I did was not as fun as I expected. Most of the pictures were of only rocks. I would only see two or three animals out of 1,000 pictures. But I do feel like I helped the scientists, and I learned that sometimes science can be really boring!

