

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Don't say 'So long, salamander' so soon

Discovery of larvae
in Elkhorn Slough
is first in four years

By Alia Wilson

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WATSONVILLE — Several Santa Cruz long-toed salamander larvae were discovered this week in Elkhorn Slough, for the first time in four years, giving the endangered species a fighting chance at survival.

The salamander, which has been federally listed as endangered since 1967, lives only in Monterey and Southern Santa Cruz counties.

"This is an exciting find — if they hadn't bred in the pond this year, it might have meant that the population here on the Reserve would blink out," Elkhorn Slough Reserve Ecologist Nina D'Amore said.

The salamanders only live 10 years and the population could probably only go a



BREE CANDILORO

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maximum of five years without breeding successfully, she said.

Researchers took samples from Lower Cattail Swale, a pond located on the reserve, and found six salamander larvae. According to D'Amore, the discovery means it is likely that there are many more lar-

vae in the two-acre pond.

Small long-toed salamander populations exist only at Oxbow Pond in Las Lomas, McClusky and Zmudowski sloughs and parts of Moro Cojo Slough, D'Amore said. Small populations also likely exist in pockets elsewhere in Monterey and Santa Cruz

counties.

The purchase of a land parcel upland from Cattail Swale by the Elkhorn Slough Foundation and the reserve several years ago led to the removal of the land from agricultural production. As a result, erosion and sediment flow into Cattail Swale was reduced and water quality improved.

Additional restoration efforts allowed Cattail Swale to hold water for longer lengths of time, giving animals like the salamander and California red-legged frogs the chance to mature into adults.

"We're thrilled that restoration projects have improved water quality at the reserve to provide healthy habitat for Santa Cruz long-toed salamanders," D'Amore said.

Elkhorn Slough is located about halfway between Santa Cruz and Monterey at the center of the Monterey Bay coastline, according to the foundation's website.