



Some of the rare, white Albin Redwoods are in Ben Lomond.

Rare Redwoods In County

Nature 'Flocks' Its Own

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While some people pay to have their Christmas trees flocked to a snowy whiteness, nature has its own way of turning coastal redwoods white even with the absence of the white stuff from the sky.

Albino redwoods, unique in their natural pearly whiteness, are rare having been documented in only about 60 of the 1.5 million acres of the redwood region stretching along the coast from Monterey to southern Oregon.

The story of how nature has brought about the white redwoods is told in a recently written book by Douglas F. Davis of Felton and Dale F. Holderman of Santa Cruz, "The White Redwoods, Ghosts of the Forest."

Holderman, forester for Big Creek Lumber Co. in Davenport, was the first to successfully graft and cross-pollinate albinos with normal redwoods.

He had plenty of evidence to work with since, according to the book, the number of known white redwood sites increases as one moves south from Oregon to the more mild Monterey climate.

It has been found that the white redwoods are highly susceptible to extreme heat and cold, which also explains

their rarity.

Holderman, in fact, discovered a white redwood just 50 feet from the driveway at his home. Alice Earl Wilder, long-time San Lorenzo Valley resident, has known of the existence of a clump of white redwoods in Ben Lomond for most of her 91 years and Sentinel reporter Margaret Koch also knows of some white redwoods in the summit area.

But those that know of white redwoods aren't about to reveal their whereabouts, and hold a type of protectiveness towards these rare and beautiful trees.

As Holderman and Davis note in their book, most rangers, natural scientists and foresters don't like to reveal the whereabouts of the white redwoods for fear of vandalism.

Albinism, the two authors explain, is found throughout both the plant and animal worlds. In plants, it's characterized by the absence of chlorophyll, the substance that makes plants green.

Chlorophyll collects light energy to be used by the plants to manufacture food. Since the white redwood must get its food some other way, it attaches itself to the root system of normal redwoods and is, therefore, parasitic.

For this reason, white redwoods can't

be grown from seed. Although Holderman tried to grow some from seed, once the seedlings used up the nutrients in the seeds, they died, unable to get food from any parent source.

Albinism is a genetic trait. A missing or altered gene in the redwood prevents the formation of chlorophyll and, thus, the whiteness of the redwood is a permanent trait.

White redwoods normally grow to a maximum of only 15-20 feet tall, while normal redwoods reach a maximum of 200 to 300 feet.

However, Holderman and Davis point out, some albino redwoods have been found growing up to 80 feet tall.

The branches of these unique trees are brown and their needles are white. When they first sprout, they are almost a pure white, but eventually turn cream or ivory in color.

The uniqueness of the white redwoods has resulted in coastal Indians attaching a spiritual value to the white trees.

Holderman and Davis begin their book by stating, "... by far the most unusual phenomenon among redwoods, one seldom known or witnessed by even residents of the redwood region, is the beautiful and unique albino *Sequoia sempervirens* — the white coast redwood."