

RARE OPPORTUNITY

Up close and personal with a protected salamander

Endangered species

By JONDI GUMZ

jgumz@santacruzsentinel.com

APTOS — Santa Cruz appraiser Bruce McGuire came eye to eye with a member of a rare protected species while surveying property surrounded by the Forest of Nisene Marks.

Biologists say the creature has a secretive lifestyle, living underground like a mole, making detection difficult, but McGuire managed to scoop up the tiny long-toed salamander and photograph it.

"I went nuts when I saw it," he said. "I've been doing this for 35 years and to bump into one of these things is pretty exciting."

Real estate agent Jeff Canepa, who accompanied McGuire on the Feb. 3 inspection, confirmed the sighting.

It was the first time he had seen the little salamander himself.

The Santa Cruz long-toed salamander, discovered Dec. 2, 1954, has derailed development projects, altered construction plans, and inspired a T-shirt after being blamed, probably unfairly, for

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BRUCE MCGUIRE, appraiser

Pajaro River flooding.

Canepa said Save the Redwoods League is negotiating to buy the two landlocked parcels and donate them to the state.

The purchase, if an agreement is reached, would provide additional security for state parkland, ending a situation where private owners cross public land to get to their property. The parcels off Olive Springs Road include rustic cabins built more than 50 years ago and are so remote that they require three creek crossings.

"It's definitely for the outback," said Canepa.

SEE SALAMANDER ON B12



BRUCE MCGUIRE/CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The Santa Cruz long-toed salamander, discovered in Aptos 34 years ago, was captured on film by local appraiser Bruce McGuire. It was his first sighting in his 35-year career.



BRUCE MCGUIRE/CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Santa Cruz appraiser Bruce McGuire saw this rare long-toed salamander near the Forest of Nisene Marks in Aptos. The salamander, which McGuire said had a orange stripe along the spine, blends into its environment.

SALAMANDER

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The Santa Cruz long-toed salamander was first discovered at the Valencia lagoon in Aptos.

One of the smallest in the salamander family, this local resident enjoys courtship at breeding ponds at night when it rains.

Valencia lagoon, which is seasonal, was partially filled in 1968 during the widening of Highway 1, then studied by biologists and later purchased by the state to protect the salamander's habitat.

Both the state and federal agencies recognize this salamander as endangered. Scientists say its distinguishing characteristics are a well-designed tail fin for swimming, a black body and a yellow or orange stripe along the spine.

"You could see it was orange," McGuire said.

The 1973 Endangered Species Act pro-

SANTA CRUZ LONG-TOED SALAMANDER

SCIENTIFIC NAME: Ambystoma macrodactylum croceum

DISCOVERED BY: R. W. Russell and James D. Anderson in 1954

CHARACTERISTICS: Smaller than most salamanders, has a distinctive orange or yellow stripe on the spine, lives underground

SOURCE: www.montereybay.com/creagrus/

hibits harm to any endangered species.

Ten years ago, tunnels were installed near the Seascope Uplands residential development to provide safe passage for the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander. But biologists found only a small percentage of the salamanders took advantage of the tunnels and concluded that other strategies should be explored.