

Santa Cruz cypress protected under federal law

✓ *Endangered Species*

There are only two trees listed under the federal Endangered Species Act. One grows in Florida. The other grows in our back yard.

It's called the Santa Cruz cypress and there's only 5,100 of them, roughly.

This tree prefers the well-drained sandhill habitat found scattered throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains, a habitat "threatened by development and agriculture," wrote James C. Hickman in "The Jepson Manual: Higher Plants of California."

The Santa Cruz cypress looks much like the Monterey cypress — and the Gowen and Sargent cypresses for that matter — but it doesn't get as tall as its fog-loving cousin, and its foliage has more yellow to it.

Some botanists believe the Santa Cruz cypress is a hybrid of the Gowen and Sargent cypresses, but if "The Jepson Manual" says it's its own species, then that's the final word. After all, any book that costs \$80 ought to be on the money.

TRAVIS
SEMMES
Native Guide



What's the easiest way to tell the difference between the Monterey cypress, like the ones at Lighthouse Field, and the endangered Santa Cruz cypress up in the mountains?

Here's a couple methods, but I'll be the first to admit getting the two confused is very easy.

Monterey cypress doesn't grow above 100 feet in elevation. In other words, it only grows near the ocean.

It's native to the Monterey Peninsula, but has been carried all over the world, including much of California. That's right, the ones at Lighthouse Field were planted by someone.

"Monterey cypress early became a favorite tree for hedges and wind-breaks in places as disparate as New Zealand, Kenya, the south of France,

Hawaii and Ireland's County Galway," wrote Ronald M. Lanner in "Conifers of California."

The Santa Cruz cypress prefers elevations of 1,500 to 2,650 feet and requires the sandy soils characteristic of the sandhill habitat — which is actually just ancient beach sand that was uplifted, along with the hills, by tectonic movement.

The Santa Cruz cypress is commonly found among chaparral and knobcone pine forests. The grove I visited in Bonny Doon was sharing its sandy-root space with mazanita, chamise and knobcone pine.

Another way to tell the difference is to examine the tree's height and compare it to the one we all know: the Monterey cypress, which can reach triple-digit numbers.

"The largest (Monterey cypress) is in Pescadero and is 106 feet tall and 13 feet in diameter," wrote John D. Stuart and John O. Sawyer in "Trees and Shrubs of California."

That's funny, because any environment above 100 feet in elevation is out of the Monterey's range. Perhaps they stop growing at 106 feet

not because they can't go any farther but because they don't like the weather up there.

According to a recovery plan written by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Santa Cruz Cypress exists only in five populations.

"More than 5,100 total individuals cumulatively occupy approximately 356 acres along a 15 mile range of the Santa Cruz Mountains in Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties. The Bonny Doon population is the largest and supports over 3000 individuals."

The Bonny Doon grove is impressive; I visited it last weekend with local naturalist Richard Hencke.

We found hundreds of Santa Cruz cypress trees, most 30-feet tall and growing in well-established colonies.

Interestingly, we spotted several dozen young seedlings, sprouting beneath the parent trees. Some people have told me that the Santa Cruz cypress needs fire to properly regenerate.

While fire may help clear out competitive species, and dead wood, the cones apparently don't need an inferno to open them.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Seed pods from the Santa Cruz cypress. This species is one of two trees listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

A far greater threat to the future of this endangered trees is human pressure on their unique habitat.

"When Santa Cruz cypress was federally listed as endangered, primary threats were alteration and

destruction of habitat due to logging, agricultural conversion, and land development," according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

■ Common name: Santa Cruz

Please see **GUIDE** on **Page C2**

Guide

Continued from Page C1

cypress, Abrams' cypress

■ Botanical names: *Cupressus abramsiana*

■ Family: Cupressaceae (cypress family)

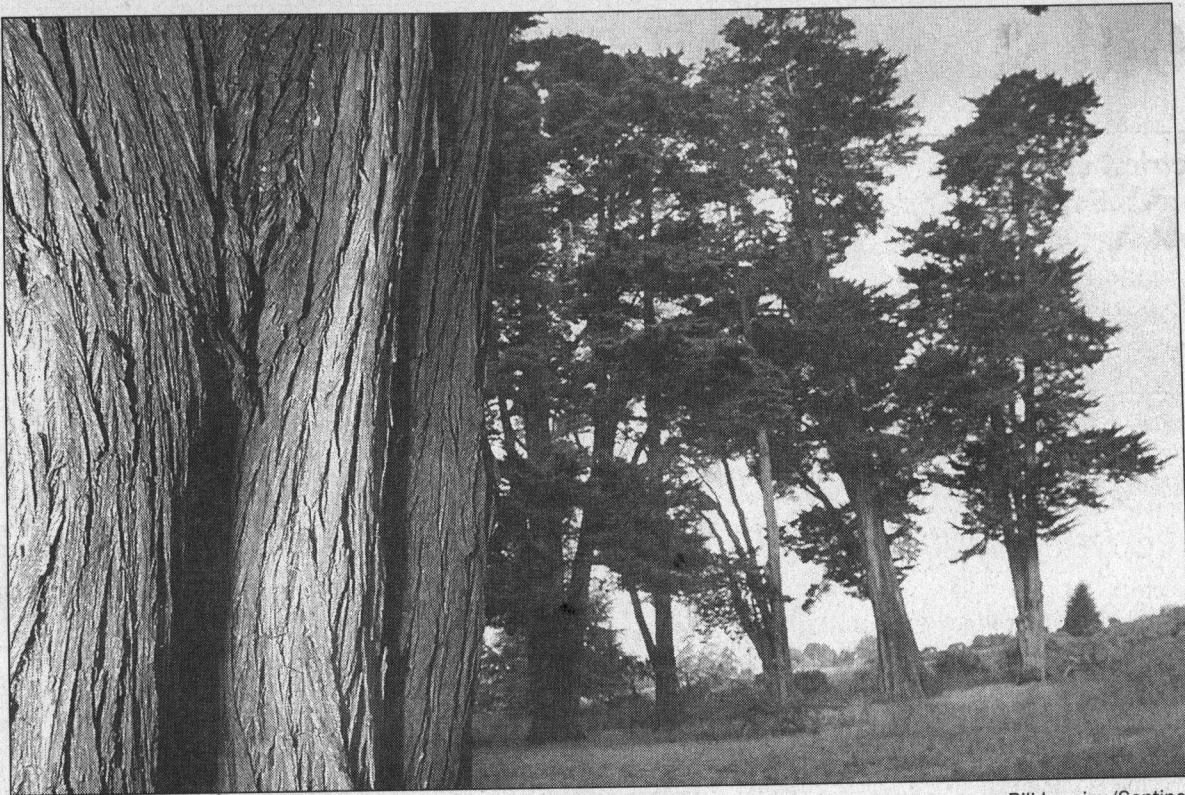
■ Description: Monoecious, evergreen tree to 30 feet, very similar to Monterey, Gowen and Sargent cypresses. Bark is gray and runs vertically in thin plates. Cones are slightly smaller than those of the Monterey cypress, shiny brown (this time of year) and are comprised of eight to 10 plates, which slowly open and release the seeds. (The ones I've examined all had eight plates.)

■ Habitat: There are only five locations where this tree grows: Bonny Doon, Eagle Rock, Brackenbrae, Butano Ridge, and one other mystery location in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

■ Locally found: Martin Road in Bonny Doon is your best bet for seeing this tree, and it doesn't even require you to get out of your car.

■ Collecting: Don't collect or harvest anything from these trees — they're a federally listed endangered species — and you can be arrested for tampering with them.

■ Where to purchase: **Elkhorn**



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

A grove of Monterey cypress at the base of UC Santa Cruz campus. This species is only native to the Monterey Bay area.

Native Plant Nursery, north of Moss Landing at 1957 Highway 1, has Monterey cypress in one gallon pots. But they don't have the Santa Cruz cypress. Call 763-1207.

Redwood Nursery, up Highway

17, has Monterey cypress in five gallon cans for \$25. They only have Santa Cruz cypress every once in while. Cypresses "need plenty of room," said owner Flora Schweizer. "You can trim them,

they don't mind it, but they get to be big trees." Call the nursery at 438-2844.

Contact Travis Semmes at tsemmes@santa-cruz.com.