

Endangered Species

Santa Cruz Salamander Finds Company, Numbers 3,000

By BRUCE McPHERSON
Sentinel Staff Writer

The now-famous Santa Cruz long-toed salamander has found some company at its Ellicott Pond breeding site near La Selva Beach, and his numbers may be more than 3,000 there.

Alan Holbert, a Cabrillo College biologist who last week became county coordinator for the "Save The Sally" project, estimated Friday that from initial research of the creature, there may be 3,000 to 5,000 located at Ellicott Pond. Males are outnumbering females about 2 to 1.

The Santa Cruz long-toed salamander is considered an endangered species that has existed between 10,000 and 20,000 years. Some researchers claim that Ellicott Pond may be one of its last habitats.

Santa Cruz Sally now may have to share some of the

limelight, however. It was discovered last week that two other threatened species, the rare Tiger Salamander and also the Red-Legged Frog, also have found a home at Ellicott Pond.

The University of California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology currently is carrying out a study of the area. Many local students have assisted in the venture led by the county youth commission, and the state has shown interest also.

Aside from salamander numbers in the thousands and recognition of two more rare species at Ellicott Pond, there is other good news.

Robert Stebbins, a UC scientist, noted last week that there is evidence the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander is breeding again at Valencia Lagoon, near the Rob Roy Junction highway overpass.

It was feared when that struc-

ture was built that the "reconstructed" lagoon habitat for Santa Cruz Sally was not successful. Stebbins announced some 100 salamanders have been found at Valencia Lagoon, including a female which had just laid eggs.

Holbert said the effort to count the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander will continue this weekend. The counting is done by placing a "fence," a six-inch high tar-paper strip, around the pond to prevent the creatures from escaping.

The salamander has a highly specialized instinct to go towards ponding areas, especially in January and February, the breeding season. The fence was placed to have

the creature follow its length until it reached the pond. Santa Cruz Sally has to be in water to breed.

On the way, however, have been placed some open cans, which the salamander falls into, and is subsequently counted. The salamander was "marked" at first by clipping one toe before being turned loose.

Now, however, Holbert said a "Lincoln Index" can now be used for statistical purposes to estimate how many salamanders are being recaptured.

All in all, Holbert said the effort to save Santa Cruz Sally "seems to be going along very well."

