

Personal view

# What the long-toed salamander could be good for

By MARY BARNETT

With his usual knack for recording interesting sidelights in the daily drama of county government, Lee Quarnstrom has recorded that during the three-hour hearing on saving the habitat of the long-toed salamander, one member of the audience asked this pregnant question:

"What good is the salamander anyway?"

He does not record the response of the audience of scientists, students, and environmentalists that crammed the Supervisorial chambers and the adjacent corridors for the hearing, but I suspect it may have been scorn.

Yet perhaps the question deserves an answer, for it reflects what has long been the dominant human attitude towards the other forms of life with which we share the globe. Even today, I would wager the question is more representative of the typical American attitude than the deep concern for the fate of the salamander shown by most of those at the hearing. Santa Cruz County is rather a special place.

"What good is it?" is indeed the question with which man has approached other species throughout his history. This attitude is most representative of Western man, and is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In Genesis we learn that the Lord gave man dominion over all the creatures of the earth, and this has proved to be only too true.

Man has, alas, interpreted his dominion over the beasts and fowl and all the creatures that crawl upon the earth to give him the right to use them for his own purposes and even to wipe them from the planet.

Long is the list of species destroyed by man's carelessness and greed. Once the vast skies of pioneer America were dark with the flight of passenger pigeons; now there are none of them. Once the buffalo stretched to the horizon, and for centuries the red man survived by following the great herds across the American plains. Now they survive only as a pitiful remnant.

Once many thousands of playful sea otters disported themselves in the central

California surf, feeding themselves and their pups on the abalone, sea urchins, and other shellfish which also existed in great abundance amid the rocks and kelp. Now the sea otter is on the endangered species list, and the abalone is also becoming scarce. Interestingly, man, the newcomer to the scene, blames the sea otter who existed side by side with the abalone for thousands of years, for its disappearance, and not himself, despite the sharp increases in abalone landings at Morro Bay.

Yet all these species had or have, some utility to man. The passenger pigeon and the buffalo provided him with meat. The abalone is a choice delicacy. Even the sea otter may be considered a practical asset, for the tourists who gaze upon them through binoculars from the coastal cliffs have to purchase gasoline and refreshments locally and perhaps rest at local inns.

But the long-toed salamander—what good is he?

It might be said that he is an object of scientific curiosity, and the study of his unusual life cycle may provide scientists with knowledge of possible utility to man. Some wise person has said that wilderness holds the answers to more questions than we now know how to ask, and the salamander in his coastal swamp is a resident of the remaining wilderness.

But he does seem to have been studied quite a bit already, and let us for the sake of argument assume that we never learn a practical thing from the salamander and he turns out to be of no use whatsoever.

Let's save him anyhow. Let the United States Department of the Interior, as suggested by mid-county Supervisor Ralph Sanson, purchase the salamander habitat near La Selva Beach as a wildlife sanctuary for this endangered amphibian. Let all the people of the nation have a part in saving the swamp, the hillside, and the willows, so that the long-toed salamander may move with the seasons from willow grove to pond to willow grove again, reproducing his kind through the

centuries until the coast of Santa Cruz County, and the habitat of man and salamander sink again into the seas from which they emerged in the yesterday of geologic time.

Let it be a present, from which we expect no return. Let us say, "Long-toed salamander, cousin, follow guest at the banquet of life, and neighbor on this beautiful and all too fragile earth, here are your swamps, your hills, your

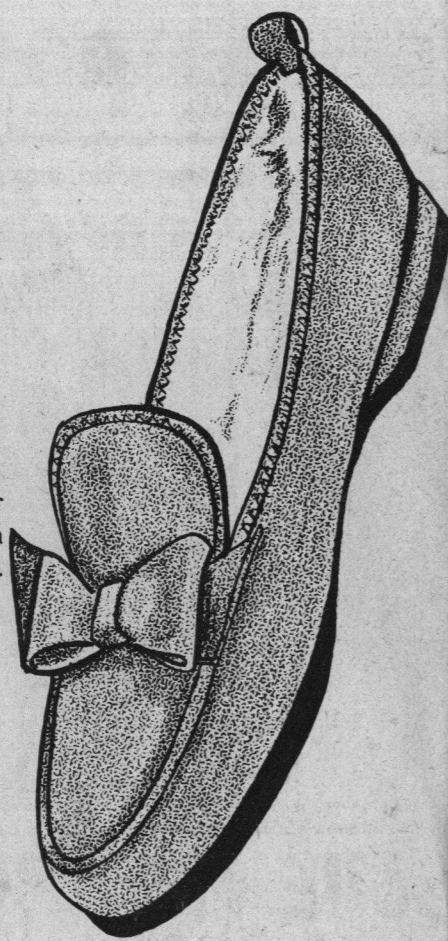
groves. May you long enjoy them, and may we live in peace, side by side. Take them as a gift from one endangered species to another."

Maybe if we can find within ourselves the self-control and the wit to save the long-toed salamander, we can save ourselves. Maybe he will bring us luck. Maybe this will turn out to be the answer to the question, "What good is the salamander?"



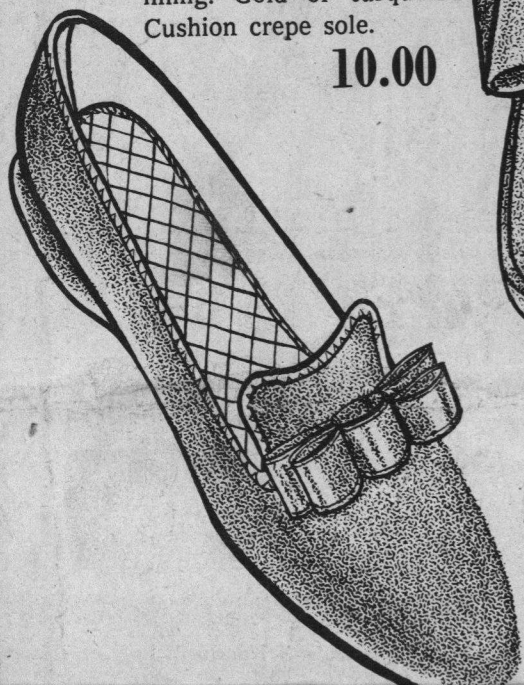
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## US asked to purchase salamander sanctuary

The Department of Interior has been asked to commit funds to purchase the breeding site of the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander.

Ralph Sanson, chairman of the Santa Cruz County board of supervisors has made the request in a letter to Rogers C. B. Morton, Secretary of the Interior.

In his letter Sanson notes that the Interior Department expressed a concern for the rare creature at last week's hearing on a proposal to rezone the salamander habitat for a mobile home park. The board unanimously denied that rezoning.

Sanson wrote Morton that a committee consisting of county, state and federal representatives, the conservationists and concerned scientists has met "to open negotiations which hopefully will lead to acquisition of the habitat of the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander as a wild life preserve."

Graduate students from UC-Berkeley have been given permission to enter the property "to conduct an intensive investigation as to the life-cycle of the salamander with particular attention at this point on the geographical range of the animal," Sanson says in his letter.

Noting that the study should determine how much of the area

specific projects where an acute need exists. On this latter point the board of supervisors urgently requests that your department take immediate steps to commit funds for acquisition of the property for a wildlife preserve."

Don Wilson, administrative assistant to the board of supervisors, was to report on progress of the salamander committee at Tuesday's board meeting.

In the meanwhile, he and Sanson have contacted several officials seeking their backing for the salamander sanctuary. These officials include Congressmen Burt Talcott, R-Salinas and Jerome Waldie, D-Contra Costa, State Sen. Donald Grunsky, R-Watsonville, Assemblyman Frank Murphy, R-Santa Cruz, Norman Livermore, director of the state Resources Agency, and Ray Arnett, director of the state Department of Fish and Game.



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