

Grey Whale Ranch is home to rare mushrooms

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SANTA CRUZ — One reason so many people are upset about plans to cut timber on the Grey Whale Ranch is that the 2,400-acre site near UC Santa Cruz is home to several species of rare and endangered animals.

But while elegant golden eagles and spotted owls make for impressive public relations, the ranch is also home to the rosy Octopus Stinkhorn and the shy Salmon Waxy Cap, two of 83 species of rare mushrooms that have been discovered on the site.

During the past 20 years, local mycologist David Arora has com-

bed virtually every corner of Santa Cruz County, cataloging local fungi. And he says that the Grey Whale Ranch is one of the best fungus habitats he has ever seen.

The Ranch is home to at least 500 varieties of mushrooms, according to Arora, including 83 species that are rare or extremely rare. Sixteen species of mushroom he has found

on the ranch have not yet been named by science, and of those, six are not known to occur anywhere else.

"(These mushrooms) definitely live in other areas," Arora said. "But they've only been found in the Grey Whale Ranch. My position is, until we know whether they occur elsewhere we should protect the

ones we know are there."

Most of the mushrooms found on the Grey Whale are mycorrhizal, meaning they only grow in association with living tree rootlets with which they exchange nutrients.

"The mushrooms need living trees," Arora said. "If they cut the trees down, even if the stumps sprout later, the severe shock to the

tree usually kills all of the mushrooms surrounding it."

Arora's information on the mushrooms has been pivotal in persuading the California Department of Forestry to delay plans to begin logging on the Grey Whale for several weeks. But because many rare mushrooms only come up once a year, during the rainy season,

Arora is pressing for a study period of at least one year.

"I'm genuinely concerned about the mushrooms, this is not a delaying tactic," Arora said. "That's why, if the place gets logged next summer I'm willing to work with (the timber company) to develop some mitigation measures. But I'd rather not see them log it at all."