

Native frogs in need of help

Endangered Species

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SANTA CRUZ — Nature lovers of all ages are invited to Antonelli Pond in west Santa Cruz for Save the Frogs Day on April 29.

A Santa Cruz-based non-profit "Save the Frogs!" is organizing the event, which it expects will be the largest frog-centered occasion.

So far, 17 countries on six continents have planned events ranging from wetland restoration efforts to leap-frog races. This is the third annual Save the Frogs Day.

"The goal is to raise awareness worldwide," said Kerry Kriger, the nonprofit's founder and director. "Amphibians are the most rapidly disappearing group of animals on the planet."

"Save the Frogs!" came to Santa Cruz early last year. It's working to educate the community about native amphibians — animals such as frogs and salamanders that breathe water when they first hatch but transform into air-breathing adults.

Santa Cruz has three native amphibian species, all of which are in trouble: the California red-legged frog, the California tiger salamander and the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander.

Amphibian populations are deteriorating in the face of habitat loss, pollution and competition from non-native species. Frogs are also harvested for their legs, which some consider a culinary delicacy.

Kriger hopes Santa Cruz residents will come to Antonelli Pond between 9 a.m. and noon April 29 to help restore habitat for the threatened California red-legged frog, the star of Mark Twain's story "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County."



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The California red-legged frog is one of three species endangered.

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KERRY KRIGER, Save the Frogs!

Antonelli Pond is near the north end of Natural Bridges State Beach.

Adult red-legged frogs lay their eggs in the pond, but spend most of their time on land looking for food, said Kriger, who gives talks at local schools and other venues. "Native plants provide better cover and attract more animals the frogs can eat," he said. "That includes anything they can fit in their mouths."

Nina D'Amore, an amphibian and freshwater ecologist with the Elkhorn Slough

National Estuarine Research Reserve, first suggested an Antonelli Pond restoration project to Kriger in 2010.

"I have long wanted to do some work at Antonelli Pond," said D'Amore, who is a member of the "Save the Frogs!" advisory committee. "It is a beautiful site and a place that many local people enjoy."

D'Amore said sites that provide high quality habitat near urban areas are rare. Santa Cruz residents can help preserve their local ecosystem by keeping areas trash free and

picking up after their dogs, she said, and by not releasing animals such as fish or turtles into the wild.

Patagonia, the clothing retailer, provided \$5,000 to fund the restoration project.

"California red-legged frogs smell like a cross between burning plastic and garlic when they are upset," said D'Amore. "They are beautiful and I want my daughter to be able to show them to her grandchildren in 70 years."

While volunteers work in Santa Cruz, Kriger will lead a rally at The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, D.C., supporting a federal ban on Atrazine, a widely used herbicide that's very bad for frogs.

For information, go to www.savethefrogs.com/day.