

SPAWNERS

San Pablo Watershed Neighbors Education and Restoration Society

February 2004

News of the Newts

Wednesday, February 4, 7:00 to 9:00 P.M.

El Sobrante Library

4191 Appian Way

Did you know that El Sobrante has an annual rescue effort to assist California newts in reaching their breeding grounds on Castro Ranch Creek? And that Tilden Park closes a road in winter for the newts? Who are the newts and why do we help them? Come to our February meeting and learn about *Taricha torosa*, the California newt that inhabits our creeks. Our guest speaker, Alan Kaplan, the East Bay Regional Parks District naturalist from the Tilden Nature Area, will present the fascinating life history and future prospects of the California newt.

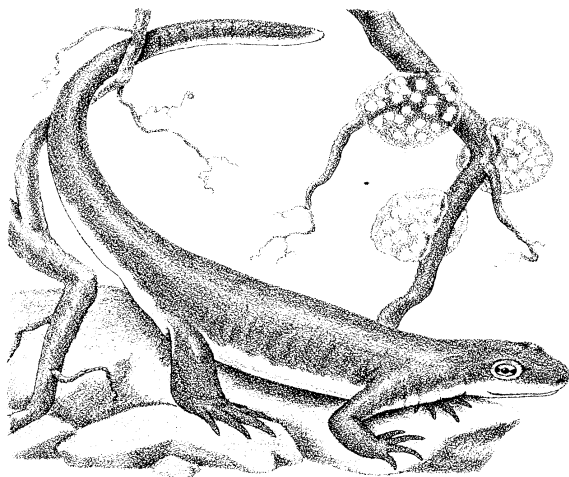


Illustration courtesy of EBRPD

The Newts Need YOU!

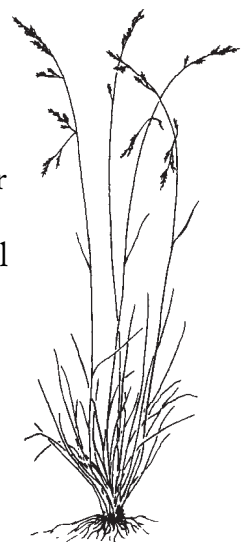
It is the time of year when newts cross Hillside Drive. These gentle, slow moving amphibians have few natural enemies but, as they seek their breeding grounds, they can be run over by cars. You can help them. Join the Newt Rescue Brigade! Each night at dusk a cadre of newt enthusiasts meet and escort newts to safety. Hundreds of newts have been helped each year. If you would like to join them, contact Annabelle Travis at annabelle11_3@yahoo.com, or Elizabeth O'Shea at 231-9566.

Alien Plant Invader

Pampas grasses (*Cortaderia jubata*, and *C. selloana*), invasive members of the grass family, have been observed in many places in the San Pablo Creek Watershed. The leaf blades of *C. jubata* grow 3-5 feet tall, while flowering stalks tower above the mass of spreading leaves. *C. selloana* is a smaller, more rounded plant. Although many people find these plants attractive, that beauty is achieved at great price. These plants do not support native insects and animals, and they choke out the native plants that do support the biological community. Pampas grass also poses an increased fire hazard when dry. It is very invasive, produces thousands of wind-dispersed seeds, while fragments of roots or leaves can start new plants vegetatively.

Removing this plant is very difficult because of the razor-like edge of its leaf blades and the huge mass of roots which are difficult to dig out. A first step in limiting the spread of this pest is to cut the flower stalks and carefully bag them for disposal. Ultimately, the plant must be dug out of the ground. Because it is so invasive and hard to remove, it is best not to plant pampas grass and to remove any self-sown seedlings when small. For more information on how to remove this grass, visit, <http://www.nps.gov/redw/pampas.htm>.

Several native plants can provide similar landscape value. One is deer grass (*Muhlenbergia rigens*). It is a drought-tolerant perennial that will spread slowly by seeding, but can easily be controlled. California fescue and purple needle grass are also good replacements. They both hold their flowering stalks gracefully above their foliage. Purple needle grass is more delicate in appearance than the fescue. Both are drought-tolerant natives.



California fescue



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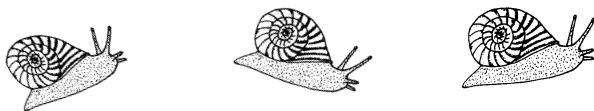
**Dated Material – Please
 deliver by January 31.**

*Join us at the next SPAWNERS meeting on **Wednesday, February 4** at 7:00 P.M.
 The San Pablo Creek Watershed Awareness Program is sponsored by the Clean Water Program of Contra Costa County,
 the City of San Pablo and the CalFed Bay-Delta Watershed Program.*

Announcing Aquatic Outreach Institute's Spring Creeks Conference

Join the 3rd Biennial Bay Area Joint Creek Groups Meeting on **Feb 26, 6-9 p.m.** Meet creek groups and volunteers from around the Bay Area to celebrate your achievements, confront some of the challenges facing urban creeks and share ideas on how to meet them. Features presentations by guest speakers. Location: 1901 Hearst Ave., Berkeley.

Sign up for workshops on stream monitoring and protection (**Feb 28**), outreach and communication, and community collaboration (**Mar 7**), invasive weed control, and reducing urban runoff (**Mar 13**) at AOI offices in Richmond, and Merritt College, Oakland. Pre-registration is required. The evening meeting is free. \$25 for the first workshop, and \$15 for each additional workshop. Contact Mary Malko for details on (510) 231-9430, or mary@aoinstitute.org. Or to download a registration flyer go to www.aoinstitute.org.

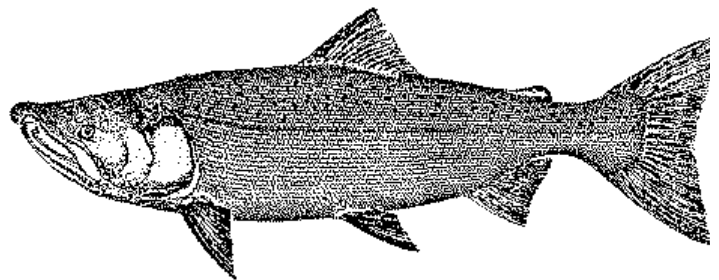


Water Quality Monitoring

Water quality monitoring will take place on a **new day**, Sunday. The next two dates are February 15 and March 14 from 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. Join our water quality monitoring team and learn how to test for dissolved oxygen, pH, turbidity, and other factors that affect aquatic life. Any one interested is welcome. Call (510) 231-9566 to sign up.

Looking ahead – Calendar of Events

- February 4:** Monthly meeting - Talk on Newts
- February 15:** Water Quality Monitoring
- March 3:** Monthly Meeting - Talk on Frogs
- March 6:** Workday at the Library with CNPS Restoration Team
- March 14:** Water Quality Monitoring



Meeting Recap

At our January meeting, Linda Stonier of the National Parks Service facilitated the creation of a brochure for SPAWNERS. This brochure will aid outreach by explaining our goals for the watershed. Members at the meeting brainstormed to determine content and reviewed a various samples for style and format. Members are now refining and completing the content. The next step is graphic design and for this we need help. If you or someone you know would be willing to donate graphic design services, please call Elizabeth at (510) 231-9566.

