Otters Starting a Return to Lamorinda Creeks?

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First otter in an Orinda creek spotted By Chris Lavin



Otter spotted in San Pablo Creek near the Sturgeses' Orinda home

Photo Karen Sturges

mental movement atwitter this month when a couple who has lived on Moraga Way for more than 20 years spotted an otter in San Pablo otter," said Michael McGowan of Creek, right behind their house.

workshop, doing his usual gardening and workshop-like tasks, sharpening stuff and putting things away, when he saw a large wake in the creek behind the building.

"I saw a big ripple, and thought, 'That's quite a fish!' So I stepped out to look, and saw it was an otter," Sturges said. There it was, swimming through the creek, probably looking for crayfish, near a culvert on San Pablo Creek that runs right behind their house by Creek is indicative of a bigger McDonnell Nursery. He told his issue: the return of more normal wife, Karen, about it.

a week now," said Karen Sturges. to be all over the area, but they were She got her phone ready and started extirpated almost completely by the snapping pictures when he (or she) middle of the 1900s, Isadore said. was around. "The otter doesn't Part of that was water quality; part stand still," she said with frustra- of it was a large use of pesticides. tion, a problem for photographic purposes. When asked to provide spotted in the San Pablo and some more high-quality photos of the otter, she did. Her son Derek calls her the techie in the house.

Friends of Orinda Creeks' booth in Lafayette. But the sighting on during Orinda's Fourth of July celebration, and told volunteers there mystery. Isadore said it probably about their find. The otter was

recent chain of events set the about the size of a big house cat, Orinda creeks and environ- they said, and Karen Sturges had pictures on her phone to prove it. Word quickly spread.

"I am highly excited by the Friends of Orinda Creeks, adding Thomas Sturges was in his that he thinks it brings good news about the improving health of local

> Megan Isadore, the executive director of the River Otter Ecology Project, which collects information about river otters in Central California, thinks McGowan is right.

"Otters are clearly repopulating in the Bay Area, but they are mostly going south," Isadore said, into the environs of the South Bay. Yet the appearance of an otter on San Pablo health to the Lamorinda watershed "We see him, or her, about once after decades of abuse. Otters used

River otters have long been Lafayette reservoirs, even Briones, while none in Upper San Leandro Reservoir. One was spot-The Sturgeses visited the ted in 2013 in Las Trampas Creek San Pablo Creek is a first – and a came from one of the reservoirs,



Thomas and Karen Sturges stand at the spot in their back yard in Orinda where they started spotting an otter on San Pablo Creek this month. It's the first known return of an otter to an Orinda creek since they were wiped out in the last century. Photo Chris Lavin

but those are miles away.

"Otters can travel a long way over land," she said. If it came from San Pablo Reservoir, it would have had to negotiate miles of culverts and pipes unless it decided to negotiate traffic on Highway 24. And Lafayette Reservoir is a bit closer, but that journey would have required even more overland trekking.

Isadore's project has initiated an investigative experiment partly to answer precisely this question: If she can find enough scat, test results will help develop a DNA pattern for families and populations in the Bay Area that can lead to individuals such as the Orinda creek

"It's expensive, and it takes time," said Isadore, who is concentrating now on the Marin County river otter populations.

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This exhibition will showcase the art of watercolor painting as it was practiced in Northern California in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. On view will be works by Juan Wandesforde, William Keith, Percy Gray, L.P. Latimer, Chris Jorgensen, Francis McComas, Sydney Yard, and Gunnar Widforss.

Lorenzo P. Latimer, *Redwoods, Creek*, 20" x 13 1/2," 1902, watercolor on paper. Collection of Roger and Kathy Carter

Public reception and lecture by Curator Alfred C. Harrison Jr, Sunday, July 26, 2pm, Soda Activity Center.

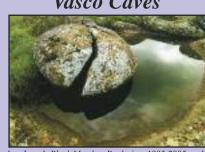
Through September 6

River Passage: New Work by Danae Mattes



Bay Area artist Danae Mattes creates abstract, mixed media wall and floor objects using clay, paper and pigment, activated by water, which symbolically flows through all aspects of her life and art.

Through September 6 Stephen Joseph: Inside Vasco Caves



ph Black Meadow Pool, circa 1995-2005, archival pigment print. Courtesy of the Artist

Vasco Caves, located in the East Bay Regional Park District, is an uncommonly distinctive place in an uncommonly distinctive region where the physical (geological), biological, cultural and spiritual landscapes converge, each one inseparable from, and influenced by, the other. On view will be photographs of rock outcrops and caves that are rarely seen by the public.

Through September 6

The Darker Side of William Keith: Late Paintings



Collection of the Saint Mary's College Museum of Art

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