

EAST BAY TIMES

Walk on the Wild Side: Birding and wildlife watching in California's coastal redwood forest



OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA – OCTOBER 17: Ladybugs have converged along the Stream Trail at Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park in Oakland, Calif., on Monday, Oct. 17, 2022. (Jose Carlos Fajardo/Bay Area News Group)

By [BEN DAVIDSON CORRESPONDENT](#)

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This past spring, I was hiking solo on a little-known trail high above Mill Valley's Cascade Canyon. This dense, shady coastal redwood forest is just over the ridge from the famous old-growth redwood trees of the Muir Woods National Monument in Marin County.

Despite being a neighborhood of sorts, the canyon is also a wildlife haven. Dozens of species of resident and migratory birds, animals, insects, amphibians, mollusks and even crustaceans make this magical forest their home. And you never know what you're going to see on a stroll in the redwoods.

Rounding a bend into a deep, shady ravine, I heard a slight hooting sound. I paused to locate the sound and continued walking just a bit further up the trail. To my astonishment, I had lucked into an encounter with some of the rarest creatures in the redwoods: Northern spotted owls, a threatened species that lives mostly in the old growth coastal redwoods and the forests of the Northwest.

Amazingly, right above the trail in the hollow of a time-worn redwood tree were two fuzzy baby owls — owlets — looking like cute little Star Wars ewoks as they bobbed their heads and warbled in curiosity. Two parent birds were in the nearby redwood canopy, keeping a watchful eye on their brood.

Spotted owls are the holy grail of veteran Bay Area birders. To see fledgling spotted owls was truly a moment to remember.



Wildlife abounds in the redwood forest in Mill Valley's Cascade Canyon where above a trail in the hollow of a time-worn redwood tree are two fuzzy baby owls, looking like Star Wars ewoks.
(Ben Davidson Photography)

This wasn't the first time I've spotted these rare owls and other exotic birds in this particular redwood forest. Walking the trails that follow Mill Valley's Old Mill Creek, I've seen great blue heron and snowy egrets — birds usually found in San Francisco Bay's estuaries — fishing for tiny steelhead trout. And I regularly see red-tailed hawks and turkey vultures circling the canopy high overhead, bold Steller's jays winging

among the trees and Anna's hummingbirds flitting about in high-speed searches for nectar. Acorn woodpeckers and pileated woodpeckers with their distinctive red crest and distinctive call peck away at rotting trees with a rat-a-tat-tat, searching for bugs to eat.

Among my favorite avians are the most common: tiny Pacific wrens that hop along logs with their stubby tails held upright, chirping high-pitch notes. They're cute and perky, like little welcome ambassadors to the redwood forest.

California's 2 million-acre coastal redwood forest, which is unique to the state's north coast and the extreme southern Oregon coast, is also home to an abundance of small mammals, such as bobcats, Western gray squirrels, raccoons, skunk, bats and medium-sized members of the weasel family, including Pacific fishers and pine martens. You may spot larger animals, too, such as black-tailed deer and Roosevelt elk.

Once, while visiting Muir Woods, I spotted elusive gray foxes and their young emerging from a den below the deck of the park's visitor center. Another checkmark for my redwoods wildlife bucket list, right next to black bear and mountain lions.

Once common amphibians such as Pacific giant salamanders, red-bellied newts and tailed frogs have become less common, at least on my walks, perhaps victims of increased global temperatures. But garter snakes and slimy, slow moving banana slugs (the mascot of UC Santa Cruz — Go Slugs!) are still seen here and there, with the latter most commonly seen on moist and rainy days.



Sun rays break through the redwoods during a hike along French Loop Trail at the Redwood Regional Park in Oakland, Calif., on Friday, April 21, 2023. (Ray Chavez/Bay Area News Group)

And there are fish! In Oakland's Reinhardt Redwood Regional Park, a unique variety of rainbow trout has adapted to dammed-up waterways and can still be seen spawning in streams shaded by the park's redwood trees. On Mount Tamalpais'

north side, Coho salmon make their way up Lagunitas Creek to spawn each year and can be seen from the Leo Cronin Fish Viewing Area off Sir Francis Drake Boulevard between the village of Lagunitas and Taylor State Park.

It's yet another remarkable wildlife scene in our unique and vibrant coastal redwood forest.

If you're heading out to go birding or wildlife-watching in California's coastal redwood forests, you'll want to wear comfortable hiking shoes, of course, and tote trekking poles, a good pair of binoculars and birding, wildflower and wildlife guidebooks or smartphone apps. A hat, sunscreen, a sack lunch and plenty of water are a must for any Bay Area hike. And a digital camera with telephoto and close-up lenses will provide the highest resolution images.

Smartphone applications such as [Merlin](#) and [Sibley](#) have detailed identification information and illustrations along with bird calls that can help you identify a wide variety of birds. The latter, which costs \$20, includes all the content in David Allen Sibley's 644-page "Sibley Guide to Birds," as well as audio recordings. But like its print counterpart, the app is aimed at die-hard birding devotees. Beginning birders will likely want to start with Merlin, a free app designed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

You can download a copy of the Save the Redwoods League's free, [81-page birdwatcher's guide](#) to the coastal redwood and giant sequoia forests and other helpful travel guides at www.savetheredwoods.org under the Experiences tab.

Having seen spotted owls in the redwoods and checked those off my list, my new priority is to spot other rare birds, such as California condors, peregrine falcons, bald eagles and especially marbled murrelets, seabirds that curiously split their time between the open ocean and nesting sites high in the canopy of old growth redwoods.

So many birds, so little time.

For neophyte birders, I suggest following the sage words of the Save the Redwoods birding guide: "Walk slowly and stop often. Listen. Look. Speak softly. Birds, after all, are wildlife, and wildlife is reflexively reclusive and retiring. To observe birds, you must become part of the wild."



EAST BAY REGIONAL PARKS HAPPENINGS FOR NOVEMBER

written by [CC News](#) November 11, 2023



Here is a rundown of upcoming happenings within the East Bay Regional Park District, including honoring veterans with free access and parking on Veterans Day at Regional Parks

The East Bay Regional Park District is leading the way in wildfire protection for the community with innovative solutions to address wildfire risks. At Anthony Chabot Regional Park, a first-of-its-kind, large-scale fuels reduction project is underway using a climate-friendly carbonator to dispose of vegetation. The carbonator, a Tigercat 6050, burns organic matter at very high temperatures (about 1,300 degrees Fahrenheit) and with very little oxygen. The process, called pyrolysis, produces very low emissions, especially compared to conventional disposal methods of open pile burning or

transporting long distances off-site in diesel trucks. The resulting biochar is being used throughout the Park District to enhance soil health, improve water retention, and increase crop productivity, including at the Park District's Ardenwood Historic Farm in Fremont. State, federal, and District funding are being used for the fuels management project at Anthony Chabot Regional Park.

The innovative use of the carbonator for fuels reduction projects is being seen as a model statewide as well as nationally. The Park District's leadership team, firefighters, scientists, park rangers, and dedicated staff across departments continue to focus on wildfire mitigation strategies and large-scale fuels management projects, all while seeking new partnerships and ways to protect the community. For more info, visit www.ebparks.org/sites/default/files/carbonator-feature-article.pdf

November marks Native American Heritage Month, a time for us to honor and celebrate the past, present, and future of the vibrant Indigenous communities that have called the land now known as the East Bay home since time immemorial. In November and throughout the year, the East Bay Regional Park District recognizes enduring Indigenous traditions and Native Peoples' role as the original stewards of this region's ecosystems. To learn more about California Native peoples, visit www.ebparks.org/we-celebrate/native-american-heritage-month.

FREE park entrance for active and retired military members on Veterans Day – Saturday, November 11. The East Bay Regional Park District honors veterans with free access and parking on Veterans Day at Regional Parks, including Ardenwood Historic Farm in Fremont. The fee waiver covers parking and park entry but does not include dog fees, boat launch or inspection fees, fishing permits, or concessions, such as the Tilden Merry-Go-Round and Redwood Valley Railway steam train.

Celebrate Green Friday, November 24, with a FREE Park Day. Green Friday at the Park District provides healthy and fun ways to enjoy the day after Thanksgiving with

family and friends. On Green Friday, all entrance activity fees are waived in Regional Parks, including parking, dogs, horses, boat launching, and fishing, as well as entrance to Ardenwood Historic Farm. The fee waiver does not include state fees for fishing licenses and watercraft inspections or concessions, such as the Tilden Merry-Go-Round and Redwood Valley Railway steam train. To learn more, visit www.ebparks.org/we-celebrate/green-friday.

For years, Ardenwood Historic Farm's eucalyptus groves have been the site of a rare and exciting natural phenomenon – the annual gathering of monarch butterflies. From late October to February, a few hundred to several thousand monarchs typically form dense clusters in the trees and, on sunny afternoons, fly around looking for nectar.

Lately, it has become challenging to predict whether the monarchs will return to Ardenwood. Dramatic variations in winter temperatures, combined with extended drought and habitat loss, have resulted in very few monarchs present at the farm over the past three winters.

While many typical monarch gathering sites in the state saw few to no monarchs last winter, volunteers at other locations across California were surprised by unusually high numbers – the highest total since the 2000 season according to Western Monarch Count, a community science program through the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation. This news was a great relief to monarch enthusiasts throughout the state who feared the monarch was on the road to extinction.

To learn more, consider attending a naturalist-led monarch program at Ardenwood. For more information, visit www.ebparks.org/calendar and search for “monarchs.”

East Bay Regional Parks using new technology to reduce fire risk

By [The Pioneer](#) 1 week ago



The Tigercat 6050 burns organic matter at high temperatures with low emissions.

CASTRO VALLEY (Nov. 5, 2023) — The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) has launched a first-of-its-kind fuels reduction project at Anthony Chabot Regional Park.

EBRPD is using an innovative and climate-friendly carbonator to dispose of vegetation with extremely low emissions, rather than conventional open-pile burning or transporting it long distances in diesel trucks.

In fall 2020, staff noticed significant tree die-off in its parks. Further investigation identified more than 1,500 acres of die-off within regional parks, mostly eucalyptus, but also bay and pine. While there are many contributing factors, the overarching cause is believed to be drought-stress due to climate change.

“We were facing a crisis,” said general manager Sabrina B. Landreth. “I directed staff to assess the situation quickly and come together with a plan of action, including obtaining the necessary funding to begin addressing the die-off.”

Complex situation

Much of the problem area was within the district’s Wildfire Hazard Mitigation and Resource Management Plan, which meant environmental approvals for fuels reduction work were already in place. However, they needed more than \$30 million. In 2021, the state responded with a \$10 million direct appropriation.

Adding to the complexity of the situation was the fact that removing so much dead and dying vegetation by traditional means required hauling it in trucks to plants that would burn it for fuel. Transporting the dead trees was cost-prohibitive, disruptive to the residential areas and potentially dangerous. It would also create greenhouse gases and pollution.

EBRPD’s innovative plan featured a carbonator machine, a Tigercat 6050, which resembles a trucking container with a box-like metal chamber. The device burns organic matter with very little oxygen and at very high temperatures, which breaks down the molecules of organic matter into a smaller material called biochar. The process creates extremely low emissions.

The resulting biochar – essentially elemental carbon – enriches soil by improving its water retention or pH, accelerates composting of green waste and filters toxins from water.

The district tested the carbonator at an 80-acre pilot project at Anthony Chabot in 2022. It proved to be net positive, with only a tiny fraction of emissions compared to open-pile burning or hauling off-site.

“Going forward, up to half of the biomass removed from parks could be converted into biochar,” said Khari Helae, the district’s assistant fire chief.

Fuels reduction program underway



The East Bay Regional Park District is removing dying trees at Anthony Chabot Regional Park.

A major fuels reduction project is now underway on 365 acres at Anthony Chabot, using \$7.5 million of the state funding plus \$1.5 million from the federal government. The plan includes a felling team removing trees from the top down and a mastication team thinning vegetation and trees from the ground up.

“By doing this work now, we will gain a more sustainable eco-system in the long-term to benefit generations to come,” said Landreth.

East Bay Parks tackles fire-fuel reduction with 'biochar' project

Smokeless incinerator will burn 60-80 tons of biomass every 12 hours

by Ruth Dusseault / Bay City News Service

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*Inside the new biomass incinerator, called a carbonator, at Anthony Chabot Regional Park.
(Photo by Ruth Dusseault / BCN)*

Pull a burning log out of a campfire and it will send a smoky plume of carbon and ash into the air. Place that log in a 1,500-degree fan-blown kiln and the carbon and ash will lock down inside the coal.

That's the mechanical principle behind the Tigercat 6050 Carbonator being used by the fire fuel reduction team in the East Bay Regional Park District this year.

District fire officials unveiled the machine that creates "biochar" on Oct. 24 ahead of the fuel reduction season.

Anthony Chabot Regional Park is the site of the largest eucalyptus reduction project in Northern California and is the largest in park district history. According to the district, the use of the new carbonator to break down biomass is directly benefiting the communities of Oakland and Castro Valley by reducing truck traffic as well as the risk of forest fire.

"If we were to dispose of that biomass traditionally, we would be trucking the timber all the way to a cogeneration facility near Sacramento," said assistant fire chief Khari Helae with the park district. Instead, they can process the biomass on-site.

Deep in the park, green felling machines slash, rip, rake and grab young eucalyptus trees and stack them in a staging area next to the idle container-sized carbonator. By November, the smokeless incinerator will be burning 60 to 80 tons of biomass every 12 hours.

In a process called pyrolysis, the wood is burned at extremely high temperatures, under a curtain of fanned wind in the absence of oxygen. The charred wood is cooled with water and mechanically crunched into bits of dense porous coal, about the size of construction gravel.

"We would have had seven semi-trucks at all times on these small park roads," he said. "We're able to reduce the truck traffic carbon by nearly 10 times, from 19 pounds to 2.1 pounds. So not only are we doing it in a new way that's better for the environment, but we took something that did not have much use, which was eucalyptus lumber, and we've turned it into something that has a benefit, biochar," he said.



Cleared eucalyptus stacked and ready for incineration in the carbonator at Anthony Chabot Regional Park. (Photo by Ruth Dusseault / BCN)

One of the most beneficial uses of biochar is its ability to retain water, said Helae. It can be mixed with soil to make it drought-resistant. It also filters contaminants from soil.

This fall's 365-acre fuel reduction project follows a smaller pilot project done on 80 acres in January. In 2021, the district's fire officials were spooked by the sudden death of over 1,500 acres of drought-stricken trees.

Non-native eucalyptus trees contain chemicals that easily ignite. They regrow quickly into impenetrable densities, and firefighters can't reach a blaze to fight it. Because the park is near urban areas, they can't just let a fire burn out.

They knew the forest had to be thinned to avoid the risk of disasters like the 1991 Oakland Tunnel Fire, which killed 23 people and destroyed 3,000 homes. After seeking expertise from forestry labs at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of

California, Davis, they dedicated \$1 million from their own district budget and asked the California Coastal Conservancy for another million dollars to fund the pilot.

District General Manager Sabrina Landreth thanked a list of supporters who helped direct \$10 million in state funds to upscale the project this year.

The district now has a biochar utilization committee, which is working to find additional uses for biochar within the park district.

The biochar from the pilot was given to Ardenwood Historic Farm, where it's being utilized to improve soils and crop yields, said Helae.

Another project where biochar is being used is in Wildcat Canyon.

"We had a landslide occur during the atmospheric rivers that took place last winter," Helae said. "Biochar is being mixed with the soil to help the plants grow back quicker."

CASTRO VALLEY FORUM

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East Bay Regional Parks Uses New Tech to Prevent Fires

Nov 1

Written By [Michael Singer](#)





Last week, East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) officials were in the hills above Lake Chabot to demonstrate new technology they say will reduce the chances of a wildfire by disposing of organic materials in a

climate-friendly way.

The machine, called a Tigercat 6050 “carbonator,” resembles a trucking container with a box-like metal chamber. The device burns cut-up trees and shrubs using very little oxygen and at very high temperatures (about 1,300 degrees Fahrenheit). The result is a blackened material called biochar that can be put back into the soil, which improves its water retention or pH, accelerates the composting of green waste, and filters toxins from water.

Previously, EBRPD would have either needed to burn the dead trees and shrubs in an open pile or use heavy diesel trucks to haul out the remains. By contrast, the carbonator process creates extremely low emissions.

“The carbonator is another tool for our toolbox to reduce wildfire risks and combat climate change. Going forward, up to half of the biomass removed from parks could be converted into biochar,” said Park District Assistant Fire Chief Khari Helae.

Having never been used in a metropolitan area for biomass disposal, EBRPD tested the Tigercat 6050 as part of an 80-acre pilot project at Anthony Chabot Regional Park in 2022. They shared their findings with the state and other partner agencies facing similar challenges. When completed in March 2023, the pilot project was shown as a net positive.

“As a large regional park district with a full-time fire department and biologists and ecologists on staff, we can do work that other agencies can’t,” said Park District Fire Chief Aileen Theile.

The current amount of biochar generated around Lake Chabot is currently being used at the Park District’s Ardenwood Farms in Fremont.

Reducing Wildfire Risks

In the fall of 2020, while conducting ongoing vegetation management work, Park District staff noticed significant tree die-offs in its parks. Staff later identified more than 1,500 acres of dying trees within the Regional Parks, primarily eucalyptus, bay, and pine. While there are many contributing factors, the overarching cause is believed to be drought-stress due to climate change.

The Park District spans Alameda and Contra Costa counties in the San Francisco Bay Area and manages 73 parks, 1,330 miles of trails, and over 125,000 acres. EBRPD has its own fire department and fuels management crew.

“As the largest regional park district of its kind in the nation and a local wildfire prevention leader, we knew we needed to lead the way in finding solutions,” said Park District General Manager Sabrina B. Landreth.

Much of the identified tree die-off was within the Park District's approved Wildfire Hazard Mitigation and Resource Management Plan, which meant environmental approvals for fuels reduction work were already in place. However, significant funding was needed.

In 2021, shortly after the discovery of tree die-off, the EBRPD approached state officials for help addressing the situation, and the state responded with a critical \$10 million direct appropriation from the legislature through Senator Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley) and then-Senator Bob Wieckowski (D-Fremont). The total cost estimate for the tree die-off issue is over \$30 million.

Based on the success of the pilot project, EBRPD is moving forward with thinning out more of its dead or dying trees and shrubs in the backwoods areas of Anthony Chabot Regional Park. The project uses \$7.5 million of the \$10 million direct appropriation from the state legislature, plus federal funds of \$1.5 million secured by U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D-Calif.).

The 365-acre project currently underway at Anthony Chabot Regional Park involves heavy equipment, including a felling team removing trees from the top down and a mastication team thinning vegetation and trees from the ground up.

"By doing this work now, we will gain a more sustainable eco-system in the long-term to benefit generations to come. We are working and planning for both now and the future, and we're committed to playing the long game," said Landreth

EAST BAY PARKS USE GROUNDBREAKING TECHNOLOGY TO REDUCE WILDFIRE RISKS



As part of fuels reduction work for fire suppression a tree is removed then burned in a low-emission Tigercat 6050 carbonator machine, resulting in biochar used to enrich soil in the East Bay parks. Photos: EBRPD