

# There's a fungus among us: East Bay Parks puts out annual wild mushroom warning

The death cap and the western destroying angel are ones people, pets should avoid most

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by Katy St. Clair / Bay City News Service

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The Golden Chanterelle may be the state's new official mushroom, but the East Bay Regional Park District is reminding residents that some fungi are best appreciated for their beauty, not taste.



Death Cap

Western Destroying Angel

East Bay Regional Park District is warning visitors to avoid the poisonous mushrooms 'death cap' and 'western destroying angel' after winter and spring rains. (Image courtesy EBRPD, via BCN)

The park district sent out its annual wild mushroom warning last Friday as winter rains spur spores and mushrooms begin popping up.

There are two kinds that both people and pets need especially to avoid, and their names say it all: the death cap (*Amanita phalloides*) and the western destroying angel (*Amanita ocreata*).

Both of these mushrooms contain amatoxins, which are molecules that are deadly to most animals -- even primates like us. Symptoms don't appear until up to 12 hours later, making them a great plot element in an Agatha Christie novel but causing extreme gastrointestinal distress that progresses to liver and kidney failure to anyone who ingests them.

According to Dave Mason, public information supervisor for the park district, these species are responsible for most cases of mushroom poisonings in California.

Both are mostly associated with oak trees and can be found anywhere that oak roots are present.

The death cap is a medium to large mushroom that typically has a greenish-gray cap, according to Mason. It has white gills, a white ring around its stem, and a large white sac at the base of its stem. Not native to California, it was introduced to North America by being attached to the roots of European cork oaks and is now "steadily colonizing the West Coast," said Mason.

As for the western destroying angel, it is native to the state but nonetheless just as poisonous as the death cap. It is medium to large with a creamy white cap, white gills, a white ring around its stem that can disappear with age, and it enjoys the company of oak trees exclusively. It usually appears late winter and into spring.

Anyone gamboling through the East Bay Parks should heed the warnings about these mushrooms, but Mason reminds all park visitors that the removal of any mushrooms is prohibited, edible or not.

To learn more about other poisonous mushrooms in our area, go to [ebparks.org/safety/trails/toxic-mushrooms](http://ebparks.org/safety/trails/toxic-mushrooms) or visit the Tilden Fungus Fair in late January [ebparks.org/events/tilden-fungus-fair](http://ebparks.org/events/tilden-fungus-fair).



## DeSaulnier receives award as advocate of East Bay Park District

By Bev Britton 1 week ago

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*Sabrina Landreth and Dennis Waespi present Mark DeSaulnier with the Radke award on Dec. 8. (Photo courtesy Mark DeSaulnier)*

WALNUT CREEK, CA (Dec. 26, 2023) — The East Bay Regional Park District and the Regional Parks Foundation awarded the 2023 Radke Championing Advocacy Award to Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (D-Concord).

Park district general manager

Sabrina Landreth and board president Dennis Waespi were among those in attendances at the Dec. 8 presentation along the Iron Horse Trail in Walnut Creek.

DeSaulnier has been a long-time supporter and avid user of park district parks and trails. In 2022, he was instrumental in securing \$3 million in federal funding for the district's planned visitor center at Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50.

The award is named for late park district board member Ted Radke, who advanced state and federal support for park funding.

## Happy Newt Year!

Winter means migration and mating for the East Bay's favorite amphibian

By Sonya Bennett-Brandt

December 27, 2023



SUPER CREATURES Newts Are Intriguing, Enigmatic Creatures, Full Of Impressive Transformational Abilities. (Photo By Kevin Fox, Courtesy Of The East Bay Regional Park District)

In the Bay Area, our winter is a subtle one: Daytime temperatures sidle down into the 50s, there's a hint of a nip in the air and everyone puts their scarves on. And, it rains—not a lot, but just enough to lure the East Bay's newts out of their damp burrows and send them crawling across wood and road in search of a mating pool.

The East Bay has two endemic newt species: *taricha torosa*, the California newt, and *taricha granulosa*, the rough-skinned newt. They look almost identical, and both species spend the winter searching for a mate. “They have to do their breeding cycle in water,” says Natalie Reeder, a wildlife biologist with East Bay Parks. “They’ll go to ponds, slow-moving streams or pools within streams, depending on what’s available.”

But first, they have to get there: a strenuous, hazardous migration for a five- to eight-inch animal. Tilden Regional Park closes South Park Drive to traffic every winter between November and March to protect the newts that slowly slither across, vulnerable to cars.

Newts are intriguing, enigmatic creatures, full of impressive transformational abilities. They begin their life in water, hatching into larvae with feathery gills that wave out from their heads like eccentric facial hair, or a Victorian ruff. Then, both California and rough-skinned newts develop lungs as they outgrow their larval stage and leave their natal pools for life on land.

“Newts are to salamanders as toads are to frogs,” Reeder explains. Like toads, they’re a little drier, and better at living away from water—but they still have to stay moist to survive. “Newt skin is capable of being drier than a more fully aquatic salamander. But they do need to have some moisture. Amphibians are not meant to be fully dry.”

Another impressive newt superpower is the potent neurotoxin, tetrodotoxin, that both California and rough-skinned newts secrete from their skin. The toxin weakens and paralyzes muscle tissue, including the diaphragm and chest wall muscles, stopping breathing. “Humans can certainly be sick from it, or even die if they ingest enough of it,” Reeder says.

If threatened by a predator, newts will arch their back, lifting their body to show off their neon orange bellies. The bright color warns the attacker about their toxicity. The phenomenon of aposematism—animals advertising their toxicity to potential predators through warning coloration—is common in amphibians.

Rough-skinned newts in particular are impressively toxic; few predators can survive eating them. One exception is the common garter snake, which has developed a resistance to newt toxin. It’s a famous example of coevolution, often described as an evolutionary arms race. Poisonous newts push garter snake populations to evolve to be resistant to their toxin, Reeder explains. Then, “newts get more toxic in response, then garter snakes get more resistant in response. And that’s what drives the newts to get more and more poisonous.”

One side effect of extreme toxicity is a certain boldness. “Because they’re toxic, they’re not super afraid. They don’t spend too much effort trying to hide themselves,” says Reeder.

Winter is the perfect time for newt-spotting. “The best way to do it with the least amount of impact is to go to ponds during the breeding season,” Reeder suggests. “They’re usually pretty easy to see if you can find a pond that’s got clear enough water.”

When males return to pools to breed, they transform into a more aquatic form: Their skin becomes smoother, and their tails flatten and become more fin-like. Male rough-skinned newts develop special, grabby “nuptial pads” on their toes to help them hang on to females.

Newt courtship involves a kind of mating dance where the male shows off his orange belly and swishes his tail. Then, he hugs the female from above in a clasp called “amplexus,” and rubs his chin on the top of her nose to stimulate egg production. Competition, however, can be fierce; an amplexed pair may be approached by other males, creating a “mating ball” where as many as a dozen males cluster around a female, all grappling with each other until one male emerges victorious.

Then, if all goes well, he attaches a spermatophore, a packet of spermatozoa, to the floor of the pool; the female retrieves it and uses it to fertilize her eggs. California newts lay eggs in big bunches; rough-skinned newts lay eggs one at a time, carefully attaching each one to bits of underwater vegetation.

Two to three weeks later, tiny baby newts will be swimming about, eating microinvertebrates in the water. “I always like to say that for amphibians, they’ll eat anything that moves that fits in their mouth,” says Reeder. As the newts grow larger, they graduate to eating insects, spiders, mites, worms, mollusks and even small amphibians and fish.

Most of what biologists know about newts is centered around the breeding season, when they’re easier to find and observe. “Historically they’ve been understudied,” says Reeder. Once they leave their pools, the lives of newts become more mysterious. “We don’t really know where they go,” says Reeder. “It’s much harder to find them and track them.” Biologists can put a GPS collar on a mountain lion or glue a transmitter to a turtle shell, but tracking a newt is harder.

Reeder says that advancements in collecting environmental DNA have helped scientists study newt populations in more depth. “Instead of collecting the animal itself and getting genetic material from it, they go to a body of water, or take soil samples, and detect newt DNA in the sample,” she says.

California newts are a “species of special concern” in the state—in Southern California, populations have declined due to habitat loss and the destruction of breeding ponds. Luckily, Northern Californian populations have remained more stable, and the remarkable newt congregations of the winter and spring provide a window for scientists—and amateur enthusiasts—to meet our unique amphibian neighbors in person.

In the East Bay, newts can be found in Tilden Regional Park, Briones Regional Park, Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve, Las Trampas Wilderness Regional Preserve, Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park and Sunol Wilderness Regional Preserve.

Newts are often active during the day, but the biggest factor for newt activity is dampness. The wetter it is, the more likely newts are to be on the move. To be extra sure of success, naturalist Trent Pearce recommends a post-sunset search.

“The best advice I have for finding newts is this: Go out after dark,” he advises. “The increase in ambient moisture after the sun sets is enough to get them moving about.”

Going newting right after a classic East Bay winter rainshower will yield even better results. Pearce reminds drivers to keep an eye open for an ethereal procession of amorous amphibians crossing wet roads. “There are newts underfoot,” he notes.

Get the timing right, and diligent seekers are sure to encounter a newt enjoying our wetter winters. “Find a stream, pond or even a large puddle after dark and look carefully with a headlamp,” Pearce says. “You’ll find them.”





## Fungus among us: East Bay Park District puts out annual wild mushroom warning

by: [Bay City News](#)

Posted: Dec 25, 2023 / 07:14 PM PST

Updated: Dec 25, 2023 / 07:14 PM PST

(BCN) — The Golden Chanterelle may be the state's new official mushroom, but the East Bay Regional Park District is reminding residents that some fungi are best appreciated for their beauty, not taste. The park district sent out its annual wild mushroom warning Friday as winter rains spur spores and mushrooms begin popping up.

There are two kinds that both people and pets need especially avoid, and their names say it all: the death cap (*Amanita phalloides*) and the western destroying angel (*Amanita ocreata*).

Both of these mushrooms contain amatoxins, which are molecules that are deadly to most animals—even primates like us. Symptoms don't appear until up to 12 hours later, making them a great plot element in an Agatha Christie novel but causing extreme gastrointestinal distress that progresses to liver and kidney failure to anyone who ingests them.

According to Dave Mason, public information supervisor for the park district, these species are responsible for most cases of mushroom poisonings in California. Both are mostly associated with oak trees and can be found anywhere that oak roots are present.

The death cap is a medium to large mushroom that typically has a greenish-gray cap, according to Mason. It has white gills, a white ring around its stem, and a large white sac at the base of its stem. Not native to California, it was introduced to North America by being attached to the roots of European cork oaks and is now "steadily colonizing the West Coast," said Mason.



As for the western destroying angel, it is native to the state but nonetheless just as poisonous as the death cap. It is medium to large with a creamy white cap, white gills, a white ring around its stem that can disappear with age, and it enjoys the company of oak trees exclusively. It usually appears late winter and into spring.

Anyone gamboling through the East Bay Regional Parks should heed the warnings about these mushrooms, but Mason reminds all park visitors that the removal of any mushrooms is prohibited, edible or not.

To learn more about other poisonous mushrooms in our area, go to [ebparks.org/safety/trails/toxic-mushrooms](http://ebparks.org/safety/trails/toxic-mushrooms) or visit the Tilden Fungus Fair in late January [ebparks.org/events/tilden-fungus-fair](http://ebparks.org/events/tilden-fungus-fair).

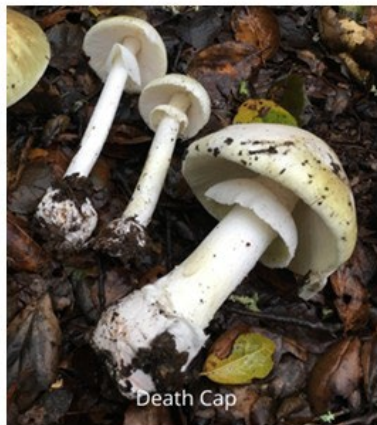


# Here's Your Annual Wild Mushroom Warning From The East Bay Regional Park District

December 23, 2023 - 12:00 PM 5 comments

## Annual Wild Mushroom Warning

*Learn More about Mushrooms at the Tilden Fungus Fair*



Death Cap



Western Destroying Angel

With the return of winter rains, park visitors may have noticed mushrooms popping up in the Regional Parks.

Mushrooms are an ecologically important part of our parklands and can look beautiful – but some of them contain dangerous toxins.

ADVERTISING

The death cap (*Amanita phalloides*) and western destroying angel (*Amanita ocreata*) are two of the world's most toxic mushrooms, and both can be found in East Bay Regional Parks during the rainy season.

The death cap and western destroying angel mushrooms contain amatoxins, molecules that are deadly to many animals. Symptoms may not appear until up to 12 hours after consumption, beginning as severe gastrointestinal distress and progressing to liver and kidney failure if treatment is not sought immediately. Both mushrooms can be lethal to humans and pets if consumed. They are mainly associated with oak trees and can be found growing anywhere oak roots are present.

The death cap is a medium to large mushroom that typically has a greenish-gray cap, white gills, a white ring around the stem, and a large white sac at the base of the stem. Although the death cap is mainly associated with oak trees, it has been found growing with other hardwoods. It was accidentally introduced to North America on the roots of European cork oaks and is now slowly colonizing the west coast. The death cap is not native to California.

The western destroying angel is a medium to large mushroom that usually has a creamy white cap, white gills, a white ring around the stem that can disappear with age, and a thin white sac at the base. It fruits from late winter into spring. It is associated exclusively with oaks. Unlike the death cap, it is a native California mushroom.

The Park District urges the public to be safe and knowledgeable about toxic mushrooms when encountering them in the parks. Collecting any mushrooms in East Bay Regional Parks is not allowed.

Pet owners should contact a veterinarian immediately if they suspect their pet may have eaten a toxic mushroom.

While the death cap and western destroying angel mushrooms are responsible for most cases of mushroom poisonings in California, deadly toxins can also be found in Galerina and Lepiota mushroom species, which also occur in the Bay Area. For more information about toxic mushrooms, visit [www.ebparks.org/safety/trails/toxic-mushrooms](http://www.ebparks.org/safety/trails/toxic-mushrooms).

### **Learn More About Fungi – Tilden Fungus Fair, January 20-21, 2023**

Celebrate the fruits of winter! View hundreds of local mushroom specimens, mingle with the mycological community, and enjoy presentations by guest speakers at this two-day special event. Saturday, January 20, and Sunday, January 21, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Tilden Nature Area. For more information, visit [www.ebparks.org/events/tilden-fungus-fair](http://www.ebparks.org/events/tilden-fungus-fair).

***The East Bay Regional Park District is the largest regional park system in the nation, comprising 73 parks, 55 miles of shoreline, and over 1,300 miles of trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding, and environmental education. The Park District receives more than 25 million visits annually throughout Alameda and Contra Costa counties in the San Francisco Bay Area.***



## 2 Of World's Most Toxic Mushrooms Found In East Bay Parks

Both the death cap and western destroying angel mushrooms usually appear after the first real rain and can be lethal to humans and pets.

Maggie Fusek, Patch Staff

Posted Fri, Dec 22, 2023 at 2:32 pm PT



Death cap mushrooms are shown on the right and western destroying angel mushrooms are on the left. Both are toxic and can be deadly for humans and their pets. (Photos courtesy East Bay Regional Park District )

**EAST BAY, CA —** Mushrooms are an ecologically important part of East Bay parklands and can look beautiful — but some of them contain

dangerous toxins, the representative of the East Bay Regional Park District said Friday.

"With the return of winter rains, park visitors may have noticed mushrooms popping up in the Regional Parks," Park Spokesperson Dave Mason said. "The death cap (*Amanita phalloides*) and western destroying angel (*Amanita ocreata*) are two of the world's most toxic mushrooms, and both can be found in East Bay regional parks during the rainy season."

Both mushrooms contain amatoxins, which are deadly to many animals and can be lethal to humans as well. Both mushrooms are also mainly associated with oak trees and can be found anywhere oak roots are present, Mason said.

## Death Cap

According to the park district, the death cap is a medium- to large-sized mushroom that typically has a greenish-gray cap, white gills, a white ring around the stem, and a large white sac at the base of the stem. Although the death cap is mainly associated with oak trees, it has been found growing with other hardwoods. It was accidentally introduced to North America on the roots of European cork oaks and is now slowly colonizing the West Coast. The death cap is not native to California.

## Western Destroying Angel

The western destroying angel is also a medium- to large-sized mushroom. It usually has a creamy white cap, white gills, a white ring around the stem that can disappear with age, and a thin white sac at the base. It fruits from late winter into spring. It is associated exclusively with oaks. Unlike the death cap, it is a native California mushroom.

## But Wait, There Are More

While the death cap and western destroying angel mushrooms are responsible for most cases of mushroom poisonings in California, deadly toxins can also be found in *Galerina* and *Lepiota* mushroom species, which also occur in the Bay Area. For more information about toxic mushrooms, visit [Ebparks.org/safety/trails/toxic-mushrooms](http://Ebparks.org/safety/trails/toxic-mushrooms).

## What To Do

Collecting any mushrooms in East Bay Regional Parks is not allowed so please refrain from it.

Keep pets on leash. Any pet owners who suspect their pet may have eaten a toxic mushroom should contact a veterinarian immediately.

## Inform Yourself

Not all mushrooms are bad. The Tilden Fungus Fair runs Jan. 20–21 and is a great way to celebrate and learn more about the fruits of winter.

In addition to viewing hundreds of local mushroom specimens on display, guests can mingle with the mycological community and see presentations by guest speakers at this two-day special event held at the Tilden Nature Area, 1500 Central Park Drive in Berkeley.

The event runs from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Jan. 20–21. This is a free event and there is no pre-registration; it is a drop-in event only. Go to [Ebparks.org/events/tilden-fungus-fair](https://ebparks.org/events/tilden-fungus-fair) for more info.





## Park District Recognizes Rep. DeSaulnier With Advocacy Award

The Radke Championing Advocacy Award is named for late Park District Board Member Ted Radke, who advanced state & federal support for parks.

Maggie Fusek, Patch Staff  
Posted Wed, Dec 13, 2023 at 5:32 am PT



U.S. Rep. Mark DeSaulnier was recognized Dec. 8 with the 2023 Radke Championing Advocacy Award. (East Bay Regional Park District)

**EAST BAY, CA —** The East Bay Regional Park District and the Regional Parks Foundation recognized U.S. Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (D-Concord) with the 2023 Radke Championing Advocacy Award at a ceremony Friday along the Iron Horse Trail in Walnut Creek.

DeSaulnier has been a longtime supporter and avid user of Park District parks and trails. In 2022, he was instrumental in securing \$3 million in federal funding for the District's planned visitor center at Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50, the Park District said.

"U.S. Representative Mark DeSaulnier has been a great champion and supporter of the East Bay Regional Park District," said Park District Board President Dennis Waespi. "The 2023 Radke Championing Advocacy Award recognizes the Representative for his many years of advocacy for the Park District, including as a Concord City Council Member, Contra Costa County Supervisor, State Legislator, and now as a U.S. Representative."

DeSaulnier is the first award recipient serving in Washington, D.C.





U.S. Rep. Mark DeSaulnier is recognized with the 2023 Radke Championing Advocacy Award from the East Bay Regional Park District and the Regional Park Foundation in a ceremony Dec. 8 on Iron Horse Trail in Walnut Creek. (East Bay Regional Park District)

"The Park District thanks Representative Mark DeSaulnier for his leadership in obtaining critical funds in the Federal budget

for expanding access to the outdoors and providing a welcoming space for visitors to learn the important history at Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50," said Park District General Manager Sabrina Landreth. "Representative DeSaunier has been a true partner and champion for the Park District throughout the years."

DeSaulnier is known for championing policies that promote sustainability and environmental protection, and mitigate the consequential effects of climate change. He led the effort to secure a \$3 million Community Benefit Project application for a future Visitor Center at Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50. The visitor center is envisioned as a joint facility with the National Park Service to provide outdoor recreational opportunities, connect the public with the natural and human history of the park, and serve as a welcoming center for NPS to share the history of events commemorated by the Port Chicago Naval Magazine National Memorial.

"The East Bay Regional Park District provides invaluable service to our community by creating opportunities for outdoor activity that benefit our physical and mental health, protecting the environment, and hosting wildlife educational programs," DeSaulnier said. "I am proud to have called the Park District a partner over many years in our efforts to ensure public access to parklands, preserve habitats, and share the history of our East Bay lands, and am honored to be recognized with the 2023 Radke Championing Advocacy Award."

The Radke Championing Advocacy Award is named for the late Park District Board Member Ted Radke, who advanced state and federal support for park funding. Former Director Radke strengthened the Park District's ties in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. Radke served 36 years on the Park District Board of Directors and was the longest-serving board member in its 89-year history.

# SFGATE

## Bay Area petting zoo decimated by rare and fatal rabbit virus

The virus is 99% fatal when contracted by domesticated rabbits

By [Sam Mauhay-Moore](#) Updated Dec 10, 2023 7:19 a.m.



FILE: Several rabbits in a rabbit hutch. All the rabbits at the Little Farm at Tilden Regional Park died last month after contracting a viral illness. Tilen Držan / Getty Images

All of the rabbits at the Little Farm at [Tilden Regional Park](#) died last month after contracting a viral illness.

The farm's seven Dutch rabbits fell ill and died after being infected with myxomatosis, [Berkeleyside reported](#). Myxomatosis is a virus carried by bloodsucking insects such as mosquitoes and fleas, and can be spread by wild rabbits.

After a Little Farm rabbit named Jack Rabbit fell ill and was euthanized in early November, a biopsy confirmed that he had contracted the disease, Berkeleyside reported.

The other six rabbits were quarantined, but by the end of November, there were no longer any rabbits left at Little Farm. The few that hadn't contracted the illness were euthanized as a protective measure, as their odds of exposure were high.

“It was really hard,” Jenna Cassel, a naturalist at the park, told the [Mercury News](#). “When we lose any of the animals, it’s really heartbreaking. They have names. We get really attached to them.”

The strain of myxomatosis found in California is 99% fatal when contracted by domesticated rabbits, according to the Los Angeles County Public Health Department’s [College of Veterinary Medicine](#). Symptoms of the virus include lethargy and swelling of the eyes, both of which were observed in Jack Rabbit before he died.

Since the rabbits at Little Farm are kept in an outdoor enclosure, the virus may have spread to them through fleas or mosquitoes, according to the Mercury News. The East Bay Regional Park District did not respond to SFGATE’s request for comment by publication time.

There is currently no treatment available to combat myxomatosis once a rabbit contracts it. Although a vaccine is available in the United Kingdom, it hasn’t yet become available in the United States.

The Little Farm opened in 1955 as a place for children and their families to learn about farm animals. It houses animals including cows, sheep, goats, pigs and chickens.

The farm plans to include new rabbits — and an updated enclosure system — after at least four months, according to the Mercury News.



## REP MARK DESAULNIER HONORED AS 2023 RADKE CHAMPIONING ADVOCACY AWARD RECIPIENT

### Press Release

written by [CC News](#) December 9, 2023



Oakland, CA – The [East Bay Regional Park District](#) and the Regional Parks Foundation recognized U.S. Representative **Mark DeSaulnier** with the **2023 Radke Championing Advocacy Award** at a ceremony along the Iron

Horse Trail in Walnut Creek. U.S. Representative DeSaulnier has been a long-time supporter and avid user of Park District parks and trails. In 2022, he was instrumental in securing \$3 million in federal funding for the District’s planned visitor center at Thurgood Marshall Regional Park – Home of the Port Chicago 50.

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## All of Tilden's Little Farm rabbits are dead after rare viral outbreak

Seven rabbits were infected by the myxoma virus, which is fatal to pet rabbits and is primarily spread by mosquitoes. The California strain of the disease has no vaccine.

By [Iris Kwok](#) Dec. 7, 2023, 3:57 p.m.



Three Dutch rabbits, all named Oreo: Thin, Original, and Double Stuff, photographed in May 2023. Names were sometimes a point of contention between the docents and the youth volunteers, but they found common ground when naming these three rabbits. Credit: Deborah Doctor

All seven of the Dutch rabbits at Tilden Regional Park's pastoral Little Farm died or were euthanized in November after one developed a fatal disease likely contracted from mosquitoes infected by wild rabbits.

After a temperamental brown-and-white rabbit named "Jack Rabbit" fell ill when his eyes swelled and appeared abnormally lethargic, a veterinarian diagnosed the bunny with myxomatosis and euthanized it on Nov. 4. A biopsy confirmed the vet's diagnosis.

The remaining six rabbits were put under quarantine to prevent the public from touching them, but roughly a week later, healthy-seeming gray-and-white twin brothers died in quick succession.

"They just would be fine, and then be deceased the next day," said East Bay Regional Park District naturalist Jenna Collins. "This was happening very close together, and we were very concerned because this is something we hadn't experienced before."

There are currently no rabbits left at the farm — all have either died naturally or were euthanized to prevent further suffering.

“At the discretion of the vet, we euthanized the last few rabbits because the odds were very high that they were already infected and would pass away shortly,” Collins said. “It’s a very unpleasant passing, so we were doing the best that we could for the rabbits.”



Elwood, one of the gray-and-white rabbits, photographed in January 2023. Elwood and twin brother Jake died in quick succession in November after contracting myxomatosis. Credit: Iris Kwok

Myxomatosis is caused by the myxoma virus, which comes in different strains and only affects rabbit species. Some strains, like the South American strains introduced to Europe and Australia, have become less harmful, meaning infected rabbits

can survive.

But the California strain carried by wild cottontail brush rabbits is primarily transmitted by mosquitoes and remains fatal to pet rabbits. There is no treatment or available vaccine in the U.S., said Hilary Stern, a veterinarian at the Exotic Pet Clinic in Santa Cruz who has been working on a two-year study of the disease. Initial symptoms also include swollen eyelids, ears, and genitals and a “sleepy” look. While most rabbits die very quickly, those that survive the initial stage have trouble breathing, develop discharge from the eyes and nose and stop eating.

Stern’s clinic sees an average of six cases per year, though she believes many go unreported because sudden death is one of the main symptoms and accurate and rapid premortem tests do not exist.

“[The numbers] tend to wax and wane, and I’m guessing it has to do with the mosquito populations,” Stern said. “Maybe there’s been more or less rain, and it also depends on the wild rabbit population.”



Symptoms of myxomatosis include swollen eyelids, ears and genitals, said Santa Cruz veterinarian Hilary Stern, an expert on the virus. Credit: Hilary Stern



Cases, usually coming from places where wildlife is more active, start popping up in July and slow down by the end of November, she said. Stern hasn't found this year to be a particular outlier, though she recommends keeping pet rabbits indoors — especially during dusk and dawn — or at least behind mosquito netting.

Stern has worked to raise the profile of the disease, which was previously known by a few vets. She was taught how to recognize the disease by a veterinarian in Santa Cruz. "It has a very distinctive look," Stern said. "You start seeing it everywhere."

Collins said she's optimistic the Little Farm will be bringing back new rabbits next spring after a four-month waiting period, and screens are installed to keep insects — mosquitoes, fleas and ticks — out of the hutch.

For now, longtime volunteer Deborah Doctor, who is known at the farm as the Rabbit Lady, has switched over to showing off the farm's chickens on Sundays. One of the hens — with bronze and gray feathers — has been "amenable" to being picked up, calmly sitting on her lap as she fields questions from curious children.

It's not quite the same. Doctor started volunteering at the farm more than five years ago, after Farmer Stanley Ward, the farm's official caretaker of more than 20 years, placed a rabbit in her arms. Charmed, she began spending weekend afternoons there, showing kids how to properly pet the rabbits — always on their backs and in the direction the hair grows and getting into playful squabbles with youth volunteers over which name was "right." (Farmer Stanley's bitey "Jack Rabbit," for example, was "S'more" to Doctor. To her, his golden brown ears resembled graham crackers and the brown and white reminded her of chocolate and marshmallows.)

On some weekends, she'd meet several hundred children and their parents, who would almost always comment on how soft the rabbits' fur was. "Nobody's too cool to pet a rabbit," she liked to say to the adults who lingered in the back. Her all-time favorite comment came from a 5-year-old boy: "This rabbit is so soft, I want to marry it!"



# San Francisco Bay Area gains 18 miles of rustic hiking trails in Sunol

By [Gabe Lehman](#) Dec 7, 2023

The Tyler Ranch staging area and Sunol Ridge Trail are now open to the public at Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park.  
East Bay Regional Park District

After over two years of construction, the East Bay Regional Park District officially opened access to 18 miles of new hiking trails across 2,800 acres in the [Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park](#).

The trails are accessible from the freshly minted Tyler Ranch Staging Area in Sunol, California, a country town about 15 minutes east of Fremont. Sunol is also home to the Alameda Creek Overlook, formerly known as [Little Yosemite](#), in the Sunol Regional Wilderness.

From the Tyler Ranch Staging Area, experienced hikers can access the Sunol Ridge Trail, an 8-mile trek with over 2,100 feet of elevation.

Smaller offshoots are also available for those seeking a less strenuous option. The new trail system is open to hikers, bikers and horses. Dogs are allowed on leash. Visitors can park just off Interstate 680 at the Tyler Ranch Staging Area parking lot, which includes restrooms, over 70 parking spots and a picnic area. The new trails were completed after the park district purchased two privately owned properties and turned them into public land.

The park district acquired the [Tyler Ranch in 2009](#), adding to the [Pleasanton Ridge chain that it started purchasing in 2007](#). East Bay Regional Parks added

the [Robertson Ranch in 2012](#), for just over \$6 million. However, trail construction didn't start until 2021.

While the area had already been open to the public, the East Bay Regional Park District officially christened the trails with a [grand opening ceremony](#) on Dec 3.

*Editor's note: This story was updated at 3:30 p.m., Dec. 8, to correct the name of the East Bay Regional Park District.*

# EAST BAY TIMES

## Mysterious virus wipes out rabbits at East Bay petting zoo

Experts warn about spread from wild cottontails to domestic species



A rabbit suffers from myxomatosis, a virus with a 99% mortality rate for domesticated rabbits, at the Exotic Pet Clinic in Santa Cruz. Last month, a rabbit at Tilden Park's Little Farm, an educational farm in Berkeley, was diagnosed with this viral illness and it quickly spread killing all their rabbits. (Courtesy of Hilary Stern/ Exotic Pet Clinic of Santa Cruz)

By [WILL MCCARTHY](#) | [wmccarthy@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:wmccarthy@bayareanewsgroup.com) | Bay Area News Group

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Last month, a Dutch rabbit at the Tilden Park Little Farm started acting strangely. It had lost its appetite, lying in its hutch, head hanging, refusing to move. When staff at the free education farm in Berkeley examined the animal, they saw one of its eyes had swollen immensely.

Jenna Cassel, a naturalist at the park, was disturbed. Animals get sick, sure, but this was unusual. She took the rabbit to a veterinarian and was shocked by the diagnosis.

The rabbit had contracted myxomatosis (mix-a-mitt-oh-sis), a viral illness endemic to a narrow strip of the U.S. ranging from Oregon down the California Coast to Baja. Although relatively harmless to wild brush rabbits, the illness is highly contagious and has a 99% mortality rate for domesticated species. Suddenly, it was threatening the beloved rabbits of the farm.

"I asked a ton of questions because I had no idea what was happening," Cassel said. "They said it's very contagious. Very deadly."

Cassel learned that rabbits suffering from the illness experience swollen eyes and genitalia, ulcers, fever and, eventually, death. Even before leaving the vet, she was on the phone with staff at the farm, trying to quarantine the surviving rabbits.

But it was too late — at least two or three others already had contracted the illness. The remaining handful, who had been exposed but weren't showing symptoms, were euthanized to save them from the ravages of the virus. And so, by the end of November, Tilden Park's farm was left with no rabbits for the first time in decades.

"It was really hard," Cassel said. "When we lose any of the animals, it's really heartbreaking. They have names. We get really attached to them."

Tilden Park's Little Farm has been around since the 1950s, established to teach city children and their families about farm animals. The farm is unique in its location, situated within a 740-acre nature preserve amid a broader 2,000-acre park.

Until now, that location has served as a boon — a farm at the base of a hidden canyon disconnected from the bustle of the city. But it is just this kind of location that likely led to the spread of myxomatosis.

"The infections only occur where the brush rabbit's territory is," said Hilary Stern, a veterinarian at the Exotic Pet Clinic in the Santa Cruz Mountains, who has been studying the illness. "So it usually tends to be on the outskirts or in the mountains."

Because the virus is carried by the wild cottontail rabbit, infections occur where domestic species and wild rabbits coexist. The rabbits at Tilden Park's Little Farm are kept in an enclosure outside, so it's possible they were infected by fleas or mosquitos.

The virus is still something of a mystery. Although it has been in the Bay Area for as long as we know, many veterinarians still don't even know of its existence or understand its spread.

"It will be on the westside of Santa Cruz, then the next year it's up in the mountains, and then it will be in Los Gatos," Stern said. "It is odd."

Over the decades, flare-ups of myxomatosis on the West Coast have periodically gained attention. In the 1970s, there were numerous cases in Davis. In 2010, three cases were reported in Los Angeles, prompting their health department to issue a warning. In 2016, the illness killed all but one of a herd of 90 rabbits in Roberts Creek, Oregon. Other farms in the Bay Area also have been affected, including Deer Hollow

Farm near San Jose, another farm situated within a park system. The virus is not a threat to humans or other animals.

But the current spread is enigmatic.

"It's hard to say where it is and where it isn't," Stern said. "A lot of people don't know about it, so they may be missing the diagnosis."

In Berkeley at least, the dearth of infections over the decade at the Little Farm seems to indicate myxomatosis was previously rare in the area. Now experts say families with rabbits should take extra precautions. Although there is a vaccine for the virus in Europe, none exists in the U.S.



The young volunteers brush the Dutch rabbits as guests gather to watch and pet them at Tilden Park's Little Farm in the Nature area in Berkeley, Calif., on Sunday, June 4, 2017. (Laura A. Oda/Bay Area News Group)

That reality has staff members at the Little Farm wondering whether they

can safely host rabbits again. Cassel said the farm will wait at least four months before introducing new ones. The farm also plans to research new housing methods to keep the rabbits safe. The very earliest the animals would return is April, but nothing is assured.

Tilden Park's Little Farm is a popular attraction for families during the holiday season, and rabbits are one of the primary draws. For some children, interacting with a rabbit at the Little Farm will be the first time touching such an animal. The furry little creatures have been a tactile, charismatic part of the program, a farm that has introduced generations of East Bay residents to life beyond the city.

"It's a big loss. I know our visitors feel that loss," Cassel said. "We definitely want to try to have rabbits in the future. But it's going to take a long time to think about it."



## New Sunol Ridge Trail Offers 18 Miles Of Recreation

The newly-opened Tyler Ranch Staging Area and Sunol Ridge Trail offer trails for hikers, horses, and bikes, and panoramic views.

Michael Wittner, Patch Staff

Posted Mon, Dec 4, 2023 at 2:30 pm PT|Updated Mon, Dec 4, 2023 at 7:53 pm PT



The new 2,800 acres offer ample parking, hiking, and views. (Google Maps)

SUNOL, CA — The East Bay can now enjoy 18 more miles of trails and open space for hikers, horses, and bikes. On Sunday, East Bay Parks Regional District and community members helped

welcome the new Tyler Ranch Staging Area and Sunol Ridge Trail.

The new trails, which begin at a trailhead at the southwest end of Foothill Road in Sunol, offer more than 2,800 areas of protected open space, according to the [East Bay Regional Park District](#).

The trails rise roughly 2,150 feet and offer panoramic views of the San Francisco Bay, Mt. Diablo, Brushy Peak, Mission Peak, Mount Umunhum, and Mount Tamalpais.



The Tyler Ranch Staging Area offers 70 parking spaces, four handicap accessible spaces, and parking for horses, trailers, or buses. It also includes a picnic area, restrooms, a water fountain, a bike rack, and informational signs.

Construction of the staging area and trail started in September 2021, according to EBRPD. The park district acquired the 1,476-acre Tyler Ranch property in 2009, and the 1,368-acre Robertson Ranch property in 2012. Funding from California State Parks and Measure WW helped pay for the project.

## East Bay Regional Parks celebrate grand opening of new trail

By [Christie Smith](#) • Published December 3, 2023 • Updated on December 3, 2023 at 11:48 pm

People in the East Bay now have access to more than 18 miles of trail and hundreds of acres of open space. This comes after East Bay Regional Parks celebrated the grand opening of the Tyler Ranch Staging Area on Sunday.

Malissa Swanson came to the Tyler Ranch Staging Area to get some exercise and explore.

"There is parking. Love the bathroom facilities that they have," she said.

There was an event Sunday to mark the completion of the area near Sunol.

"This opening of the new staging area is going to increase access to over 2,800 acres of open space, including 18 miles of trails here," said Sabrina Landrith, East Bay Regional Park District's general manager.

People walking or hiking, cycling or horseback riding have access.

Visitors can check out the Sunol Ridge Trail, the Tyler Ranch Trail and some pretty expansive views. The staging area includes more than 70 parking spots, restrooms and a drinking fountain.



## Grand Opening of Tyler Ranch Staging Area in Pleasanton

[tribune-admin](#) November 29, 2023 [Our Town](#) [2 Comments](#)

The Grand Opening marking the completion of the Tyler Ranch Staging Area, which provides new public access for pedestrian, equestrian, and bicycle use on more than 18 miles of trails across 2,800 acres of protected open space on the Tyler Ranch and Robertson Ranch properties, part of Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park, is scheduled for this Sunday December 3rd from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

From the new Tyler Ranch Staging Area, visitors can now enjoy the Sunol Ridge Trail and Tyler Ranch Trail. The newly accessible parklands offer amazing panoramic views of the Bay Area, including the San Francisco Bay, Mount Diablo, Brushy Peak, Mission Peak, Mount Umunhum, and Mount Tamalpais.

The Tyler Ranch Staging Area and Trails project was made possible through funding from California State Parks and Measure WW.

The Grand Opening event includes a program with speakers, along with park staff to provide information.