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## March Rains to the Rescue?

By Andrea A. Firth



Moraga pre-schooler Caroline Gustafson, 4, (center, pink coat) braves light rain and some stiff competition while hunting for eggs March 24 during the Moraga Juniors' Spring Egg Hunt at the Moraga Commons. Photo Andy Scheck

Rainfall across the region has been far below average this year, but the recent storms and torrential rains in March have brought some green color back to Lamorinda's hills. Yet, has there been sufficient rain to boost precipitation levels back to "normal," or even close? The Lamorinda Weekly checked in with our local rain trackers to see if the March rainfall was making a meaningful impact on the total precipitation numbers for the year.

"Definitely, we are behind 'normal' totals over this rain year," said Susan Watson of Orinda. "But, on the other hand, in this Mediterranean climate where the summers are dry, this is a valuable time to be having rain here, as it stays in the soil longer than if rain had been heavy in January and then quit. [Although] it is not so good in the mountains as far as stored water is concerned."

Lon Metzger of Moraga concurs that Lamorinda's rainfall for the year is way below average. "Even if we get average rainfall from now to the end of June (the current rain year runs from July 1, 2011, to June 30, 2012), we will not get to 20 inches and will end at about 65 percent of average." Still Lamorinda is doing much better than other parts of the Bay Area, noted Metzger. "San Jose is only at 27 percent of their average," he said, "And on March 14th, our big rain day, they got less than 0.10 inch of rain."

[See the table for a comparison of rainfall data collected by our local rain trackers this year and last in locations throughout the area.]

How wet did it get so far in March? Allan Prager, who resides in Orinda's Sleepy Hollow neighborhood found that rainfall in the first 19 days of March to be over 10 inches, which was more than double the rainfall he recorded in early March last year. Gene Gottfried, who lives in the Upper Toyonal neighborhood of Orinda, recorded almost 10 inches of rain falling between March 13-17, including an impressive four-plus inches on March 14 alone. Orinda Downs resident Bill Moon found March 14 to be quite a wet one, too, recording over three inches of rain on that single day. But since he's been measuring precipitation Moon reports, he has seen even wetter days, including almost six inches (5.85 to be exact) on Dec. 31, 2005.

The fluctuations in monthly and annual rainfall numbers do not seem to surprise the locals who track precipitation.

"I am not all that surprised, more delighted not to have to face real drought conditions as in 1977 and 1978," Watson said. "This has been a year of storm extremes... It is late in the season, but late rains are not all that unusual, so we shall give thanks and enjoy the soakings. May they continue."

Prager is not surprised by the March wetness following a dry winter either. He has seen it happen before. In the 1990 to 1991 rain year, Prager's records show that only 7.5 inches of rain had fallen by the end of February. "In March of 1991, I recorded 10.74 inches," he said, adding, "That year ended up as a drought year anyway, but without the significant rainfall in March, it would have been much worse."

With rain predicted as the Lamorinda Weekly goes to press and throughout the following week, will this month's rainfall put the area back on track? Most rain trackers won't venture to say. While they are keen to measure and analyze the area's wet weather, rain trackers avoid forecasting.

"Looking back over the years of data I can see no pattern that would allow useful projections," Metzger said. "Patterns seem destined to be broken so it is not really a surprise. Besides we have never had a year that didn't have at least one month with above average rainfall, [but] I guess that is a pattern of sorts."

Location	Rainfall Year-to-date <sup>1</sup> (inches)	Rainfall Last year <sup>2</sup> (inches)
<b>Orinda</b>		
Sleepy Hollow	23	37
El Toyonal	20 <sup>3</sup>	31
Orinda Downs	17	30
South Orinda	22	35
<b>Moraga</b>		
Ashbrook Place	16	28
<b>Lafayette</b>		
Amber Lane	12	24

17/1/11-3/20/12 27/1/10-3/20/11 3Measured thru 3/17/12

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