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Lafayette's Amazing Natural History: Doc Hale to Present at the Lafayette Community Garden

By Sophie Braccini



Doc Hale

Photos provided

Longtime wildlife biologist, naturalist, and ethnobiologist James 'Doc' Hale understands the Lafayette area, its natural beauty, the wildlife that lives there, and the history of the Native Americans who once built villages along its creek and tributaries. He will discuss these Native Americans, and the edible plants they used for sustenance and medication, on July 13 at the Lafayette Community Garden and Outdoor Learning Center.

"The phrase that's carved in our garden's gate is Rachel Carson's 'In Nature Nothing Exists Alone,'" says Lafayette Community Garden's Beth Ferree. "Gardening is only one of the components of what we are about; the other two are education and preservation." Hale's class is part of the garden's mission to promote a better appreciation and use of our land.

The idea originated during one of the interpretive cultural and natural history hikes Hale leads in the Morgan Territory Regional Preserve with members of the garden. "I knew this park before," says Ferree, "but I had no idea about the richness of Indian heritage sites it contains."

The mountain lion expert and former UC Santa Cruz professor, whose current research involves Native American cultural sites in the Bay Area, used to take his students backpacking for an entire semester to teach them about natural and cultural history, Sierra Nevada ecology, wildlife biology, botany, and field study. Hale says that the East Bay was the most densely populated Native American region in North America. "The density here was up to 16 habitants per square mile," he says. "When the Spaniards came, in a span of 40 years they were mostly wiped out."

Hale says that Lafayette is the location of many Saklan village sites: "There are at least 15 different sites I know of near creeks and tributaries along the Lafayette corridor," he says.

Today most of them have been built over.

"The population here was flourishing because the vegetation and wildlife were very abundant," he notes. Hale explains that before ranchers replaced native grass with annual vegetation for their cattle, the hills were covered with much heartier plants. "The Indians knew how to manage the land with controlled fires, and they knew how to feed on the abundance of native plants available," he says.

During the class at the garden, Hale will describe how to identify edible plants and medicinal plants, and will take participants along the creek to discuss the Saklan civilization.

In addition to offering tours and classes, since he retired from his teaching position, Hale has become a local activist for the restoration of our wild environment. He believes that even if our population grows, there are smart ways to manage the suburban/open space interface to protect wildlife. He has been working with the Walnut Creek watershed on the restoration of salmon in the streams with great success. He is also working with the Muir Land Trust for the preservation of the routes of local mountain lions.

"They are no threat to us," he says, noting that since 1890 there have been only seven human deaths caused by mountain lions. "They are programmed to feed on deer and they travel at night. The problem is that freeways have cut their routes, but it seems that they are using creeks and ridges to move about." Hale, who was born and raised in Lafayette in the pre-freeway era, has a special respect for the lions; he has had eight sightings of mountain lions in his lifetime.

While Hale is not scheduled to discuss wildlife in detail while at the garden, he will respond if asked. His main goal, however, is to encourage people to restore the natural habitat of their surroundings. "We still have the seed bank of the native plants and grasses that were here," he says. "People can harvest wild seeds and propagate in their own garden. There are also nurseries around that provide them."

Hale will speak at 3:30 p.m. Saturday, July 13 as part of the outdoor classes offered at the Lafayette Community Garden. For more information about future classes or to register, visit lafayettecommunitygarden.org/sign-up-for-events.



While mountain lions inhabit the Lamorinda area, Hale notes, "They are not a threat to us."

Free Movie Thursdays in July

By Cathy Tyson

Designed to tie into the county-wide library "Reading is So Delicious" theme, both the Lafayette and the Moraga libraries will be hosting free movie events every Thursday evening after the Fourth of July from 6 to 8 p.m. With air conditioning and complimentary refreshments, the series is fun for the whole family.

Looking to "celebrate food on film," librarian Emily Koster of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center wanted to spread the word that the Moraga, Orinda and Lafayette libraries are co-hosting this new event. In addition to the movies, the Lafayette Library is offering a free chocolate tasting event on July 9 at 6:30 p.m. featuring local chocolatier Loyd Auerbach. Please call to sign up at (925) 385-2280, since seating is limited.

Kicking off the movie series is culinary comedy "Julie and Julia" based on true stories of Julia Child

and Julie Powell, a young New Yorker who attempts to recreate all of Julia Child's 524 recipes noted in "Mastering the Art of French Cooking" and describe it on her blog. The story seamlessly weaves between Julia's time in France in the 1950s and Julie's cooking adventures and work struggles in the early 2000s. Meryl Streep is very believable as Julia Child and Amy Adams portrays the ambitious New Yorker. Enjoy the film screening in the Arts and Science Discovery Center on the lower level of the Lafayette Library and Learning Center.

"Chocolat" – about a woman who opens a chocolate shop in rural France that shakes up the stodgy community, with Juliette Binoche and a young Johnny Depp – will be shown at 6 p.m. the following Thursday, July 18 at the Moraga Library.

Finishing off the movie series is the darling, kid-friendly "Rata-

touille" on July 25 back at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center. This Pixar film tells the story of a sweet rat named Remy who dreams of becoming a chef and tries to achieve his goal by forming an alliance with a Parisian restaurant's helper, Linguini. This film will be shown at 6 p.m. in the Community Hall of the Lafayette Library.

In related movie news, Sustainable Lafayette also has a summer film series that kicks off with compelling documentary "Trashed – No Place for Waste" featuring Jeremy Irons on July 18 that looks at the risks to the food chain and the environment through the pollution of air, land and sea by waste, and explores the immediate dangers to public health. The film will be screened at 6:30 p.m. in the Community Hall. There's a \$5 suggested donation, no reservations necessary.