

# Locals take part in world's largest citizen scientist project

... continued from page D1



Local trees were inspected during Sudden Oak Death Blitz.

Photo Sora O'Doherty

The exotic disease, which kills four types of oak trees, was brought into California in many locations with the importation of ornamental plants from Asia to domestic nurseries. The first escape of the disease was noted in 1987.

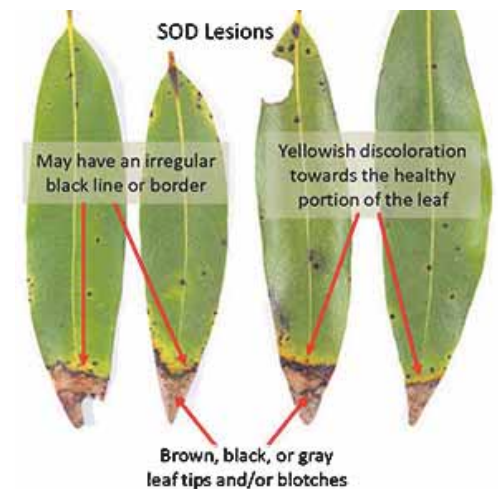
Garbelotto has found that citizen scientists are as accurate, if not more accurate, than professional scientists in the collection of specimens of SOD. His is the largest database ever created for a forest disease. Over the past three years, huge jumps in in-

fection levels have been recorded. The occurrence of the disease is affected by climatic conditions, such as drought. SOD thrives in wet years, declines in dry. The highest infection levels ever recorded were in 2017. Highly visited tourist sites also contribute to the spread of the disease, as tourists carry it from one area to another, increasing the risk of long distance spread. Currently SOD is found in the wildlands of 14 coastal California counties, from Monterey to Humboldt.

Symptomatic bay leaves are often the first sign that SOD has arrived at a location, and generally precedes oak infections. Some management options are available (sanitation, chemical preventative treatments, bay removal), but they are effective only if implemented before oaks and tanoaks are infected; hence, timely detection of the disease on bay laurel leaves is key for a successful proactive attempt to slow down the SOD epidemic, according to Garbelotto.

"The Orinda Library is an excellent location for training East Bay participants because it is so accessible by car or BART," Hudson said, "and we really appreciate the support from Sierra Campana and her predecessors." Volunteer Liz Bittner, park supervisor of the Tilden Park Botanical Garden, said that she attended the training because the park is trying to be more active in identifying and hopefully controlling sudden oak death.

More information about Sudden Oak Death Blitz program can be found at [sodblitz.org](http://sodblitz.org).



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