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## New Saratoga facility helps animals get back to the wild life

Care center is run by the Peninsula Humane Society and SPCA



Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group

Baby squirrels are fed a special formula at the Larry Ellison Conservation Center in Saratoga. The center, which opened March 16, is run by the Peninsula Humane Society and SPCA and cares for wildlife that is brought in by animal control agencies and the public from across San Francisco, San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.



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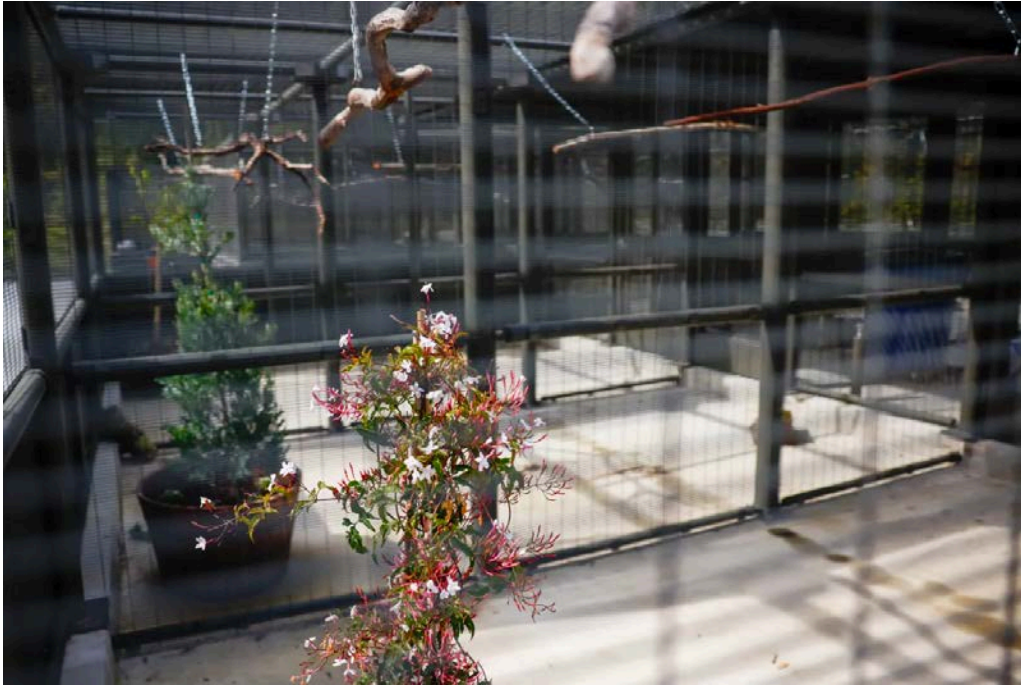
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Hidden in the hills off Highway 9 along Saratoga Creek, a new wildlife facility is thrumming with life, caring for animals that may be sick, injured or imperiled.

The new wildlife care center opened on March 16 and is run by the Peninsula Humane Society and SPCA. The center cares for animals that are brought in by animal control agencies and the public from across Santa Clara, San Mateo and San Francisco counties. Nicole Weger, wildlife director of operations, said the center takes in all wildlife, whether the animal is native, exotic, endangered or threatened.

“It’s important also to our future,” Weger said. “It’s important for the wildlife, but it’s also important for the humans.”

The 197-acre facility boasts several nurseries and enclosures to help birds, mammals and other species recover. From the inside, the center looks more like a hospital than a zoo. The hallways are lined with doors to different rooms designated for mammals of different sizes and ages. There are also large outdoor enclosures on a patio area for songbirds from declining populations, cedar waxwings and lesser goldfinches. Seabirds like ducks and pelicans also have their own enclosures with ponds and space for them to fly.



A habitat for birds receiving cat at the Larry Ellison Conservation Center in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)

Each enclosure is relatively isolated to prevent the animals from having more human or interspecies interaction than necessary so they can recover safely. Bobcats, foxes and coyote are kept separate from corvids like crows and ravens, and birds of prey, like falcons and owls.

Lisa Van Buskirk, senior vice president of development, planned giving and community engagement, said the facility was paid for with a grant from the Larry Ellison Foundation. Planning and construction of the facility was in the works on and off for 14 years due to disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic.



As of March 19, the facility was relatively empty, save for a few squirrels and hummingbirds, whose babies are typically born in the spring and need caring for. However, Weger said they expect the population to keep growing and are preparing to care for more animals in the summer. She said there were over 500 animals in the organization's two facilities last summer. The population fluctuates with the seasons, growing through the spring and reaching its peak into the summer and then falling again in fall and winter.

The care center also houses an imperiled species program. Senior lead biologist Dr. Regina Spranger said "imperiled" is used broadly to mean any animal species facing survival challenges since the center doesn't solely care for federally endangered or threatened species.

There are currently two species in the program: the Santa Cruz long-toed salamander and the giant garter snake, which hails from Central California. Invasive species and climate change are some of the reasons why these species are in danger, but the major threat is agricultural and human development, which have cut off these populations from each other, making them unable to breed in the wild. Their young are being taken care of in the facility until they are old enough to be released into the wild and help restart their respective populations.

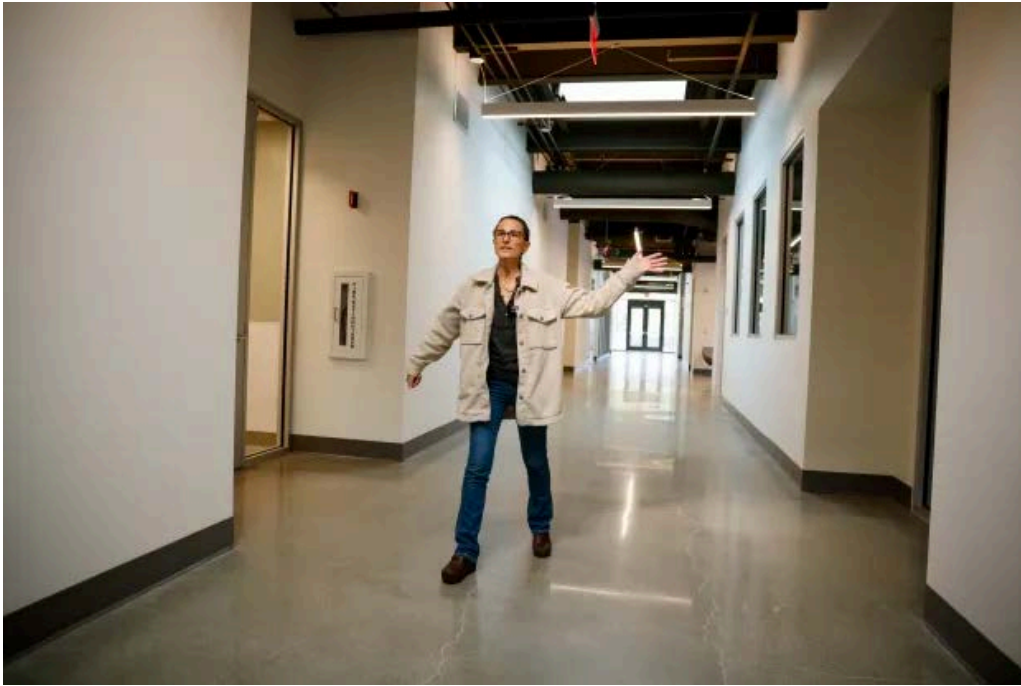


Dr. Regina Spranger, conservation biologist, holds a Santa Cruz Long-toed Salamander, at the Larry Ellison Conservation Center in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)

While visitors to the care center will be limited to keep human/animal interaction to a minimum, there is an intake center on the campus, located at 24103 Congress Springs Road, where the public can bring in any injured or orphaned wildlife they find. The intake center is open daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Anyone dropping off an animal would need to fill out paperwork related to where they found the animal, what happened to it, and if they gave it anything so the staff has as much information as they can to return it into the wild.



Dr. Regina Spranger, conservation biologist, holds a giant garter snake at the Larry Ellison Conservation Center in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)



Nicole Weger, Wildlife Director of Operations at Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA, gives a tour of the Larry Ellison Conservation Center in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)



The Larry Ellison Conservation Center for Wildlife Care in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)



A baby squirrel eats at the Larry Ellison Conservation Center in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)

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Dr. Regina Spranger, conservation biologist, speaks during a tour of the Larry Ellison Conservation Center in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)

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The giant garter snake room at the Larry Ellison Conservation Center in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)



An animal drop off location is open for the public to drop off injured wildlife at the Larry Ellison Conservation Center for Wildlife Care in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)





Separate cages allow different species of birds to receive care at the Larry Ellison Conservation Center in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)



The Larry Ellison Conservation Center for Wildlife Care in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)



A van is parked at the Larry Ellison Conservation Center in Saratoga, Calif., on Wednesday, March 19, 2025. (Shae Hammond/Bay Area News Group)

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