

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



A cloud over Earth Day

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As the South Coast gears up for the Earth Day celebration at the county Courthouse on Sunday, there's a pall over it because of how nature is treated -- or more aptly, mistreated -- in our region.

Sometimes, the cruelty is hidden or out of sight, but this doesn't lessen our community responsibility to speak out and try to stop it.

You won't be able to hear the gunshots on Santa Cruz Island today or this weekend. The bullets, though, will be flying just as thousands and thousands of them have over the last year.

Perhaps if people were constantly reminded of killings on the island and actually could witness the slaughter of wild Santa Cruz pigs, there would be more of an outcry.

Some residents aren't content to adopt the "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" attitude when it comes to the killings.

Santa Barbara businessman **Rick Feldman** is spearheading a federal lawsuit to stop the multimillion-dollar effort to shoot all the wild pigs.

The Channel Islands Animal Protection Association also over the years was a steady opponent of the mass slaughter by the National Park Service and the Nature Conservancy, the nonprofit organization that owns much of the island.

The pigs have lived on Santa Cruz since the 1850s. But, after 15 decades on the island, the Park Service and Nature Conservancy suddenly proclaim there's a need to kill every last one of this species.

A whistle-blowing exposé by the former superintendent of the Channel Islands National Park has exposed the manipulation of science, the environmental review procedures and the public process to support the killings.

The Park Service and Nature Conservancy have imported gunmen from New Zealand -- and awarded them a contract worth millions of dollars -- to shoot the animals.

In addition to keeping the details of the shootings basically a secret from the public, we're also concerned about the government's delay in the legal proceedings. Part of the tactics at times has seemed to be to slow the filing of certain papers to allow the killings to continue.

As Mr. Feldman said: "We believe we have a strong case to present if and when we are allowed to present the facts in a real trial. As a matter of fact, we have just requested the documents which will provide 'smoking guns' to our case under the Freedom of Information Act."

At such a trial, the leadership of the Channel Islands National Park and Nature Conservancy undoubtedly will be seen as having low credibility. First, they sold to the public that the gunmen would shoot 1,000 animals, apparently in an effort to minimize the extent of the killing. But 4,500 Santa Cruz pigs already have lost their lives, with an additional 1,500 estimated left on the island.



Third in a series of four editorials for Earth Day

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For more information, e-mail the nonprofit organization, In Defense of Animals, at ida@idausa.org

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