

## SAN LORENZO RIVER REPORT

by Hal Fairfield, Felton, California

This is a report about a recent field trip along the San Lorenzo River. It seems a little inaccurate calling this a field trip because I live on the banks. The river originates in the springs and creeks of the Santa Cruz Mountains, gaining volume from other streams as it flows southward through a forest of Giant Coast Redwood and Douglas Fir trees. Tumbling down steep, fern-lined mountain gorges, it levels as it winds its way to the Pacific, about six miles downstream from my home in Felton. This river changes its mood with the weather. I've seen it run 30' deep, able to send 2'-diameter logs crashing to the sea. In the early spring, I've seen 30" Steelhead (Salmo gairdneri) rushing upstream in the clearing water to spawn. I've seen the river gentle as it becomes a nursery for thousands of tiny minnows, and I've seen it, as this report reflects, as a warm-water stream that serves as a wading area for the many people who visit Henry Cowell Redwood State Park.

There is much public access to this area. State Highway 9 nearly follows the whole length of the river. Fishermen, hikers, equestrians, and picknickers spend much of the long summer enjoying this scenic area.

On a clear day in mid-September, 1984, I started wading downstream, catching some of the common minnows in my dipnet. As I happened on one of the slow backwater areas created when the lack of water forces the main channel to abandon the full width of the river, I caught a glimpse of some fish that didn't dart away as the minnows did, but hid in the red willow roots and limb entanglements which extended into the slow-moving, shaded water. Without waiting, I plunged my net into the water to catch two Threespine Sticklebacks (Gasterosteus aculeatus). Before I left this little pool, I collected six more sticklebacks, all between .075 and 1.0 inch long. As I was making my way back upstream, I decided that these fish prefer slow-moving areas with lots of cover (willow roots, downed tree limbs, and larger root entanglements) in about 12" of water. Armed with this new knowledge, I made a try in a likely spot and pulled in two more sticklebacks.

The streambed is composed mostly of gravel and fine sand, with many of the rocks limestone. Some of the water data is as follows: the water temperature checked 63°F, the pH checked 7.5, and the water hardness checked between 163 and 171 ppm (CaCO<sub>3</sub>).

The majority of the sticklebacks caught were infested with parasites--black spots on their fin membranes. One fish had an unidentified growth on its dorsal spines and anal fin which I physically removed. These parasites seem to be the nature of things as the river slows to its late-summertime pace, with parasites becoming more concentrated in the slower-moving water.

I am looking forward to observing the interesting behavior and breeding of these curious fish.