



SANTA CRUZ MUSEUM
of natural history

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA CONTACT:

Tara Thomas
Development and Community Engagement
831-420-6115, ext. 16
tara@santacruzmuseum.org

MUSEUM HONORS FOUNDER AND PRESENTS 2025 NATURALIST AWARD AT LAURA HECOX DAY CELEBRATION

A DAY OF CELEBRATION, LOCAL HISTORY, AND FAMILY FUN

SANTA CRUZ, CA — JANUARY 15, 2025 — Continuing a cherished tradition that began in 2016, the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History will honor the birthday of its founder, Santa Cruz naturalist and lightkeeper Laura Hecox, on **Saturday, January 25th, 2025**. This outdoor celebration will feature volunteer gardening in Tyrrell Park and Pilkington Creek, hands-on activities, historical exhibits, and the presentation of the 2025 Laura Hecox Naturalist Award.

"We are so excited to come together to celebrate the Museum's founder, who inspired the entire community to become naturalists by transforming her private collection into a publicly accessible natural history museum," says Felicia Van Stolk, Executive Director.

The Laura Hecox Naturalist Award honors individuals who embody the Museum's mission to connect people with nature and science by inspiring others to appreciate, understand, and protect the natural world. **The 2025 recipient is Dr. Jeb Bishop Ph.D., local ecologist, volunteer, and advocate for native plant restoration.** Dr. Bishop has worked to strengthen and restore native ecosystems throughout Santa Cruz County, with a legacy in volunteer leadership at restoration sites at Pilkington Creek and Seabright Beach. His collaborations with the City of Santa Cruz, the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History, California State Parks, and Groundswell Coastal Ecology have established sustainable practices that continue to benefit the environment. Through mentorship and knowledge sharing, Dr. Bishop has nurtured a lasting culture of environmental stewardship within our community that endures beyond his active involvement creating a lasting legacy of ecological restoration.

The award will be presented to Dr. Bishop during an award ceremony at 11:00 AM.

The Laura Hecox Day celebration will occur outside the Santa Cruz Museum of Natural history in Tyrrell Park at 1305 E. Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz on Saturday, January 25th. The festivities will commence with the Naturalist Award Ceremony at 11 AM, followed by an Open House celebration from 12-1 PM. Additionally, the 'Saturdays in the Soil' Volunteer Gardening Program will take place from 10 AM - 1 PM. Guests of all ages are invited to enjoy the festivities and free admission to the Museum. Those interested in volunteering during the event can sign up by contacting volunteer@santacruzmuseum.org to RSVP. Space is limited.

Participants will learn about the Museum's rich cultural and natural history, connect with community partners, engage in arts, crafts, and games for kids, and have the opportunity to help with the Pilkington Creek Restoration project. Learn more at <https://www.santacruzmuseum.org/1-25-laura-hecox-day/>

About Laura Hecox

Laura Hecox served as the keeper of the original Santa Cruz lighthouse from 1883 to 1916. A self-taught naturalist, she shared her love for science, the environment, and marine life by welcoming the public into her home to view her meticulously curated exhibits. In 1904, Ms. Hecox donated her extensive collections to the City of Santa Cruz, forming the foundation of the city's first public museum. In 2017, the City first proclaimed January 29 *Laura Hecox Day* in honor of her birthday. [Learn more about Laura Hecox.](#)

About The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History

The Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History is an independent nonprofit organization dedicated to connecting people with nature to inspire stewardship of the natural world. Founded by the collection of naturalist Laura Hecox, it is the oldest public museum in Santa Cruz.

The Museum features hands-on educational exhibits, indoor, outdoor, and online events for people of all ages to discover and learn about the world we live in and the natural history of this region. The life-size gray whale model outside the Museum, created in 1982, a cherished Santa Cruz landmark, is often observed with children climbing on and playing around it.

Learn more about the Museum and plan your visit at santacruzmuseum.org

We also invite you to follow us on social media to see updates on current events, fun facts about nature, science, and local nature sightings: **@SantaCruzMuseum** on all platforms.