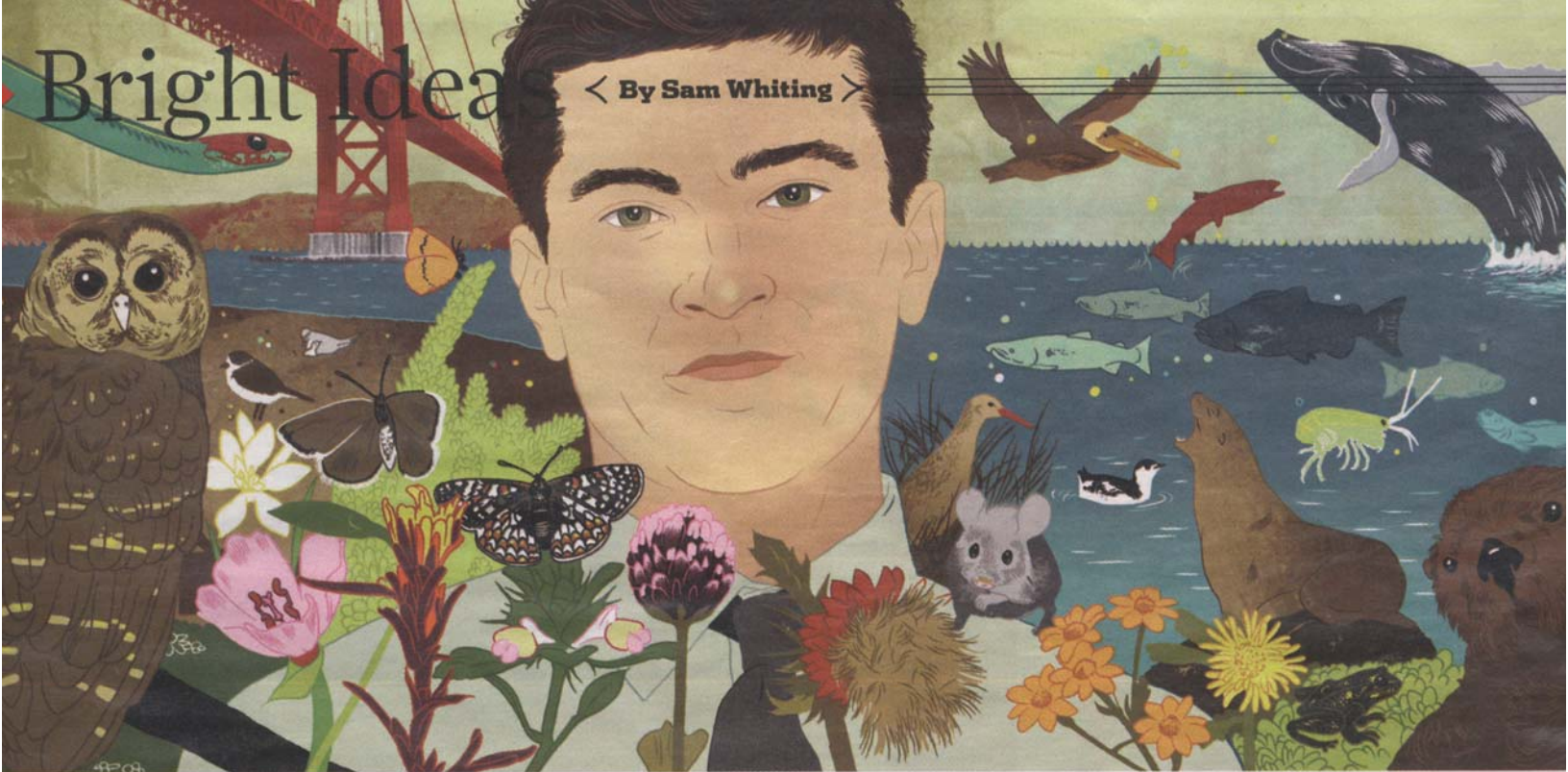


< By Sam Whiting >



ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYER BRENT PLATER THINKS HIS "BIG YEAR" IDEA WILL HELP LOCAL ENDANGERED SPECIES

There are 33 endangered species in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. That's one for every year Brent Plater has been alive. Plater, an environmental law professor, would like to change that ratio. He has declared 2008 a GGNRA Endangered Species Big Year.

"A **BIG YEAR** is an event that competitive birders came up with. They'll try and go out and see as many birds as they can within a year. This always struck me as an interesting way to connect with endangered species, but it was missing an element of actual conservation. It was voyeuristic, almost. When I was thinking about the endangered species in the park, I wanted people to establish relationships with these species, but I also wanted them to take it to the next step and do something to help the species to recover.

THE GGNRA Endangered Species Big Year is a race against time in 2008 to see and save every single one of the endangered species found in the Golden Gate National Recreation

Area. The number 33 has always been mystical for me. That was my number when I played football in high school and lacrosse in college. We've put together a list of the 33 species, and we're going to take people out to see those species. There are 33 conservation action items that people can complete to help those species to recover. Each species has its own corresponding action.

THE BIG YEAR is a competitive event. The person who sees the most species and helps the most species by the end of the year is going to be eligible for prizes. It's not going to be a Prius, so we don't anticipate that people will be motivated to cheat. People can come out for one trip or they can try and compete for the entire year. The program is free.

ON JAN. 6 we're having our kick-off party at the San Francisco Zoo. We'll have a short presentation, some things for people to eat, then

we're going to take people across the street to Ocean Beach and hike north until people see the western snowy plover, which will be the first species they can check off their list for the 2008 competition.

THE LIGHTBULB: One weekend I was trolling through some federal documents I'd received under the Freedom of Information Act, and I came across this statistic that really struck me. The GGNRA has more endangered species than Yellowstone, Yosemite, Kings Canyon and Sequoia national parks combined. I came up with an idea to try and raise awareness about the endangered species. I called it the Golden Gate National Recreation Area Endangered Species Big Year.

SPECIES INCLUDE fish, wildlife and plants. There are 11 plants, six birds, three butterflies, six fish, four mammals, one frog, one snake and one crustacean.

WE HAVE SOME success stories in the park. The California brown pelican is essentially a recovered species. It's easy to see. The converse

of that one is probably the loneliest species on the planet. It's called the raven's manzanita. The last wild plant can't be seen, but Big Year participants will see some collected seeds that may be its last chance.

THE GGNRA is bigger than you think. To do all 33 species, people are going to have to visit three counties — San Francisco, San Mateo and Marin. The southernmost point is Edgewood County Park for the bay checkerspot butterfly. The northernmost point is Tomales Bay for a hoped-for California clapper rail. It's a chicken-size bird with a long bill.

IT'S STILL a little early to say how the oil spill is going to affect the Big Year. There do appear to be impacts in some of the endangered species, for example the western snowy plover. It is possible that some of these species are going to be even more rare than they are right now because of this oil spill.

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