

# **Love What You Love Podcast**

## **Episode 15: Naturalist Programs with Rick Joosten**

**August 25, 2020**

Hey, I'm Julie Rose. Welcome to *Love What You Love*. I'm an author, creator, and enthusiast, and I've always been fascinated by the things that people are super into, because they're always a unique expression of curiosity, and joy, and wonder. So every week I'll introduce you to another fascinating human who's into really interesting stuff.

Is 2020 getting you down? Doom-scrolling like it's your job, maybe? Are you ready for some extremely wholesome content? Then have I got the guest for you!

Rick Joosten is a former corporate legal counsel who has traded long days stuck in an office for long walk in nature. A certified Master Naturalist, he's super passionate about nature, not just what you see out on long hikes, but the nature in your own backyard too. We talked way back in April about the epidemic of feeling nature starved, learning to look more closely, citizen science, and so much more. Find out why Rick loves nature and naturalist programs and why you might learn to love them too.

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**Julie:** Hey Rick! Thank you so much for joining me today.

**Rick:** No problem, Julie. I'm glad to be here.

**Julie:** I'm so excited to talk with you. Your background is in corporate law, and I know you were with Texas Instruments for a very long time.

**Rick:** Yeah, 30 years.

**Julie:** Oh my goodness. So, when you retired, you guys moved out here to California, and you got involved in something called the UC Naturalist program. Is that the right name?

**Rick:** That's right. UC California Naturalist Program.

**Julie:** If you could tell me a little bit about that... And just for people who may be confused, it doesn't mean that you're a nudist. [laughs]

**Rick:** [laughs] No, exactly. Naturalist in the sense of nature. Actually, I retired a few years before we moved out here to California, so I first got into the Master Naturalist program in Texas. And when we moved out here... One of the reasons we moved to California was we loved the beauty and the nature, and we thought it'd be great if they had a similar program to learn about California nature. Sure enough, they did, and it's called the UC California Naturalist Program.

**Julie:** Okay, so what is a Master Naturalist and what is Naturalist Program?

**Rick:** Well, the program out here... They're pretty similar, all the different chapters. There's different chapters, the sponsoring organization is University of California, but each chapter is sponsored by what they called their partners. So, there may be a little difference between a program, say, here in the Diablo region, which is the one I joined, and one that might be in another part of California. But the basic program is 40 hours of classroom education on local nature, and three or four field trips in addition to that. Ours also required what they call a Capstone Project. Then afterwards you're invited

and encouraged to volunteer with local organizations to support an understanding of local nature.

**Julie:** So what are the kinds of things that you do in this program?

**Rick:** The classroom time, ours was out here in Walnut Creek at the Lindsay Wildlife Experience. It was a classroom... I'd say there were about 30 or 40 people in our class, and we met once a week from 6-8 at night, and each week would have a different theme. The goal was that over 12 weeks you're going to know a whole lot about your area's nature. So, ecology might be one week, birds would be another, mammals, geology, weather, fire and water issues. Grazing is one of the ones we covered, botany. Everything from insects, to plants, and animals. It's a pretty comprehensive study of local nature.

**Julie:** So you met for a couple hours every week. Was this like a hands-on thing? Was it textbook? Was it all of the above?

**Rick:** It was mostly presentations. Sometimes we'd have some classroom activities where they would pass around leaves and we'd do identification using keying, which is how you learn how to differentiate plants by how their leaves are shaped, or the branches. Or a water expert might bring in some water samples and we'd learn how to test water and learn about the different pollutants and aspects of water that he manages. But each class would have a different teacher. Some of them would be local professors from nearby colleges, some would be people that are employed by, say, East Bay Regional Park District, or somebody from the Lindsay Wildlife Center about animal rehabilitation. Different people that are really experts in their field and very enthusiastic about their particular slice of nature.

**Julie:** So you said you had started this program in Texas. Did you become a Master Naturalist in Texas as well?

**Rick:** I did. That's what I did first. I was just considering retirement, I had a friend who had gone through the program, which I'd never heard of, and she knew I liked nature because I had been a Boy Scout leader, and I liked... I don't know how she knew. We did a little bit of camping. So she said, "Hey Rick, you're curious about nature. You might like this program." And I was so glad she introduced me to it because I found our local chapter and I started going to the training there, and it really opened up a whole world of activities and volunteering out in Texas.

**Julie:** So there's chapters in each state, sounds like its broken down even further into regions. Is there, like, an overarching organization that looks after this, or are they, kind of, a loose confederation?

**Rick:** At the state level, there is. There's probably a couple of employees. It's highly volunteer oriented, but there are probably a few state employees that run the UC California Naturalist Program. You can find their website if you were to google UC California Naturalist. They explain more about it, and they also have a map where you can zoom in and find the chapter closest to you and then learn about their particular program and how they sponsor it.

**Julie:** Is it usually universities that are sponsoring this? Like in Texas, was it UT that was sponsoring the program?

**Rick:** It was Texas A&M and the Texas Parks & Wildlife, both co-sponsored it. There are materials... Here in California it's called a handbook. I suppose a member of the public

could buy it just as a resource for learning about nature, but it's the California Naturalist Handbook. Texas had its own. When I first started it was a giant notebook with a bunch of loose-leaf chapters added in, and I think they were moving to an online disc. So yeah, a lot of detail. Each section was, kind of, its own universe, so it'd be a professor of geology that might describe the local geology. That's one of the things makes it so great, is it's highly localized. It isn't, "Let's learn all about global ecology." Its, "Let's learn about the plants, and animals, and geology of the specific area that you live in."

**Julie:** So beyond just the fact that it's super interesting, it sounds like there's also an ultimate goal of getting people who are in this program to go volunteer in support of your local environment.

**Rick:** Yes. In fact that was a little clearer and maybe a little stronger mission in the Texas program than the California program. I noticed a slight difference between the two. They do have the same reporting of hours that you do as volunteering here, but I noticed in our class... Our class was probably... half the people were 30 and younger, maybe there was a small set of people like me that were, like, older and retirees, and looking for new learning and new activities, and the rest were sort of in the middle. And a lot of people, I noticed, were taking the course in part to, sort of, broaden their own credentials as naturalists because they may already have been employed.

We had a woman who worked at the Oakland Zoo, and we had somebody that was working for the Regional Park District that wanted to learn more and become more of a docent for nature tours. And we had people who were working at the Lindsay Wildlife Center doing raptor rehabilitation for birds that had been hurt and wanted a broader understanding. So, it was a wide group of people with a diversity of interests.

**Julie:** For your capstone project, what did you end up doing?

**Rick:** Oh, it was fascinating! Wait 'til you hear! Mine was all about stinkwort. Doesn't that sound fascinating? One of the co-sponsors of our chapter, we met at the Lindsay Wildlife Center, but the Cal State East Bay has a satellite campus in Concord, and they had just opened up an area of their pretty large campus out there as an ecological research station. So, when I was looking for a project, they were looking for people to help them, kind of, get started understanding the land that they're putting this in.

One of the problems they have there... They have a big grazing area but it was being invaded by this invasive species called stinkwort, which turns out to be a big problem in all of the Bay Area, and a growing problem. It's kind of taking over a lot of grazing area; it's taking over a lot of open fields. They wanted to know more about it, so I did my research project on that.

**Julie:** So it's kind of like the kudzu of California.

**Rick:** Very much! Sadly, it is kind of a kudzu-type thing. Once it takes over... You wouldn't notice it now, really. It sort of is a low-growing plant until about July and August, and then it shoots up and forms these little, like, Christmas-tree weeds with little yellowish-white flowers on it. Once you know how to recognize it you'll start seeing it everywhere, and it really likes disturbed spaces along roads. You'll be seeing more and more of it over the coming years, unfortunately.

**Julie:** So when you were in Texas, what was your Capstone Project?

**Rick:** Well, there we didn't have the same thing. We didn't have Capstone Projects so I can't really speak to that. We had volunteer requirements, and mine was... I'm kind of a

generalist. It's interesting, you say 'nature' and anybody goes through the same course, but people will usually home in on something they really love, like you have the birders, and they love the birds. We had one woman loved dragonflies and she got involved in... there's actually a citizen science project where you observe, and catalog, and report on dragonfly migrations. Most people have heard about monarchs, so there were people that were into moths and butterflies and did a lot of work with monarchs.

But I was kind of a generalist. What I liked to do was just, kind of, learn... I liked it when an expert would give us an aha moment and tell you something really interesting. Then what I did is I volunteered to lead nature hikes, mostly for kids but also for adults. And you would just walk through a nature area and point out interesting stuff and tell a little story about it, and that became kind of my thing.

**Julie:** I love that. That sounds like a lot of fun, actually.

**Rick:** It was really fun.

**Julie:** Yea. So, you say you were a generalist, so have you always loved nature? Are you just, kind of, interested in everything around you? What compelled you to get into this program?

**Rick:** Unfortunately, when you spend 30 years in an office pushing paper and dealing with legal issues, you don't get a whole lot of time for nature in your life. And I think a lot of us get to be sort of nature starved. The feeling and enjoyment you get out of being outside in a beautiful area is something I think a lot of people can relate to. It's certainly meant a lot to me.

One of the things I really got out of this program was just such a deeper appreciation of nature. Here in the Bay Area, it's so charismatically beautiful on, sort of, a superficial level that I think people spend a lot of time in nature, but they may not appreciate it at the level that they could. When I would lead groups I would often say, "If you take a toddler out and you point at a tree, they'll call it a tree, and they know what a bush is, and they know what grass is..." But most adults sort of stop learning it at that level. They know what trees are and they know what grass is, but there's so much more they could appreciate if they really understood what they were looking at.

**Julie:** You know, people are busy, they have other things that they're focusing on. Why does it matter if someone knows if a tree is an elm or an oak?

**Rick:** That's part of it, and there are people... and I'm partially one, but there are people that like knowing that it's an oak or an elm. But I think it's more than just learning a deeper catalog. It's understanding... I'll give you a good example that everybody with a house can relate to. Everyone's heard of invasive plants or native plants, and maybe it's better to plant native, but they don't really understand why.

And when you understand the ecology of nature, you understand that if you plant something like a crepe myrtle, a crepe myrtle is kind of like a silk plant. It's alive, and it's beautiful, and it's decorative, but there are very few insects that can eat it. And if there are no insects that can eat it, there's no food for birds. So you're going to have a major decrease in the richness and diversity of the entire ecosystem if you don't have plants that your native plants, and animals, and birds, and mammals have evolved to be able to exploit.

So, people need to understand that when they pick non-native plants, they're really degrading the quality of the environment. But if you plant, say, an oak tree - oak is a

great example - it's not only one of our most common trees here, but there are so many things that live... And there were studies of this. If you were to count the insects that exploit the oak, and then all the birds and mammals that live off those insects, it might be 100 times what, say, a ginkgo tree would support, or maybe even 1,000 times in the case of a ginkgo. So, understanding that also makes you appreciate that even the choices you're making in your yard can have a big impact on the quality of our natural environment.

**Julie:** In terms of the kinds of people... You said that there were folks who were already naturalists, or folks who were retired and interested, was there a theme between the kinds of folks who do this that you noticed between Texas and here?

**Rick:** You know, I think there might be... I think people spend more time outside here just because the climate is so conducive to it. In Texas, three or four months a year it's just so hot you don't even want to go outside. Here, you can pretty much count on being outside almost every day and enjoying yourself in the beauty. So, I think you've got a lot more interest in being in the outdoors. And I think also there is a culture here that is more ecologically attuned, so that sort of sets people up to want to know more.

But in truth, I think most people... It's kind of sad because most of the education of nature we have is for kids, right? You might go on a field trip, or if you're a scout you have a requirement. And I would lead groups of kids sometimes and the parents would be tagging along, and it would be interesting to me to notice how fascinated the parents were. It sort of taught me that there was a hunger for a little more information about their surroundings that was out there in the adults than I think was being met.

And I think kind of see that here too. You have a lot of people that use the trails, but they use it for recreation, for exercise, but they may not know any more than those toddlers about the nature that surrounds them. I think there's a lot of people that would find it fascinating to know more about it.

**Julie:** When you were doing this program, either in Texas or in California, was there something that really, really surprised you? Either about the area, about the ecology, about yourself? Was there anything that was, like, "Wow! This is a real aha moment."?

**Rick:** There were several of those, really. One in particular, there's a phrase everybody's heard of called biodiversity. And you sort of think you know what it means, but when you have an expert that opens your eyes up to it, it's very interesting. I'll give you an example. One of the sad things in most of the places we live - and it's about as true here as it was in Texas - despite the beauty here, so much of our local environment is non-native, invasive species, and a lot of land that's been degraded over what might've once been virgin wilderness ecosystem.

And in Texas, that seemed very obvious. It used to be the Great Plains, and the prairies, and the buffalo, and now it's just tract homes and subdivisions. We had a local park that had a field, and it looked very beautiful to me. It had beautiful grasses and trees along the creek. And the expert took us out there and he took a thing, a square-hula-hoop-sized thing, and he put it down on the ground and he said, "Let's crouch down and start counting out the different species within this square meter."

And he of course was better at it than we were, but I'd say maybe he could identify 10-15 species. Which seemed like a lot to us. A week later, we took a field trip to a place called Clymer Meadow, which is this untouched tall grass prairie in Texas, several thousand acres, a very rare fragment of untouched prairie. And we did the same thing,

and there were about 200 species! It wasn't just grass. It looked like the garden of Eden. It was spring and there were so many different types of plants, and flowers, and grasses all crammed into this one little area. I guess I naively thought that if you, sort of, fenced off an area of grass back in the park that I'd been in and left it alone it would turn itself back into that. But it doesn't. It was kind of sad. The recovery of degraded ecosystems is a difficult challenge. And it doesn't even happen naturally if you just leave it untouched because of the science.

**Julie:** Tell me more about that. Why wouldn't it go back?

**Rick:** Well, part of it is the science that we're still coming to understand. One example is this, that part of what supported that ecosystem was fungus and microbes in the soil, so there's a whole diverse ecosystem in the soil, and once you have plowed up that land and exposed it to the air, you've actually killed off a lot of the microscopic species that were necessary to support the diversity of the ecosystem. And you don't reintroduce those by coming along with a native grass plug and sticking it in, and watering it, and thinking it's going to grow, because you've basically changed the whole chemistry and ecosystem function of that remnant.

So if you have land that's been plowed, like a farm, and you let it go back to a prairie, it won't be the same prairie, at least not in tens or hundreds of years. It may eventually get there just as all evolution does. And I found that to be fascinating. The aha moment was just being able to see with my eyes how much more diverse the native area was, but also understanding how man's impact is more lasting and difficult to fix than you might think.

**Julie:** Are there nonprofits that work specifically on that kind of thing? Biodiversity and recovery, or protection?

**Rick:** Yes, there are, and I see a lot of them here. I'm not involved with them yet at this point. There are different land trusts and organizations that do restoration. It's hard work, it's very labor intensive, and therefore very expensive to do it well. Another interesting thing is that some of it is new science, and there's a lot of trial and error going on. Some universities are doing pilot projects to see, 'how do we bring back a marshland', and 'how do we restore a grassland area'. And kind of the example I gave you about the fungus and the microorganisms in the soil, that's an example of something that wasn't really very well understood until pretty recently. So that's actually kind of exciting.

There's a lot of opportunities for young scientists, but whether or not there's a lot of funding for that is a different story. But it's also an opportunity for volunteers, because some of it is done with kids with their seedlings, and people that go out... On the peninsula particularly, there have been some aggressive volunteer stinkwort removal efforts. And people go out there with their gloves and their bags and just go after it and pull it up by hand.

**Julie:** Are there things that people can do around their own home or in their neighborhoods, like planting native plants?

**Rick:** Yeah, planting natives is a great example. There's a guy I'd recommend to you and your listeners called Doug Tallamy. He's got a book or two out on the subject, but actually he gives a great PowerPoint-kind of lecture all over the country. So if you went to YouTube and just looked for a YouTube video of one of his lectures... I've read his book, and his book is good, but an hour-long lecture would really teach you so much

about why it's important to plant native plants in your yard, and really how impactful that could be to our environment. I can't even do it justice, but I recommend that.

And then as far as in your local... while you're enjoying nature, one thing I've noticed is once you plug into the right Facebook pages, or websites, or get newsletters, there's a lot of docented (meaning expert-lead) nature activities, and that's a great opportunity to go out and learn some more.

**Julie:** Being a naturalist, getting certified in the program, has it branched off into other interests that you didn't anticipate?

**Rick:** One was a pretty big deal for me back in Texas, and it has to do with something unique to the region, but one of the activities we did as a field trip was to head out to a publicly open riverbed which was rich with fossils and we went fossil hunting. I had never been fossil hunting, and I didn't really know anything about it, and it turns out to be a lot of fun. It was particularly fun there because you would definitely find some. Like anything else it takes a little while to train your eyes to know what to look for, and they helped us with that, but it really opened up a whole separate interest that I got into. I even joined an organization called the Dallas Paleontological Association, which was a fun group because it was everybody from professors at the local universities, some of whom were world-renowned paleontologists, and kids who were among the best hunters.

It was basically open to anyone, and they would have a monthly meeting and a lecture, but they'd also have - and what made it particularly worth joining - field trips that would take you to private land where you were allowed to hunt. Normally you're not supposed to disturb nature, including fossils, on any public land, and that's true here in California as well. So finding places where there's... It's still fun to go look for fossils, which anyone can do, but it's even better when you have permission to collect because it's just fun to have some you found yourself, and take them home, and put them on a shelf.

**Julie:** Yeah, for sure. What kind of fossils did you find there and have you found any here?

**Rick:** I have seen some here. The geology here is very complicated compared to Texas. Texas is a classic layer cake, at least where I lived. So the old stuff on the bottom, and then a layer on top of that, and a layer on top of that. So when you had a creek or something it would open up the deeper layers and creeks would, sort of, naturally expose fossils. And the fossils there were all Cretaceous period - which is like 65-90 million years ago - marine fossils because it used to be underwater in the inland sea. So we would find a lot of shells, oysters, and clams, and mussels, but also ammonites, things that are now extinct.

Some of the most exciting, and I have actually found a vertebra of one on my first hunt so maybe that hooked me, but the vertebrae of Mosasaurus which were these giant... They were sort of the *T. Rex* of the oceans. These giant reptiles that would feed on sharks. Some of them would be bigger than a bus, and you can still find their teeth and some of their bones, especially their vertebrae, if you know what you're looking for. So that was fun.

**Julie:** That sounds incredible!

**Rick:** It was really fun. Now here, there are areas... Shell Ridge is so named in the Walnut Creek area, on the slopes of Mount Diablo because it's also got some of those, I think,

Cretaceous period fossils, so you would find shells for sure. Then there are newer fossils that are found in this area, including things like mammoth bones, and some of the giant creatures that are more recent but also extinct like giant sloths, and saber-toothed tigers, and the things that would excite kids. Those are not easy to find, but it's fun to read that they have found some in the Bay Area.

**Julie:** If a listener wanted to get involved in a naturalist program or just, kind of, get more thoughtful about what they're seeing and what they're looking for every time they go out for a walk, how would you recommend they get started?

**Rick:** I think having an enthusiastic interpreter out in the field take you out on a walk and show you things is by far the most fun. *Bay Nature* magazine would alert you to some. I know Mount Tam in the area of Marin, they have an association where they have lots of hikes. So when those all open up again those would be a great thing to do.

**Julie:** And presumably there's analogous organizations and publications everywhere in the world.

**Rick:** Everywhere. Once you start looking... and that's the beauty of things like Facebook. If you Like a page on one it'll suggest others, or events in your area, and sometimes even cities and counties will sponsor such things. I would say definitely go on those and then maybe ask about others when you're there. There may be newsletters, or bulletin boards, or something that would tell you things that you would've otherwise missed.

**Julie:** Now, I'm hoping I'm getting this right. There's a program, or a website called iNaturalist? Is that right?

**Rick:** Yeah! It's funny you should mention that because actually an event starts tomorrow. iNaturalist is a great exploring tool, and it's also citizen science, so I'd recommend everyone check this out. I would go to the website first and just type in iNaturalist and it'll get you to their homepage. Sign up there and then download the app to your smartphone. What that app will do is it will turn the camera in your smartphone into a nature observing tool. You can go up to basically anything you can get a good, clear picture of, whether it be a flower, or a tree leaf, or a bug, or if you good at catching a bird before it flies away, a bird, or a butterfly. If you get a good, clear picture of it, hit upload and iNaturalist will use the information in your camera to, sort of, know where you are -if you permit it; you can control the settings.

But assuming you've permitted it to know everything about where you're taking pictures, it will suggest to you what it thinks you're looking at. Sometimes it might give you four or five things, or the top ten things that this might be. So it'll say, "It's definitely a bird," you knew that, "It looks like it might be a Stellar's jay." And then you can look at the picture of the Stellar's jay that it gives you compared to what you saw, and you can even click on the little thing that will tell you all about Stellar's jays. Once you think you know that's what it is, you just hit upload and it will upload that to a database that other naturalists, many of them amateur naturalists, will look at and then they can help verify or correct what you've seen.

Then that becomes a database once it becomes research grade, which means others have agreed that you've got a good identification. Scientists are actually using that database now to look at things like 'what's the range of species,' and 'when are they most often seen' and 'when did they first appear', and 'is climate change showing that certain birds are moving further north than they used to be reported'. So, it's a lot of

fun to just learn about nature, but you're also helping scientists catalog the nature in your area.

**Julie:** And it doesn't have to be... You don't have to be up in the mountains on a hike. You can just be walking around your neighborhood or in your backyard.

**Rick:** Nope. You can do it in your own backyard. They prefer you to do wild things, although you can use it... If there was a pretty flower in your neighbor's yard and you wonder what that plant was, it would probably tell you and you could go to the nursery and ask for it. So that's kind of fun. But from a science standpoint, they're looking for wild nature. And yeah, even if you have a spider crawling across your wall in the house, before you smush it, if you're going to, you can take a picture of it and learn more about it. It's a lot of fun. There used to be a contest... This year because of the coronavirus they're going to play down the contest aspect, but there's a four-day period where in different cities all around the world, people will be using that tool to see who can find the most different species, and how many observations can each city make. It's a lot of fun.

**Julie:** I'm going to go download that right now, as soon as we're done talking.

**Rick:** It starts tomorrow. Download that. Play with it. And it's every year, so if you miss it this year you could play with the tool and then by next year you could help the Bay Area if you're in the Bay Area. That'll help you win the contest. There are cities all over the world now. Last year Cape Town, South Africa came in number one.

**Julie:** Awesome. Well, this has been so enlightening and so much fun. I really appreciate you taking the time to chat with me today.

**Rick:** Thank you. I love sharing the love of nature and I hope everybody found something interesting and new to go learn about or get outside and enjoy.

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If you'd like to learn more about the nature around you, even in your own backyard, check out the [iNaturalist](#) app. I'll post links to that in the show notes along with links to the [Master Naturalist](#) programs you can find around the US. Also, I've included links to Rick's favorite nonprofits and some of mine too.

If you go out for a hike - socially distanced of course - take some pictures and tag me on Instagram [@LoveWhatYouLovePod](#) or on Twitter [@WhatYouLovePod](#) so I can share the happy with everyone else.

If you'd like to support the podcast leaving a rating or review on [Apple Podcasts](#) - even if that's not where you listen - is a great way to do that. You can also spread the love and share about the podcast on social media. Thank you to everyone who has rated, reviewed, or socialed already.

Zeke Rodrigues Thomas at Mindjam Media provided amazing editing assistance. You can find Zeke at [MindjamMedia.com](#). Also, huge thanks to Emily White, as always, for the episode transcripts, which are available to patrons at [Patreon.com/LoveWhatYouLovePod](#).

If you've been listening for a while now, you know what I'm going to say. Please be good to yourselves, and each other, and love the hell out of whatever it is that you love. Thanks for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

## **Links:**

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[iNaturalist](#)

[Master Naturalist Programs by State](#)

[The New Naturalists](#)

## **Rick's Favorite Nonprofits:**

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*Teachers request funding for projects their districts can't afford, and the charity vets them and serves as a conduit to allow the giver to select and fund or contribute to a specific project they feel is particularly worthy (by location, by type of project, by economic need, etc.). Unlike so many worthy charities, this one facilitates a very concrete and personal connection to a narrow and more modest, yet critical, need. The giver will get specific feedback and thanks from those helped (both the teacher-who will send an e-mail of thanks, often along with wonderful pictures - and the kids themselves, who will often send handwritten notes and cards/art in thanks). It is the best!*

[Save Mount Diablo](#)

*An astonishingly impressive record of success in raising funds to purchase privately held ranches and properties in and around the Diablo Range to protect them from development. They also support public outreach and education, volunteer-led trail hikes, trail and infrastructure development, and restoration of such lands (and effectively advocate for and coordinate with other land trusts, state and local agencies and governments to preserve and protect natural spaces for posterity). Far more than just "park" advocates (not that there's anything wrong with that), they are achieving success on the larger scale needed to preserve wildlife corridors and connected ecosystems that will give threatened species a chance to survive. The "long game" they are playing and winning is something rare and beautiful to see, rivaling what only coordinated government action can typically achieve (and the latter, while impressive, seems to be stagnating and struggling at best, and in some areas, in active retreat).*

## **A rotating list of my favorite charities:**

[San Mateo & Santa Clara County Fire Relief Fund](#)

[World Central Kitchen](#)

[Vote.org](#) Have you registered to vote? Do you know how you're voting (early in person, by mail, in person on election day)? Have you double checked your registration?

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