

DAILY BREEZE

Man's erosion of Earth in focus

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For three years, Michael Tobias traveled the globe documenting the daunting efforts under way to protect threatened plants and wildlife.

He's followed a stewardship program to protect an endangered parrot species in New Zealand and the native plantings occurring on Easter Island, once home to rich palm forests before humans ripped them from the landscape.

This weekend, the anthropologist, ecologist and filmmaker will bring those stories and others to the South Bay, which will get an early look at the new documentary he produced with his wife, fellow ecologist Jane Gray Morrison.

The South Bay and West Valley bird societies are co-hosting an advanced screening of "Hotspots" at 6:30 p.m. Sunday at the Hermosa Beach Playhouse, with all proceeds benefiting a trio of nonprofit initiatives - the Indonesian Parrot Project, Parrots International and Ventana Wildlife Society's California condor reintroduction program.

All three focus their work in designated "hot spots" - which is a term used to describe 35 areas around the world with some of the richest yet most threatened plants and animal species.

"A hot spot is not a good thing," said Tobias, who serves as president and CEO of the Dancing Star Foundation, a nonprofit environmental group that provided funding for the film. (Morrison is the group's executive vice president.)

Yet the film focuses on the efforts of scientists, government agencies and others to preserve and protect those threatened species - even if they do often happen at the eleventh hour, he explained.

"You've got redemption efforts that are really strenuously working," Tobias said.

"Those who can are trying to make a difference. Now there's a convergence of such stories around the world."

Although work on the film lasted about three years, Tobias said it is rooted in "35 years of ecological research."

The film shown in Hermosa will last about 89 minutes, and Tobias said PBS plans to air the documentary in November during two hour-long back-to-back segments.

Janet Ragonesi, event coordinator for the Redondo Beach-based South Bay Bird Society, said her organization jumped at the chance to show a preview when Tobias and Morrison made the offer last December.

The society took on the expense and effort of planning the screening and shares the same goals of protection and preservation, she said.

"We're bird oriented, but for this event it's all endangered species," Ragonesi said.

"We felt because the movie travels the globe and then comes up the coast of California it would appeal to everyone. You're going to see all kinds of animals."

Organizers hope to sell the roughly 500 seats in the theater.

"We're hoping to fill the house," Ragonesi said, "just to stand by these people who worked in hot spots throughout the world.

"It's about compassion. We're all in this together."

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WANT TO GO?

What: The South Bay and West Valley bird societies are co-hosting a screening of the documentary "Hotspots." The film focuses on efforts to protect threatened plant and wildlife species around the world.

Where: Hermosa Beach Playhouse, 710 Pier Ave. at Pacific Coast Highway.

When: 6:30 p.m. Sunday.

Information: Tickets can be ordered online and will be sold at the door for \$25. Valet parking is complimentary. For more information and to see a trailer of the film, link to www.sobaybirdsoc.com/hotspots/.