

Scientists track drought's impact on Sierra fish

By Edward Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

SONORA — With a fish net in one hand and backpack in the other, UC Davis fish biologist Peter Moyle set out across the dry Sierra foothills Thursday to look for a fish he feared was destined for extinction because of drought.

What he found puzzled him.

On a dry hill, with the sun blazing, he came across a thriving creek — with plenty of water and fish.

The fish in question is the Red Hills roach, which is found only in the creeks and pools amid the serpentine rock-lined hills south of Highway 120, west of the town of Sonora.

Because of the intense drought, Moyle feared that most of the creeks and pools the fish thrive in were now just rocky bottoms. “We were pessimistic we would even find anything,” said Moyle. “So we brought buckets and an ice chest with an aerator in it to take fish back.”

Whatever fish he could find he planned to bring back to UC Davis.

If none was found, it would have been the first fish extinction in California since the High Rock Spring tui chub disappeared in 1989.

Experts say climate change will eventually threaten many fish species in California.

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