

Pot farmers' pesticides poisoning forest animals

By David Perlman, San Francisco Chronicle

Fishers, those rare little forest animals barely larger than a big house cat, are dying from rat poisons left behind by illegal marijuana growers in California who abandon their plantations when the law closes in.

Ecologist Mourad Gabriel should know: He lives in Blue Lake, a Humboldt County town not far from the area's fast-moving hidden pot farmers. Nyxo, his pet Labrador retriever, died of a powerful rat poison last year while Gabriel was investigating the unusual deaths among fishers.

Fishers, related to the weasel family, live in forests along the West Coast from Oregon to Yosemite and the southern Sierra and are already proposed for federal protection as a threatened species. Once abundant, their populations have been declining for years as civilization closes in on their habitats.

But now Gabriel, along with colleagues at UC Davis and the Hoopa Valley Indian Reservation's tribal forestry department, have found that a variety of poisons are killing some of the fishers, although their primary enemies are still predators.

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