

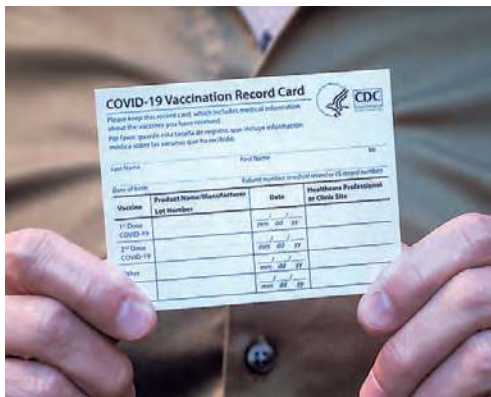
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**Today: Vaccine card**

Lost your COVID vaccine verification card? Here are several ways you can try to get a replacement.



**Nation**

**New York Gov. Cuomo resigns while still denying intentionally mistreating women. A6**

**Bay Area & Business**

**Knight: Returning cars to Great Highway a step backward for S.F. C1**



# San Francisco Chronicle

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**“Now that we know it does work, how can we keep this going long-term?”**

*Tristin McHugh, kelp project director at the Nature Conservancy*



Photos by Brian Feulner / Special to The Chronicle

**Above: Morgan Murphy-Cannella surveys a bull kelp restoration site at Noyo Bay. Below: Between 2014 and 2019, the bull kelp forest off the Mendocino and Sonoma coasts had declined by an average of 95%.**

## Nursing ailing kelp forests back to life

Projects saving plant nearly wiped out by warm water, voracious sea urchins

**By Tara Duggan**

FORT BRAGG, Mendocino County — On the fishing dock in Noyo Harbor, two days' haul of purple sea urchin barely filled a large plastic crate.

Hand-collected by commercial divers, the spiky invertebrates were destined for science, not sushi. On a table nearby, a crew from the conservation organization Reef Check cut through their shells to their gooey insides, collecting data for a state-funded project aiming to rescue California's North Coast kelp forest by systematically removing the voracious purple urchin from the sea floor.

From 2014 to 2019, when the ocean became too warm for bull kelp to thrive, purple urchin ate most of it, transforming vast underwater forests into miles of urchin barren — rocky substrate covered by the prickly orbs. The kelp forest on the Sonoma and Mendocino coast declined by an average of 95% in that period, according to UC Santa Cruz data. In

**Kelp continues on A8**



## Deported to country he's never set foot in

Expulsion to Vietnam for model inmate firefighter

**By Deepa Fernandes**

A former California prison firefighter granted early parole for good behavior was ordered deported Tuesday to Vietnam — a country he's never been to.



**Phi Pham, 30, was turned over to ICE after leaving prison.**

Phi Pham, 30, of Hayward learned his fate during a federal immigration hearing in Colorado, where he's been detained since his June 16 release from Folsom State Prison. Convicted of shooting a man during an argument when he was 20, Pham earned an early release due to good behavior, the completion of multiple educational courses and the positive reviews he received from his civilian fire captain.

But when the prison gates opened for him, Pham learned he would be turned over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or

**Deported continues on A8**

## Bay Area's battle over evictions set to intensify

**By Lauren Hepler**

Marcelo Moraes surveyed all the packing left to do at the Daly City apartment a judge had ordered him to leave 48 hours earlier.

The Rio de Janeiro native sat near a stack of black plastic bins he'd bought to move his life into a storage unit advertising one month free. Leftovers from a last-minute garage sale lined the dining room table.

Moraes' lawyers had been negotiating with his landlord over roughly \$50,000 he owed in back rent, most of which a state COVID-19 rent relief program had agreed to pay. But there still wasn't a deal by that Saturday, and Moraes didn't want to wait for the sheriff to show up.

"I can't live like this anymore," he said, then

**Evictions continues on A7**

## Delta raises worry over long COVID affecting children

**By Aidin Vaziri**

One of the most concerning things about the highly contagious delta variant is its ability to infect children spared previous strains of the coronavirus. With pediatric cases rapidly rising in the Bay Area and elsewhere, anxiety is growing about little-researched long COVID in children, with physical and mental symptoms that can last for months or years.

"As far as risk to kids for this variant, I don't think we know yet what the longer-term implications will be," said Dr. Sarah Doernberg, a parent and infectious disease expert at UCSF.

The Chronicle reached out to experts and reviewed the still-developing research to ex-

**Children continues on A9**

## Pandemic protocols in theaters' spotlight

**By Lily Janiak**



Carlos Avila Gonzalez / The Chronicle

**Christina Boothman, in the backyard studio she built during the pandemic, lost a lead role after an outcry over COVID protocols at Chanticleers Theatre.**

As Chanticleers Theatre's production of "The Four Poster" began its run last month, ticket buyers might have felt reassured by the COVID protocols listed on the Castro Valley community theater's website. Masks were required for audience members and staff, though the play's two actors, Rhonda Joy Taylor and Roger Caetano, would perform unmasked.

But Avi Jacobson wasn't satisfied. An actor based in Albany who has auditioned for Chanticleers Theatre shows, he'd heard rumors that Taylor and Caetano had not been vaccinated against the coronavirus. If that was true, he said, he envisioned the unmasked actors possibly expectorating on unsuspecting older audience

**Theater continues on A9**



**Weather**

Increasing amounts of sun. Highs: 62-105. Lows: 54-68. **B8**



**MORE INSIDE**

» **Vaccine study:** Moderna may be twice as effective as Pfizer in fighting delta variant. **A5**

» **S.F. schools:** District decides that teachers and other staff must be vaccinated or tested weekly. **C1**



## FROM THE COVER

# Sea urchin removal leads to recovery

*Kelp from page A1*

response, conservation organizations and scientists up and down the state are working on ways to fix the problem, sending divers down to plant baby kelp and trapping urchin with nets the size of Hula-Hoops.

It's starting to work. Reef Check's pilot project to remove urchin from a specific underwater site is proving effective in bringing kelp back. Nature is helping too: Cooler temperatures and windy conditions brought upwellings of nutrient-rich water last year and this spring, encouraging the return of gold-green kelp beds along the coast. Preliminary data from satellite imagery collected this year is pointing to a rebound, said James Ray, kelp management specialist at the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, who calls kelp restoration "a pressing issue that's a high priority for the state."

"This year we're definitely seeing some regrowth of kelp pretty widely on the North Coast," said Ray, who will get the full picture in the fall. "The early indications are that even though there's some improvements, there's still probably a long way to go."

The greater challenge will be figuring out how to make kelp restoration work on a wide scale and how to be better prepared when the ocean warms again.

The most common type of kelp on the North Coast, bull kelp is an annual plant that emerges in spring, quickly growing into a leafy canopy that creates a vital habitat for abalone, fish, marine mammals and other animals. In the surf, its bobbing round bulbs are easily mistaken for harbor seals coming up for air.

The worry is that even as the kelp starts coming back naturally, the urchin will find a way to devour it. While marine heat waves, including an El Niño and a warm water "blob," contributed to the kelp forest's demise, they coincided with the disappearance of the purple urchin's main predator, a type of sea star, which began dying of sea-star wasting syndrome in 2013. Even after eating almost all the kelp, the purple urchin persisted, which gave rise to the nickname Zombie Urchin.

"They're voracious little lawn mowers that eat everything they can," said Scott Hamilton of Moss Landing Marine Laboratories near Monterey, an institute affiliated with the state university system that is experimenting with ways to culture bull kelp in the lab and plant it underwater in a site cleared by Reef Check.

The organization's kelp resto-



Photos by Brian Feulner / Special to The Chronicle

**Reef Check's kelp restoration coordinator, Morgan Murphy-Cannella (left), walks with Ian Norton as they return to their car after conducting an eco monitoring survey on a bull kelp restoration site at Noyo Bay in Fort Bragg (Mendocino County).**

ration coordinator, Morgan Murphy-Cannella, recently stood above the narrow opening of Noyo Harbor, pointing to a bed of bull kelp floating directly above a 10-acre underwater site where commercial divers have removed 30,000 pounds of urchin since last July.

"None of that was here last year," Murphy-Cannella said.

Funded by a \$500,000 grant from the California Ocean Protection Council, Reef Check recently began Phase 2 of the project in Albion, a hamlet south of Mendocino, where it has started a similar removal process. The divers have experience harvesting red sea urchin, which are much larger and more sought after for their uni, or gonads, by restaurants.

The team first creates a grid on the sea floor marked with cables, which they'll remove when the project is done. Divers go down for an initial sweep of a cell measuring 10 by 100 meters (33 by 330 feet), which can take a couple of days because of the density of the urchins. Later, the divers do other sweeps to get the urchin that crawl out from in between rocks and keep diving until they can get the whole area down to no more than two urchin per square meter, which is the goal for kelp restoration.

"You can see a clear line between the restoration site and then the non-restoration site," said Murphy-Cannella, who dives so often she's difficult to reach by phone. "You're swimming and looking down thinking, 'No urchin, no urchin ... holy s— there's so many urchin!'"

Reef Check chose both the



**A purple sea urchin clings to a rock on the reef at Noyo Bay.**

Noyo and Albion sites because they're surrounded on three sides by areas where urchin typically don't go — sandy bottom or cliff. There's only one way in. Divers check that infiltration point often and clear any newcomers.

After the divers bring the urchin into the harbor, staff and volunteers weigh and measure some of them. The main goal is to figure out what it will take to remove urchin from larger areas. The work is time-consuming and expensive — commercial divers are paid a day rate of \$500 — and there are additional boat costs.

If the majority of urchins are tiny, that lets them know that clearing a site may take a lot longer, said Kristen Elsmore, a collaborator with Reef Check who just received her Ph.D. from UC Davis. Elsmore said that the research will help them target specific sites that are best suited for restoration.

"It's a very large area to cover," Elsmore said. "Realistically there's no way we're going to get divers in the water and remove urchin from the entire coastline."

The research also involves inspecting the urchin's stomach contents. Along with red and green algae, they often have bits of rock or plastic.

In the lab, Elsmore observed them eating almost anything, including the lining of tanks, and each other.

"Their jaws are strong enough that they can actually break the rock," she said, as the urchin scrape it for tiny bits of algae. "In tide pools, you can see urchins that have carved out little holes for themselves."

Currently, the remaining collected urchins are composted, but Tristin McHugh, a Reef Check consultant, is looking into commercial uses. That includes bringing them to an aquaculture facility to feed them and sell them

to restaurants and turning them into fertilizer.

"Now that we know it does work, how can we keep this going long-term?" said McHugh, kelp project director at the Nature Conservancy, which is piloting a project to trap urchins.

Yet just removing urchins isn't enough to bring kelp back on a wide scale. Because the forest almost disappeared, there's now less chance for kelp to reproduce.

Bull kelp's life cycle works like this: Kelp emerges in spring and attaches to the rocky sea floor. It can grow from the size of a spinach leaf to a long stalk that reaches the ocean's surface in about a month. In June or July, the adult kelp begin dropping spores for next year's crop. In winter, the adults are pulled out by big swells and wash up on shore.

Michael Graham and other scientists at Moss Landing Marine Labs are trying to help the process along using a few different methods. In Albion, divers have begun dropping bags full of kelp reproductive material that they hope will release spores. Another technique involves growing juvenile bull kelp from a seed bank in the lab and then attaching them to reefs.

"We're getting them through that baby step and putting them out there so that they can grow where we want them to grow," said Graham, who expects to start seeing results this fall. "We're making these little hot spots of recovery."

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# Inmate firefighter ordered deported

*Deported from page A1*

ICE, which had placed a detainee on him during his final weeks in Folsom. A carve-out in California's landmark sanctuary laws allows state prisons to transfer inmates at the ends of their sentences to federal immigration authorities.

"I barely speak the language," Pham told The Chronicle about the prospect of being deported to Vietnam prior to his deportation hearing. "I don't even know who to talk to. I don't even know who to call."

Pham was born in a refugee camp in the Philippines to exiled Vietnamese parents. His family was granted refugee status and arrived in the U.S. when Pham was 4 months old. He gained legal permanent residency soon thereafter but never became a naturalized citizen, a step that would have thwarted his current ICE detention and pending deportation.

Judge Elizabeth McGrail ordered Pham's removal to Vietnam, which the United States considers his country of citizenship even though he has

never been there and has no birth certificate issued by that country, said Anoop Prasad, Pham's attorney with Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Asian Law Caucus.

"The judge doesn't actually ask ICE for evidence that a person is from a certain country when issuing an order of removal, but ICE can legally deport the person to any country in the world that will take them whether the person is a citizen of that country or not," Prasad explained.

Pham opted not to contest the ruling, Prasad said. Given his prior conviction — assault with a firearm — he has little grounds for appealing his deportation, the attorney said. Federal law deems any crime involving a firearm a deportable offense.

Pham's removal order lays bare the complications of the federal deportation system. He was born in the Philippines and came to the U.S. as an infant in 1991. A repatriation agreement signed between Washington and Hanoi in 2008 barred the deportation of Vietnamese na-

tionals who arrived in the United States prior to 1995.

Yet it appears this agreement was ignored during former President Donald Trump's one term. Deportations to Vietnam jumped from 35 in 2016 to 71 in 2017. Successive years saw 122, 80 and 93 deportations to Vietnam, ICE records show. The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center said these numbers include people who arrived pre-'95.

It is unclear if the agreement was renegotiated during the Trump years, or if President Biden will seek to honor the 2008 document. The State Department previously declined to comment.

With an order of deportation, immigration authorities now must secure a travel document from the Vietnamese government. This can take months and may in fact be denied, said Prasad, which would leave Pham in legal limbo. The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that the federal government cannot hold detainees longer than 90 days if they cannot be deported.

"ICE is required to conduct a review every 90 days to determine the likelihood that they'll be able to deport him, and if they find that they're not going to deport him to Vietnam, they're supposed to release him at that 90-day review," Prasad

said.

Prasad said he plans to file a request for his client's release from detention so he can await deportation with his family in Hayward. Pham's mother is suffering from end-stage renal disease and has been undergoing dialysis, Prasad said, and her son wants to be with her. Pham's stellar prison record, including his firefighting service, are factors ICE must consider, Prasad said.

"If you look at ICE's memo, as it's written, it says they're focusing their resources on people who pose a current danger and I think it's pretty clear he doesn't pose a danger," Prasad said. "Before ICE arrested him, he was living out in the community serving as a firefighter so I'm not sure what additional evidence you'd possibly need as a person who does not pose a current danger."

In 2020, his final year in prison, Pham was admitted to the firefighting program open only to inmates with outstanding disciplinary records. While there he helped extinguish fires started in cells, performed chest compressions on an inmate suffering a heart attack and once tended to a corrections officer who went into diabetic shock, he said. Pham also lived on-site at Folsom's firehouse, free from standard prison re-

strictions. His civilian fire captain, Duke Juanitas, described a man with "an unrelenting work ethic" and praised his dedication to the work in a letter of recommendation.

With an order of deportation issued, Pham's only chance of remaining in the United States would come through a gubernatorial pardon — which Gov. Gavin Newsom recently granted to two Laotian men with similar histories to Pham — or if the Vietnamese government does not issue him a travel document, in which case ICE would have to release him after 90 days.

For now, Pham continues his wait in a Colorado detention cell, one of 26,000 currently detained by ICE nationwide. Before Tuesday's hearing, Pham was holding out hope that he'd done enough to warrant a second chance to be free in the only country he's known.

"America is a country of second chances," he told The Chronicle. "I know I grew up in prison and I want to show the world that I have changed. ... I'm truly sorry for what I did, it was wrong."

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