

FOR LOVE OF MONARCHS

Oregon couple grows food to sustain them

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

NEWBERG, Ore. — Oregon is known for its specialized agricultural production, but Jim and Bonnie Kiser may occupy the state's narrowest market niche.

Their entire crop this year, seeded in February and March, consisted of 990 milkweed plants. By mid-June, about 800 survived to be given away and planted in yards, parks or gardens.

The plants, *Asclepias speciosa*, or showy milkweed, are intended as forage for a migratory insect: the monarch butterfly.

The brightly colored monarch has become something of a poster-bug in the debate over pesticide and herbicide use, agriculture's impact on wildlife habitat, and the role of voluntary conservation efforts in staving off potential regulatory or legal action.

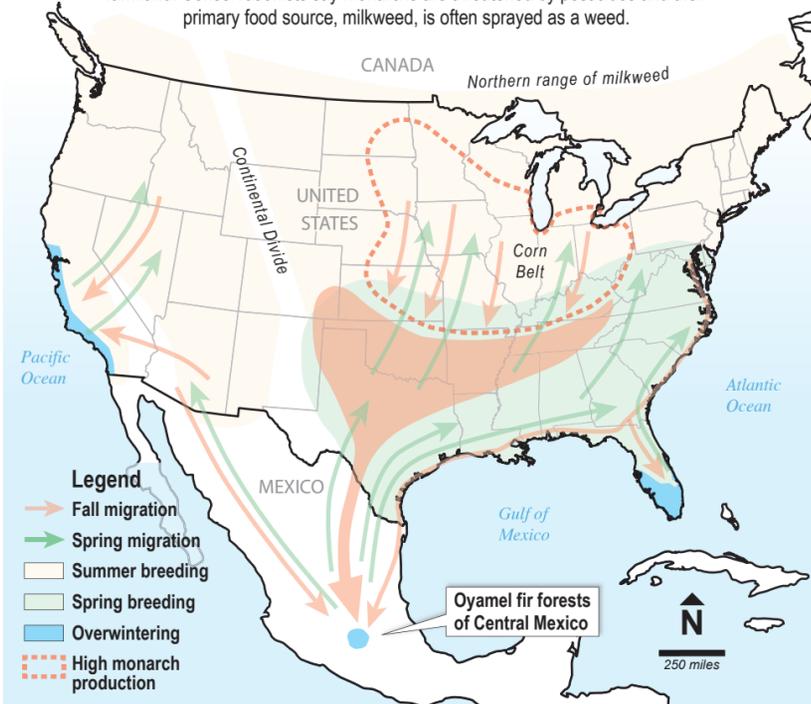
The Kisers are among a cadre of people who have taken it upon themselves to aid monarchs. They've been at it since 1998, when they dug up and rescued milkweed plants from a Costco store construction site in Eugene, Ore. They've also rescued plants from construction at a Tektronix electronics plant in the Portland area, and at a highway interchange near Rickreall. They have a couple dozen milkweed plants growing in their yard, in addition to the hundreds of seedlings growing in plastic tubes. Last year, they planted 300 milkweed plants at Champoeg State Park.

"This is an amateur operation, but it's effective," said Jim Kiser, a semi-retired consulting engineer.

The monarch population has steeply declined; one estimate puts the population loss at 90 percent over the past

Flight of the monarch butterfly

The migratory route of monarch butterflies takes them over and through prime U.S. farmland. Conservationists say monarchs are threatened by pesticides and their primary food source, milkweed, is often sprayed as a weed.



Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Eric Mortenson and Alan Kenaga/Capital Press



Photos by Eric Mortenson/Capital Press

Jim Kiser of Newberg, Ore., shows some of the showy milkweed seedlings he's growing at his home. Kiser and his wife, Bonnie, give seedlings away for planting in gardens and parks. The plant is critical food for migrating monarch butterflies.

two decades, although they bounced back this year.

Critics say farming practices, especially in the Midwest, have killed off milkweed, the only plant on which butterfly larvae feed. In March 2016, the Center for Biological Diversity and the Center for

Food Safety filed suit against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for failing to protect monarchs under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The two groups blamed planting of genetically modified corn and soybeans for loss of milkweed in the Midwest.

Food Safety, said settlement negotiations are underway.

In the meantime, USFWS encourages voluntary milkweed plantings, saying that every backyard can become an "oasis" for the butterflies and other pollinators. The agency urges schools, community groups, businesses and state and local governments to plant milkweed on public and private land and in rights-of-way. "Monarch declines are symptomatic of environmental problems that also pose risks to food production, the spectacular natural places that help define our national identity, and our own health," USFWS says on its website.

Monarchs are a compelling story. They migrate south from Canada to Mexico in the fall and head the other way in the spring, going through several generations on the way. The monarch's primary flyway covers the Midwestern U.S., including the Corn Belt, but a subset migrates each fall from Canada across the Pacific Northwest to Southern California, reversing direction in the spring.

The notion of helping monarchs by planting milkweed resonates with many people. A group called Monarch Watch advocates a "monarch highway" of milkweed plantings along Interstate 35, which runs from Duluth, Minn., south to Laredo, Texas.

But Kimbrell, the Center for Food Safety attorney, said nothing short of mandatory protection under the Endangered Species Act can help monarchs at this point.

The group applauds voluntary planting efforts, "But it's not nearly sufficient to save them, unfortunately," he said by email.

Tom Landis, a retired Forest Service nursery specialist in Medford, Ore., disagrees. Landis and others have raised and planted milkweed in half a dozen "way stations" for migrating monarchs in Southern Oregon. "It's been working like a champ," he said.



The star-shaped blossoms of showy milkweed provide food and egg-laying space for migrating monarch butterflies.

They said farmers spraying Roundup, Monsanto's trademark herbicide, kill milkweed while leaving "Roundup Ready" corn and soybeans unscathed.

The groups asked USFWS in 2014 to list monarchs as "threatened" under the ESA, but the agency has not taken action. The March 2016 lawsuit asks a court to set a deadline for a decision by Fish and Wildlife. George Kimbrell, senior attorney for the Center for

NE Washington has another wolf pack

Sherman pack breaks from Profanity Peak pack

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has confirmed the state's 19th wolf pack, formed when a female wolf left one group and started traveling with a male whose history is unknown.

The Sherman pack, named by state biologists after geographic features in Ferry County, was announced June 14 by the state Department of Fish and Wildlife.

So far, WDFW has only confirmed the two adults in the pack, though biologists suspect they have pups, WDFW wolf specialist Scott Becker said. Two wolves traveling together qualify as a pack.

The female was captured and fitted with a radio collar last year and at the time was possibly the breeding female in the Profanity Peak pack.

She may have been pushed out of the pack by another female, Becker said.

"We'll probably never know for sure what actually happened there," he said.

The male wolf was captured and collared in February.

WDFW collared a 2-year-old male June 9 and a yearling

female June 12 in the Profanity Peak pack.

With collars transmitting signals from both groups, WDFW was able to confirm they were separate packs.

WDFW has not yet determined whether the packs have overlapping territory. The Sherman pack has been staying south of Highway 20, while the Profanity Pack has been roaming north of the highway, Becker said.

The Sherman pack is the 15th in the northeastern corner of Washington. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has de-listed wolves in the eastern one-third of Washington, but the animals remain a state-protected species.

Statewide recovery goals call for wolves to disperse over more of the state, including into the South Cascades. Lone wolves have been spotted in the South Cascades, but WDFW has received no reports of wolves traveling together in a pack.

"It's only a matter of time before they show up in the South Cascades," Becker said. "We're continuing to search down there."

WDFW confirmed seven wolves in the Profanity Peak pack at the end of 2015. The department counted at least 90 wolves in the state.

The Huckleberry pack in Stevens County split last year, with the Stranger pack form-

ing just to the north. One of the packs killed a Holstein heifer in May, the last confirmed wolf depredation in the state.

The depredation would be the first of the year for either pack. WDFW's policy calls for the department to consider lethal removal of wolves after four depredations.

WDFW wolf policy lead Donny Martorello said the department is monitoring the movements of the packs to determine which one was responsible.

"We want to make sure we don't assign it to the wrong pack," he said. "There's no intention to not assign" responsibility.

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Farmers approve Wilco-HGO merger

New hazelnut facility expected by 2018 harvest

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

The members of two Oregon farm cooperatives, Wilco and Hazelnut Growers of Oregon, have overwhelmingly voted to merge their operations.

The combination of Wilco, which focuses on farm supplies and fuel, with HGO, which processes and markets hazelnuts, is planned to be complete by Aug. 1.

A major result of the merger is the expected relocation of HGO's facility in Cornelius to a new plant before the 2018 harvest that's more centrally located in the Willamette Valley, the nation's major hazelnut-growing region.

Construction of the HGO's new processing plant will be made smoother due to the

financial stability provided by Wilco, which generates about \$220 million in annual revenues through its 17 farm stores, seven agronomy centers and bulk fuel sales service.

Together the two cooperatives will have about 900 employees, though some positions may be cut due to redundancies when a portion of HGO's office functions are moved to Wilco's headquarters in Mt. Angel.

Doug Hoffman, Wilco's current CEO, would remain as chief of the merged cooperative while HGO's CEO, Jeff Fox, will head its hazelnut division.

Farmers will earn equity and dividends in the combined cooperative based on their purchases of farm supplies as well as their hazelnut deliveries, though the pools will remain separate.

Among Wilco's members, 79 percent voted for the merger while 99 percent of HGO's membership's supported it.

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