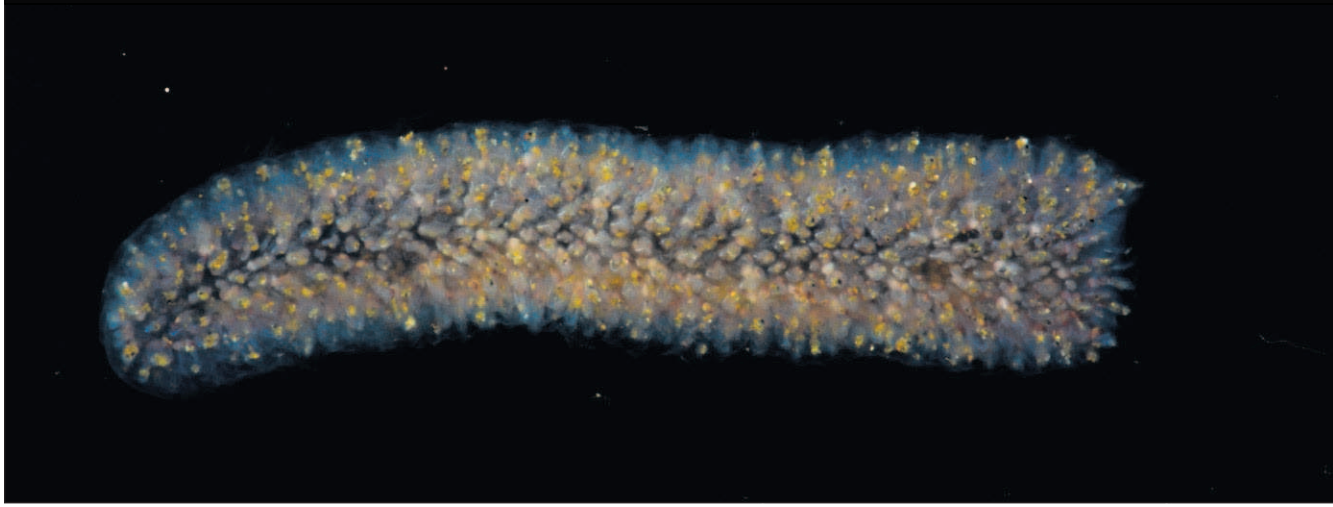


‘Very confusing little creatures’



COURTESY TIFFANY BOOTHE/SEASIDE AQUARIUM

A pyrosome is categorized as a marine tunicate.

Some visitors to the North Coast describe them as “little fingers” on the beach. Others describe them as “plastic pickles.” Their name in Greek means “fire body.” In Australia giant pyrosomes can grow to 90 feet and could consume a human being. In a sense they are like a Frankenstein monster of hundreds of animals coming together to make one organism.

“They’re all over this year for some reason,” Tiffany Boothe, administrative assistant at the Seaside Aquarium said early this month. “As soon as I saw one I picked it up and put it in my bucket and brought it to the aquarium.

“Pyro” is the Greek word for fire and “soma” means body, Boothe said, and are known for their brilliant bioluminescence — pink, yellow or bluish and are not typically seen along Seaside beaches. Like jellyfish, they cannot survive when air gets in their lungs.

A field guide, “Tidepool and Reef,” by Rick M. Harbo, presents a fascinating array of sponges, mollusks, sea stars and tunicates. According to Harbo, tunicates are “encrusting colonies of distinct individuals in a stiff gelatin-like tunic.”

Orange social sea squirts — their real name — divide asexually to form numerous rounded individuals that often cover intertidal and subtidal rocks. Other species like the stalked hairy sea squirt, the sea peach and sea pork, are found encrusting rocks, barnacles and shells. Pyrosomes are classified as a colonial tunicate, a member of the only group of chordates — animals possessing a dorsal nerve chord — able to reproduce both sexually and asexually, with hundreds of animals coming together to make one organism.

While author Harbo writes that tunicates are not edible, Boothe said turtles and sunfish consider them a “delicacy.”

“It’s not necessarily something whales and dolphins are going to find delicious,” Boothe said. “I’ve heard dogs are eating them — that’s not a great thing, but they’re not poisonous.”

Like sea cucumbers, “When you squeeze them, water shoots out,” Boothe added. “They’re very confusing little creatures. I don’t like talking about them.”

Davidson current

Visitors to our beaches in winter never know what they might find, whether it be a sea lion, bloated gray whale or even a salp, a transparent invertebrate that looks like aspic.

“In the summer we have a current that comes down from the north that cools our water down,” Boothe said. “In the winter, the Davidson Current comes up and warms our water up a little bit, so we tend to stay at the same temperature all year round.”

According to the Oregon Coastal Management Program, the Davidson Current begins 600 feet below the surface in Baja, California. In winter, southwesterly storms drive the Davidson Current’s warmer, saltier flow northward along the coastline 6 to 12 miles per day, displacing currents offshore, even at the surface.

If winds change, warm weather animals may be stranded in cold water

Results are apparent on our beaches. Over the past year and a half, at least five sea turtles washed to shore dead on arrival.

Last winter two olive ridleys, Thunder, which washed ashore in Gearhart, and Lightning, in Pacific City, were malnourished, hypothermic and comatose — but still alive.

A Coast Guard escort and rehabilitation team transported the turtles to San Diego’s Sea World. Sadly, Thunder was discovered floating in her rehabilitation pool a few weeks later, but Lightning continues to receive care.

Curator of fishes Mike Price said Lightning remains in SeaWorld’s care, rehabilitating in a 12-foot deep, 90,000-gallon holding pool along with two other rescued olive ridley turtles.

Sea turtles — olive ridleys, green turtles and leatherbacks — may continue to wash to Seaside’s sand beaches this winter, putting the aquarium on “sea turtle watch.”

“They don’t have to die,” Boothe said. “They can just get stressed out.”

‘Marvel!’

Like the western snowy plover, which leaves its subtle nest among 19 acres of Gearhart dunes, the message may be to pay close attention to the world under our feet, what Seaside naturalist and photographer calls “a carpet of living phenomena.”

“These are living, dynamic systems,” Maine said at a December lecture celebrating Haystack Rock. “They’re just not as conspicuous as some systems like fish in the stream or elk coming across the meadow.”

In a year dedicated to the 50-year anniversary of Oregon’s Beach Bill, Maine said he hopes to help recast Oregon beaches as an ecosystem and “reconnect the beaches to the landscape.”

SEEN FROM SEASIDE

R.J. MARX



COURTESY TIFFANY BOOTHE/SEASIDE AQUARIUM

Close-up of a pyrosome.

And if you’re lucky enough to find a pyrosome, what should you do?

‘Marvel!’ Boothe said. ‘They’re kind of cool!’



COURTESY SEAWORLD

Thunder and Lightning were transported to San Diego’s SeaWorld from the Oregon Coast last winter, where they received treatment. Thunder died in April but Lightning is still under care.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Thunder, an olive ridley turtle, received care after washing ashore in Gearhart last December.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

A pyrosome fits into a gloved hand, but a giant pyrosome is a fearsome thing.

He suggested citizen-level efforts to expand the discussion on beaches.

With General Manager Keith Chandler, Boothe is among those leading that effort as the Seaside Aquarium continues to foster education and awareness.

While she’s yet to collect any live pyrosomes, she goes exploring every day so visitors “know what we’re finding on the beach and talking about.”

And if you’re lucky enough to find a pyrosome, what should you do?

“Marvel!” Boothe said. “They’re kind of cool!”

Thoughts on the new year ahead

Christmas eve service at our church was one of scripture readings, old carols, solos from talented members and finally, a lighting of the candles.

There’s a sameness about it that is reassuring. It sets the tone for the rest of the season. Christmas Day there was a potluck dinner for those whose families were no longer visiting because they’d either started their own traditions or were afraid to travel in inclement weather. There were about 30 of us who shared the Christmas meal. It was great but without the luxury of leftovers when holiday hunger pangs set in later in the day. A church family is a wonderful substitute for your own when circumstances prevent you getting together. Happy New Year everyone!

I was heading for the Signal office one Wednesday afternoon when it began to look like a no fun trip because of the cold. Gail, who works in a financial office around the corner, and was a total stranger, asked if I needed a ride. I jumped at the chance so she delivered me and brought me home. Truly a good Samaritan. I was so thankful for her help.

I watched the dropping of the ball on New Year’s Eve at Times Square in New York City. Imagine 2 million celebrants and no port-a-potties. That’s what one might call emergency planning, and some of those citizens arrived on scene at 9:30 a.m. If they could have such a demonstration of self-control in that capacity, perhaps they could try it somewhere else.

By Jan. 2, I’d already broken my resolution to cut down on junk food. Think I’ll just take it one day at a time.

The president-elect says computers are so vulnerable, we should learn to send all-important messages by courier. Would that be by “courier pigeons?”

Spring is just around the corner, although it’s a big one — corner, that is. Down the street camellias are in bloom but on my birdbath there was a coating of ice so Snoopy’s yellow bird could go ice-skating.

Gary went to Portland on Saturday to catch a plane for Oakland but they weren’t flying because of the ice so he had to make arrangements to stay for a couple more days. He took the train to Eugene to wait out the time with his brother. By Monday, he arrived safely in Oakland, although according to the TV, some planes were still grounded in Portland. When the weather is bad, I wish they’d all stay home. It’s so worrisome.

Laugh line

Q: What did “Soapless” say when Annie asked if he’d taken a bath?

A: “Why? Is one missing?”

Q: When he found a horse in the tub, how did he get it out?

A: He just pulled the plug.

LETTERS

Thanks to Seaside police and fire

We want to thank all law enforcement agencies and the Seaside Fire Department for the professional and caring way they handled the situation on Whispering Pines. We appreciate you all for a job well done.

Again, thank you.

Larry & Sharon Johnson
Seaside

Big thanks for gifts

For “warming up” an audience, there is none better than sweet-spirited “leave ‘em laughing” personality Shirley Marie Patterson, daughter of Seaside resident Laura Meek. For a loyal, “get ‘er done” partner, who shares my commitment to the homeless community, and proves it year after year, there is none better than Laura Meek, herself.

So it is with sincere gratitude that Laura joins me in thanking all others who gave of their product, time and hearts to support our annual Christmas gift giving to Seaside’s homeless shelter residents. These include The Dress Barn and, among other merchandisers, store managers and department heads such as Troy Kerr and Tracy Hudson. It also includes Alli, who donated enough premium quality wrapping paper to make almost 100 Christmas presents “pop.”

Finally, and foremost, Laura and I wish to thank both Seaside’s homeless shelter founder Alan Evans and his wife, homeless shelter manager Susan Evans, for providing us the forum, together with their love, encouragement and support.

Thank you. And God bless you as you continue to change lives for the better.

Anna Ryan
Seaside

Who are the real haters?

Hum, I wonder how one should identify a hater? Is it a person who categorizes people indiscriminately and then calls them names?

Is it those who intentionally or unintentionally support policies that are detrimental to the weakest members of our society?

Is it those who have actively attacked members of their own nation because those members believe differently about certain issues?

And finally, is it those who despise a strong defense/safe borders and refuse to accept the fact that America has been a positive influence among other nations and a defender of basic human rights?

If so, then I strongly advise the liberals everywhere

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SEASIDE
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