

Life in the Valley

Fluttering views at Santiam Lake



Three Fingered Jack overlooks Santiam Lake in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness. PHOTOS BY BOBBIE SNEAD/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

Hike provides extraordinary butterfly encounters

Bobbie Snead
Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Nature is full of surprises. On a recent hike to the basin holding Santiam Lake in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness, my hiking buddy and I set out expecting to see meadow-rimmed lakes and rugged peaks. What we weren't expecting was an almost mystical experience with thousands of butterflies. The pure serendipity of it all reaffirmed a deep sense of wonder in both of us.

With the tightening of boot laces and a thorough spritz of bug spray, the two of us left the car and headed up the trail. As we settled into a hiking rhythm the familiar sights and sounds of the Cascade forest greeted us like old friends. A dark-eyed junco clicked in warning from a tree trunk as we passed by and a Douglas squirrel chattered and chirred in the distance. Huckleberries ripened in the summer heat.

Soon we arrived at a step-across stream and stopped to take photos. Half a dozen butterflies had landed on the moist ground next to the water. Each was using its long proboscis to sip moisture from the soil. This behavior, called puddling, enables butterflies to get salt and other nutrients they can't get from their usual diet of flower nectar. Another group of butterflies basked on a sun-soaked tree trunk and still more fluttered overhead. We were thoroughly delighted with the number of butterflies but we

had no idea what was to come.

Moving on we soon noticed dozens of butterflies floating on the breeze. Some flitted above and others darted in front of us as we strode up the trail. Their sheer numbers were astonishing. A stronger gust of wind brought a cascade of hundreds of butterflies down upon us. We were dumbstruck at this spectacle and looked at each other in disbelief.

The trail gradually gained elevation and the character of the forest changed. Douglas firs were replaced by mountain hemlocks and noble firs. One of the nobles looked like it had a dried leaf hanging from an eye level limb. A closer look revealed the mottled brown and gray underwings of a California Tortoiseshell butterfly hanging upside down. As it opened and closed its wings we caught a glimpse of bright orange and dark brown on its top side. We slowly lifted our eyes and noticed a butterfly suspended from every branch. This fir looked like a Christmas tree decorated from top to bottom with dangling butterfly ornaments. When one decoration lifted off, another flew in to take its place.

Other fir trees were adorned with California Tortoiseshells and, strangely, the new growth on each tree was covered with a syrupy liquid. A quick taste solved the mystery. My friend tentatively tasted her sticky fingers while I sampled the delicate needles at the end of a branch. These trees were sweet! Had we discovered candied nee-

dles on sugar-coated trees? Was this some kind of fairy tale? Actually, the trees were dripping with sweet honeydew, a secretion released by tiny aphids as they feed on the tender new growth. Certain ants, some bees and California Tortoiseshells cannot resist honeydew. It provides each of these creatures with high energy nourishment, much like the nectar from flowers.

Our next wonderment came as we crossed the old-fashioned puncheon bridge over the outlet of Duffy Lake. On the far side of the roughly hewn span, countless butterflies puddled on the damp ground. This time the California Tortoiseshells were joined by Hoffmann's Checkerspots, Blue Coppers and a handful of Lorquin's Admirals. My boots plunked loudly on each bridge plank and stepping down to the ground caused the mass of butterflies to take wing in a swirling kaleidoscope of color. It was like walking into an impressionist's painting of light, color and motion. No photo could do it justice.

We followed the trail's thread as it unspooled up to Santiam Lake. At our lakeside lunch spot the castellated summit of Three Fingered Jack loomed over the water. A sprinkling of butterflies rode the cooling wind above the lake's surface. As I ate I thought about our extraordinary butterfly encounters.

A perfect storm of conditions had created the morning's insect



A Blue Copper butterfly is seen on a hike in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness.

If you go

Directions: From Detroit, take Highway 22 east. Near milepost 76, turn east on Big Meadows Road 2267 and follow it for 3 miles to the trailhead parking turnaround at road's end.

Length of hike: 9.4 miles round trip

Duration: 6 – 8 hours

Elevation gain: 1,100 feet

Age range: suitable for adults

tsunami. An abundance of the right host plants to satisfy the specific eating habits of butterfly larvae, followed by a bumper crop of wildflowers for the adults, plus a generous supply of honeydew and several days of hot weather combined to produce this brilliant butterfly eruption. Witnessing it was one of nature's grandest gifts.

First Salem Storytellers Project event Oct. 23

Abby Luschei Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Everyone has a story to tell — and we want you to tell yours.

The Salem Storytellers Project, a series of four live storytelling events spanning over the next year, will kick off its inaugural season with a show at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 23, at Ike Box. The theme is, "New Beginnings."

The Storytellers Project was founded by Megan Finnerty at the Arizona Republic in 2011 with support from Liz Warren and Marilyn Omifunke Torres at the South Mountain Community College Storytelling Institute. This project has since expanded to more than 21 cities across the country — and now, it's coming to the Mid-Valley.

These nights bring people together from all backgrounds and beliefs and opinions through shared experiences. Each event will feature four to six true, first-person stories told in front of a live audience.

Storytellers are being selected from across the Willamette Valley. Each teller will be coached by journalists from the Statesman Journal newsroom who will help transform your experiences into universal stories.

Facilitated by the Statesman Journal, the reflections told on the Storyteller's stage will show that every person has a story to share. These stories may make

us laugh, cry or take action, but one thing's for sure — they will make us think and empathize with those around us.

With that, we will be able to better understand one another, making Salem a deeper, more capable and connected community.

If you are interested in becoming a storyteller, visit storytellersproject.com/national/speak and select "Salem" under the "Choose a city" tab and submit a story.

Tickets are \$12 for general admission, \$5 for students, and are available at tickets.statesmanjournal.com.

Here is a look at the Salem Storytellers Project inaugural season:

Night #1: New Beginnings

Change can be getting a new haircut, having a baby, deleting a number or leaving it all behind. Join the Statesman Journal for a night of stories about the choices, discoveries and accidents that impact our lives.

When: Doors at 6, show at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 23

Location: Ike Box, 299 Cottage St. NE, Salem

Night #2: Romance, or Not

Dating in the digital age can be exhausting, exhilarating and downright

crazy. Join the Statesman Journal as we explore stories about dating apps, true love and everything in between.

When: Doors at 6, show at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 5

Location: Pentacle Theatre, 324 52nd Avenue NW, Salem

Night #3: Our Family, Our Culture

Every family has its own quirks, traditions, recipes and memories. Join the Statesman Journal for a night of tales about the families we're born into and the ones we choose.

When: Doors at 6, show at 7 p.m. Tuesday, May 14

Location: Capitol City Theater, 210 Liberty St. SE #150, Salem

Night #4: Outdoors

The great outdoors isn't for everyone, but for some, it's everything. Join the Statesman Journal for a night of stories about some of the best — and worst — outdoor moments.

When: Doors at 6, show at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 13

Location: Gilgamesh Brewing, 2065 Madrona Avenue SE, Salem

For more information about the Salem Storytellers Project, call 503-399-6747 or email Entertainment Reporter Abby Luschei at aluschei@statesman-journal.com.



Calvin Worthen tells his story during the Storytellers Project "I am an American" storytelling event at Phoenix Theatre in 2017. The Salem Storytellers Project will kick off its inaugural season with a show at 7 p.m. on Oct. 23, at Ike Box. MICHAEL CHOW/THE REPUBLIC

If you are interested in becoming a storyteller, visit storytellersproject.com/national/speak to fill out the survey.