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Butterfly Monitoring Project Engages James John El

“What pollinators are visiting the meadows in our neighborhood? Do monarch butterflies visit Portland? Do they breed here? These are questions Mark Hitchcox, an insect scientist who lives in St. Johns hopes to answer with the help of volunteers and students. Although Multnomah County is not considered a major migratory pathway for most of the western monarch population, there are historic occurrence records for the Portland area (Xerces Society 2014).

Because of recent steep decline in numbers, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced it will conduct a one-year status review of the monarch to determine if it rates protective status under the “threatened” classification of the Endangered Species Act.

A major factor in the decline of the Northwest monarch is the decline of native milkweed (*Asclepias speciosa*), a plant that serves as its nursery. The female monarch will only lay its eggs on milkweed, and “milkweed is the only host a caterpillar can feed on,” said David James, a Washington

State University scientist. Scott Black, executive director of The Xerces Society’s Portland chapter said, “Any conservation effort to plant native milkweed helps. It’s an incredible plant for birds and butterflies. Add other nectar plants, and people can have a flowing oasis. And if you’re lucky, you can see a monarch.”

As a part of their restoration effort, the Friends of Baltimore Woods are enhancing the native milkweed in Baltimore Woods Meadow in St. Johns with the help of Mark Hitchcox and the James John Elementary School Green Team. Small starts were planted by the students in four 5ft x 5ft stations. Pollinator observations by the students and other volunteers will monitor for butterflies including any visiting monarchs. Volunteers will record simple notes to document observations about butterfly behaviors, such as nectaring, courtship, egg laying or whether any caterpillars or pupae are observed on the milkweed.


To protect monarchs, citizen volunteers like the Green Team are crucial to research. “The



work we’re doing is totally unfunded, which is remarkable in this day and age,” said professor James, “We hope to increase the citizen-scientist component in coming years” (The Columbian, 1-18-2015). The project is looking for interested volunteers of all ages. For more




St. Johns neighbor and insect scientist, Mark Hitchcox & his small helper, with me, in the purple gloves.

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