

Dragonflies: Data goes into nationwide database

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20 samples from the Yeon Pond that were sent to a national testing center. The next day, another class also collected 20 samples from a pond off the Fort to Sea Trail.

"Their data actually goes into a nationwide database," Astoria High School biology teacher Nick Baisley said.

Lewis and Clark National Historical Park in Astoria is one of more than 50 national parks across the country to partake in the project. It is the only national park in Oregon to join.

Carla Cole, a natural resource program manager at the park, found out about the project while attending a national conference in Oakland, Calif., earlier this year.

She assured the organizers the local park has active community engagement and education programs that could be used for the project.

"We were really set up to jump in and join in the effort," she said.

Citizen scientists

The dragonfly project started four years ago at the Acadia National Park in Maine. More than 800 citizen scientists have participated since then, contributing more than 4,000 volunteer hours.

The samples are sent to either the University of Maine, U.S. Geological Survey or Dartmouth College laboratories to analyze the mercury.

Along with understanding the impact of mercury and connecting people with the national parks, another focus of the project is to support youth engagement.

Cathy Peterson, the national park's education program director, said people often think science projects must be done in laboratories with strict protocols. Sometimes it does, but this project is an example of how local students can help, Peterson said.

Peterson hopes to expand upon the project and work with more local classes.

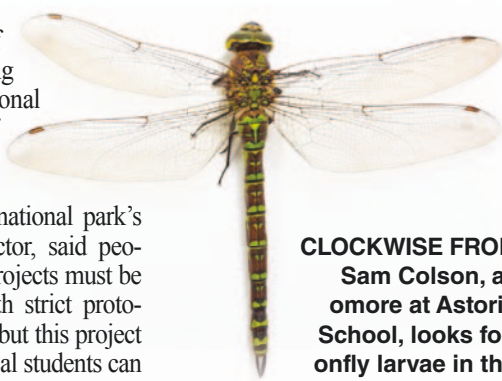
"We worked with biology teacher Nick Baisley for a while about doing some kind of hands-on work with his students," Peterson said. "So when this came up, we connected with him."

Cole said she went into the biology class beforehand to show the students pictures of the nymphs. She explained how dragonflies spend about five years underwater before becoming winged adults.

"They really stand out against the other aquatic insects," Cole said. "They kind of look like crickets. They have these incredible lower jaws that can dart out and extend to snatch up prey."

At the Yeon Pond last week, the students knew what they were looking for. Besides the nymphs, the students enjoyed seeing other waterlife such as carp, newts and snails.

"The more we get them outside, the better," Baisley said.



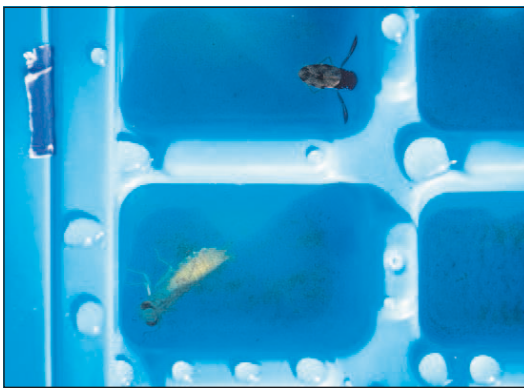
CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Sam Colson, a sophomore at Astoria High School, looks for dragonfly larvae in the Yeon Pond Sept. 30.

Astoria High School students look for dragonfly larvae in the Yeon Pond on Sept. 30. The collecting process is part of the Dragonfly Mercury Project, a nationwide initiative to assess mercury pollution levels and its effect on the environment.

An exoskeleton of a dragonfly larvae sits on a table.

A dragonfly larvae, called a dragonfly nymph, bottom, swims in a sample tray after being collected by Astoria High School students Sept. 30.

Photos by Joshua Bessex
The Daily Astorian



Hunger: The program depends on volunteers nowadays

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Key person

Mardell Bullis was dressed in a jungle-themed apron and kitchen headscarf as she poured coffee for whoever walked in the doors of the senior center for lunch in late September.

Even through years of chemo treatments, Bullis arrived at the center at 6 a.m. each day to have a hot lunch on the table by noon.

"I'm tired, but that's life — it can suck," Bullis said. "Luckily, this never felt like just a job. I love the people I serve."

Bullis, 61, thought she would be nearing retirement by now. But a second bout with cancer and a stack of chemo treatment bills extended her time as the sole cook for the south peninsula's senior nutrition program.

The program is part of the Coastal Community Action Program, which aims to help people fighting poverty.

CCAP, which sponsors six lunch sites throughout Grays Harbor and Pacific counties, also offers transportation to doctor appointments, housing placement for the homeless, and job placement assistance. The community action program took over the operations of PACE, or Pacific Aging Council, Endeavors, when that Ilwaco-based group ran into financial troubles several years ago.

When Bullis first arrived to scrape macaroni and cheese off pans as a favor 26 years ago, volunteers provid-



Katheryn Houghton/EO Media Group

When Mardell Bullis, left, and Brenda Molsby began working for the Ilwaco Senior Nutrition Program more than 20 years ago, there were nine full-time staffers. Today, a lack of funding has shrunk the program to two.

ed extra support for the paid staff. But as the program began having money problems, when people quit or retired, they weren't replaced. This left the shrinking number of employees with larger workloads.

Bullis watched the kitchen drop from nine employees to two.

Today, the program depends on volunteers. "The cuts can't affect our clients so they hit us," Bullis said. "We would never turn anyone down for a meal."

Bullis cooks roughly 350 meals a week. Half of the meals are served at Ilwaco Community Building while the remaining meals go toward the home-delivery service — a way for senior citizens who can't cook anymore to avoid having to move into a

nursing home.

"For some people, this is the only way they can have a nutritious lunch," she said.

A customer who calls himself Bullis' "wingman" laughed, "That's right, old people may eat less, but we still need to eat."

Crunching numbers

The program coordinator Stephanie Glover said the nutrition program was never meant to rely on government funding.

"It's supposed to run off local efforts," she said.

Through the Older Americans Act, which passed in 1965, the Olympic Area Agency on Aging reimburses the nutrition program \$3.75 for each meal served on site, and \$3.90 for each home delivery. However, each meal

costs roughly \$8.50 to make.

Since the program's start, donations have covered the remaining costs. But today, the average person donates 76 cents per meal served at the center and 24 cents for delivered meals.

Norah LeBlanc, a program manager, said while it is always hard to keep a nonprofit funded, there's extra stress when maintaining a commercial kitchen with high health standards.

"There's never enough money when trying to meet the needs of a community," she said. "With the nutrition program, we're always in the hole."

Looking to the future

Glover said the program's largest support comes from volunteers in their 60s. But people are retiring later in life, meaning they don't have time for volunteer work.

Glover, who is in her 60s, used herself as an example as someone who will pass the traditional retirement age.

"I thought at this point in life I would be slowly stepping down, training someone else who is younger and full of new ideas," she said.

This year, her title grew to coordinator over five sites. "There was just no one else. So, I just put on another hat and am doing the job the best I know how," she said. "There are still some volunteers out there to help, too."

Currently, there are five volunteers at the Ilwaco site, but most of the work still falls to Bullis and the only other

staffer at her site, 70-year-old Brenda Molsby.

When Molsby isn't running the delivery service on Mondays and Wednesdays, she often helps Bullis prep in the kitchen.

"We stay for the clients," Bullis said.

Molsby laughed, "If I tell the clients I'm retiring, they say 'No, you're not.' I guess I'll be here until the place closes down."

Bullis said some people who could use the program view it as a soup kitchen and don't attend out of pride — which means possible clients who could pay never walk in the door.

"We depend on the community just as much as they

need us," she said. "Come in, eat a good meal, and leave us some money in return — we will always take the money you can give."

If someone doesn't have the ability to attend the lunches, Bullis said they can volunteer, donate food, or sponsor someone else's meal.

Bullis said it's hard not to worry about what will happen to the lunch program in the future.

"I can't let myself stress over what I can't help," she said. "When we are gone, the company will have to figure it out, and they will. Everyone is replaceable. The moment we forget that, we think of ourselves as too important."

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