

It's spring season for the exciting sport of botany

There was a particular willow-studded meadow along the Sweetwater River where columbines and Rocky Mountain irises rippled in the grass like delicate pastel asteroids zipping in a verdant emerald sky.

Family rock-hunting expeditions often paused there as my dad and uncle made certain it was safe to ford the snow-fed stream in lumbering four-wheel-drives. There was time to wander around picking wildflowers — ostensibly for mama, though truth be told, I just liked them.

Botany, zoology and geology were our family sports, so by age 6 I knew irises are less innocent than they appear. "Roots were ground by the Indians, mixed with animal bile, then put in the gall bladder and warmed near a fire for several days. Arrow points were dipped in this mixture, and it is reported by old Indians that many warriors only slightly wounded by such arrows died within 3 to 7 days," my uncle's 1963 Peterson field guide reminds me.

Poisonous or not, wildflowers pumping with life force before plucking always swiftly wither into pathetic victims, becoming limp corpses within minutes of being picked. As I would eventually learn about fashion models, they are best cherished in their native habitat. (Jim Harrison, a literary hero of mine who died last week, amusingly observed: "If you've known a lot of actresses and models, you return to waitresses because at least they smell like food.")

Bloom season begins

Some wildflowers on Washington's outer coast are running a few days behind last year. It's been comparatively warm, but heavy overcast denied plants the ambitious head start they got during 2014-15's bizarrely sunny winter. As official astronomical spring began March 20, some local rain gauges pushed above 6 feet for the "water year" that started Oct. 1 — 2 feet more than our recent normal. Any sensible wildflower can't be blamed for



Matt Winters



A trillium was backlit by the evening sun on a ridge just above the Pacific Ocean this week. A sacred medicinal species that can live to a greater age than the trees surrounding them, local trillium started blooming a little early this year.

feeling a little washed out and depressed.

Wake-robins, better known in these parts as trilliums, may be an exception. They've been in bloom on the forest floors for the past 10 days, while in 2014 they weren't feeling very enthusiastic until almost mid-April.

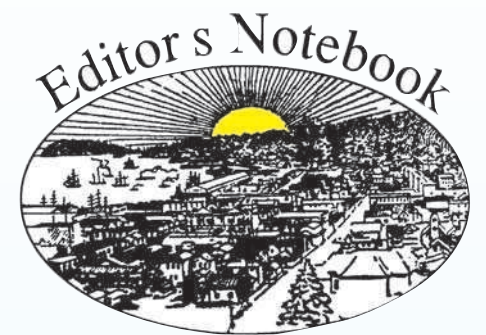
They are crawling with little insects, possibly a species of pollen beetle, though I don't know my bugs. Northwest plant gurus Jim Pojar and Andy MacKinnon note trilliums are mostly noted for a relationship with ants, which relish their seeds. After eating an oil-rich appendage on these seeds, ants carry them to rubbish piles, where new trilliums spring up. "This is a reasonably effective mechanism for seed dispersal, especially for plants of the dim, becalmed forest floor," the experts write.

Older than the trees

On March 24 in southern Oregon, Umpqua National Forest issued a plea for people to leave trilliums alone. Picking the flowers this early in the season means that the plant is stripped of its ability to make more energy to store in the root, the U.S. Forest Service said. The depleted root then lacks nutritional reserves necessary for next year's showy bloom to appear.

"The interesting thing about trillium is they can grow to be very old," said Umpqua National Forest botanist Richard Helliwell. "There are trillium in the Siskiyou that are greater than 80 years. In some cases, the trillium can be older than the trees surrounding the plant."

Like many native plants, trilliums were



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much cherished by traditional healers. They contain a uterotonic, which induces labor and reduces postpartum hemorrhaging, giving rise to a folk-medicine name of birth-root. "King's Medical Dispensatory" of 1898 (tinyurl.com/AmericanDispensatory) attributes many additional benefits to trillium roots, including treating "tumors, indolent or offensive ulcers, anthrax, buboes, stings of insects, and to restrain gangrene." Good to know, I suppose, if you're ever stranded in the wilderness.

I recommend the sport of botany — and all sciences — to everyone. Knowing a little about our incredible world will make your life far richer.

(Closing with a personal boast, my uncle Tom Bell who helped spark these interests in me and his many students, will this spring be presented an honorary doctorate from our alma mater, in company with similarly inspirational science writer John McPhee.)

— MSW

Matt Winters is editor and publisher of the *Chinook Observer* and *Coast River Business Journal*.



Open forum

Disastrous lawsuit

This past month Oregon suffered the ignominy of being the only state to lose federal grant money to the tune of \$1.2 million for failure to confront coastal water pollution, primarily from logging. Although the law regulating clean water went into effect over 25 years ago, the response to warnings from the feds by the Oregon Board of Forestry this past year was, "We're working on it."

That was followed by a letter in February from Richard Whitman, Gov. Brown's natural resource adviser, indicating that the remaining problems would be addressed through voluntary measures. That's a lot like letting the fox oversee the welfare of the hens in the chicken coop.

The lost grant money would have gone to coastal counties for water quality improvement projects. That money could certainly be well used in places like Rockaway Beach, where clear cutting and aerial spraying of herbicides have fouled the local water supply; or in Siletz, where massive clear cutting has polluted fish bearing streams; or Curry County, where aerial over-spray sickened numerous people and left

doubts about the safety of water.

The Oregon Board of Forestry, appointed by the governor, is ultimately responsible for interpreting the Oregon Forestry Practices Act (OFPA), which controls logging on state and private property. The problem is that the three of the seven members of the current board are from the timber industry. Is it any wonder that a reading of the OFPA reveals many industry-favoring regulations?

For example, the regulation that stipulates that there must be two trees left on every clear cut acre to accommodate indigenous "birds, bats, squirrels and many other animals." That's a very crowded tree.

Less laughable are the rules to protect wetlands. In practice it is now permitted to clear cut a wetland on private property. So much for sensitive species habitat. Given the instances of water pollution, and the federal fine, it's obvious that the regulations concerning streams are not adequate, and those in place are not being enforced.

The misguided lawsuit being brought by Linn County, which is being financially backed by the Koch brothers and the timber indus-

try, will bring increased clear cutting and aerial spraying in a poorly regulated and under-supervised theater of logging operations that will ultimately be disastrous for Oregon.

Citizens need to tell our local county commissioners to opt out of the lawsuit, and demand comprehensive reform of the Oregon Forest Practices Act.

ROGER DORBAND
Astoria

Dropped

When I approached Medicare wage three years ago, I called my doctor of many years and asked the receptionist, "Are you going to drop me, now that I'll be going on Medicare?"

She replied, "Oh no; because you have been one of our patients, we'll keep you."

A couple of months ago, my wife was on the phone to make an appointment. The receptionist informed her that I had been dropped as a patient because I was over the age of 60, and hadn't been in for over three years. My wife asked, "Why didn't you inform us?"

The receptionist responded, "We

just don't have time for that."

It did occur to me that my vet has the time to remind me, twice a year, to bring my cats in for their vaccinations.

DALE FLOWERS
Warrenton

Vote for Goldthorpe

I am proud to support David Goldthorpe for Clatsop County Circuit Court Judge. David guides the district attorney's participation in retiring Judge Phil Nelson's drug court, assists in child support enforcement, and is a skilled trial lawyer for a wide variety of cases, from impaired driving to armed assaults.

In all these areas, David has exhibited some of the strongest qualities attributed to "judicial temperament" that I have witnessed in the many fine lawyers whom I have hired as deputies — compassion, fairness, commitment to equal justice, decisiveness. It is an elusive but critical quality for a judge.

Judges run for election every six years on a non-partisan basis. Even the most dedicated voter may not mark the ballot for a judgeship,

because it can be hard for those who haven't worked with a particular lawyer to assess their skills as a judge.

I have a unique view of all three of the current candidates, since all three applied for and were hired as deputy district attorneys. I admire them all, and respect their differing strengths.

Those concerned about whether a former deputy district attorney might not be even-handed when dealing with the district attorney's office don't give the candidates enough credit for separating personal feelings from professional ones, something that the women and men of law enforcement and the justice system do several times every day.

David is endorsed by treatment providers, his co-workers, the Seaside Police Association, Sheriff Tom Bergin and many others who have worked with him or know him and his family. All point to the belief that "Dave" will make a fair and unbiased judge for the people of Clatsop County.

I urge you to vote for David Goldthorpe.

JOSHUA MARQUIS
Clatsop County District Attorney



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