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Silverspot butterflies breed in captivity for the first time

A lab at the Oregon Zoo

By EMILY LINDBLOM
For The Astorian

Soon, 269 more Oregon silverspot butterflies will be flying among the early blue violets along the coast, thanks to the Oregon Zoo's butterfly conservation lab.

For the first time ever, the lab bred silverspots in captivity, with plans to release the threatened species to its native places.

Travis Koons, the Oregon Zoo's animal curator who oversees the butterfly and bird programs, said the zoo is focused on species recovery in areas where they used to thrive.

For Oregon silverspots, that historically means coastal grasslands from Crescent City, California, to Westport, Washington. But due to the loss of their habitat and the early blue violets they rely on, there are only seven sites where these butterflies are found, and in smaller numbers.

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Michael Durham



A team places Oregon silverspot butterfly caterpillars on Saddle Mountain in 2018.
Mike Patterson

COVE BEACH

Water moratorium extended

New pump may solve problem

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

The Falcon Cove Beach Water District board voted Saturday to extend a moratorium for another six months, but it could be the last one.

The vote was the second extension since the board enacted a six-month moratorium last December. They declared the water emergency after reporting water production had been at record low levels for the past several years during late summer months.

The water district's system operator, Charles Dice, said there has been a supply and demand imbalance for years, citing increased use during the summer months from vacation rentals.

Several property owners, some of whom are scientists, have organized and are arguing the moratorium is without basis. Through public-records requests, they obtained the data the water district used to come to its conclusions and found discrepancies. They have shared their findings with water district and Clatsop County officials.

Prior to public comment at Saturday's meeting, Dice began by sharing "good news" with the nearly 30 people in attendance, including officials from the county.

"There was an obstruction in the well that was giving us some false information regarding the depth of the water," Dice said.

He said a 20-gallon per minute pump was replaced with a 50-gallon pump and the obstruction was removed.

He said the water district started testing the new pump and found it should produce 40 gallons per minute "very reliably." The board has said they would feel comfortable ending the moratorium if they could produce 40 gallons per minute from the well. The water district sent that information to their engineer, Curran-McLeod Inc., for more testing.

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A family tragedy during holiday

Fatal Seattle crash with Astoria ties

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

A family with ties to Astoria was tragically separated while visiting Seattle over Thanksgiving weekend.

Rebecca Richman, her brother, Michael Richman, and their father, Steve Richman, were visiting Seattle from Los Angeles. Rebecca Richman's boyfriend joined them as they left their hotel on Nov. 29.

A driver who was allegedly speeding and high on methamphetamine lost control of her vehicle, striking the Richman family and Rebecca Richman's boyfriend on the sidewalk.

According to King County prosecutors, Rebecca Richman, 28, died at the scene, and her brother, Michael Richman, 26, died in the emergency room.

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Rebecca Richman

Astoria native trains as rescue swimmer

Christie competed through school

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

Although she has been swimming competitively since age 7, Taylor Christie never imagined she would be training as a U.S. Coast Guard rescue swimmer.

Christie, 21, of Astoria, swam competitively through high school and, after graduating, began competing at Indiana State University. She studied to be an art teacher and had the goal of taking her swimming career to the Olympics.

However, Christie did not return for her third year of college.

"I left a bad relationship and I said, 'You know what, let's just come home and reset and figure out what I want to do,'" she said. "It was a super tough time for me. So it was just taking that time to heal."

Christie got a job at the Astoria Aquatic Center as a lifeguard and swim instructor. She said she came to a point where she was tired of feeling sad.

"Through those tough times, you just have to power through and know there's always going to be good on the other side," she said.

While working at the aquatic center, she saw the training that Coast Guard rescue swimmers practice every Tuesday and Thursday.

"I would just sit there and watch them and think, 'You know what, I've got to try that,'" she said with a laugh. "It just got to the point where it started driving me crazy ... So I got in and did a practice next to them, and I absolutely fell in love with it."



Taylor Christie is training to be a Coast Guard rescue swimmer.

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Taylor Christie | training to be a U.S. Coast Guard rescue swimmer

Looking back, Christie remembers a high school swimming coach who had served in the Coast Guard ask her if she ever thought about being a rescue swimmer. At the time, she didn't think much of it because she was set on being a college swimmer.

"It's always been there in the back of my mind, but never did I ever think I would really go for it," she said.

Christie contacted a recruiter and got into an Annex X program, which identifies potential aviation survival technicians, or rescue swimmers, and makes sure they meet the physical fitness requirements prior to boot camp.

She said her trainer, Jayme Toyas, has been instrumental in helping her train and build up muscle strength again.

"Taylor is one of the hardest

EVERYDAY
people

workers I've ever had the pleasure of coaching," Toyas said. "She is a natural athlete, and I saw early on in our training that the limits of a normal person would be nothing for Taylor to break through."

Christie left for Cape May, New Jersey, last week for an eight-week boot camp. Afterward, she will get assigned to train from six months to a year. Then she can put her name down for an "A" School, which will be 16 weeks.

"That will be make or break," she said.

The process is highly competitive and few women become rescue swimmers. Swimmers are expected to function at least 30 minutes in heavy seas during severe adverse weather conditions and survive on scene for more than 24 hours.

"The demands placed on a rescue swimmer's body are extremely rigorous and require tons of full-body strength. Whether it's lifting, swimming, running, jumping, Taylor is in tip-top shape," Toyas said.

Christie is confident she will make it. "I have no doubt in my mind," she said. "I quit" is not an option."

She said she can visualize herself being a rescue swimmer and that drives her the most.

"Having gone through that very tough situation I was in, it's made me a mentally stronger person ... it's changed me for the better," Christie said. "I wouldn't change the way things have gone at all. It almost feels I was being built up for this."



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