BLOOMIN' BLUES

Photo by Bruce Barnes

Penstemon fruticosus, Woody Penstemon

Purple mountain majesty has medicinal uses, too

By BRUCE BARNES
For The East Oregonian

Name: Woody Penstemon

Scientific name: *Penstemon fruticosus*

This *Penstemon* is another very showy plant, and is found from the Rockies in British Columbia to Eastern Oregon in the Blue Mountains to nearby Idaho. It is similar to Barrett's Penstemon, which was featured last week. Both species are low-growing shrubs, with blue to purple flowers facing in one direction. The species name *fruticosus* is Latin for woody.

The plant grows to 16 inches tall, with stems varying from flat on the ground to upright, often creating wide mats. The leaves are narrowly elliptic, about 2½ inches long, toothed along the edges, and smaller on the flowering stems. The flowers are few per stem, and 1-2 inches long.

Northwest Indian tribes had many medicinal uses for this plant, depending on how the plants were prepared.

These uses included treatment for headaches, colds, itchy scalp, acne, flu, toothaches, bladder problems, rheumatism, arthritis, sores, sore eyes, ulcers, kidney problems, and as a wash for the legs of lame horses. The plants were used in cooking with onions. Leaves were placed in moccasins for insoles, and used as a dye for baskets.

Where to find: It is probably 2-4 weeks too early to see this *Penstemon* blooming. However, when the time comes it is worth seeing. I've consistently found it east of Tollgate along the road to Jubilee Lake.

Once on the road, pull over at the first major left curve, where there is a broad turnout on the right for people to enjoy the view. Get out and look down the bank on the other side of the rail and you will find large patches of the plant just a few feet away.

BRIEFLY

Sturgeon season set for Bonneville

Fishery managers in Oregon and Washington have set the 2017 sturgeon fishing season in the Columbia River between The Dalles and Bonneville dams.

Anglers can keep recreational white sturgeon beginning Saturday, June 10 with a bag limit of one fish per day and a size limit of 38 to 54 inches fork length. Fishing for sturgeon will remain closed from The Dalles Dam downstream 1.8 miles from May through July, since that area is a designated sturgeon spawning sanctuary.

Sturgeon retention will be allowed in the Columbia River estuary — from the Wauna power lines downstream to Buoy 10 — for three days a week on Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays beginning Monday, June 5 through Saturday, June 17. The bag limit is one fish and size restriction of 44 to 50 inches fork length.

In addition to the mainstem Columbia River, Youngs Bay and all adjacent Washington tributaries will be open for sturgeon. The lower Columbia River from Bonneville Dam to the Wauna power lines has been closed to sturgeon retention since 2014, although fishery managers may look into the possibility of reopening that stretch of river later in the fall.

The annual bag limit for white sturgeon is two fish. Any sturgeon previously tagged in 2017 count against the limit.

For more information, check the 2017 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations or visit www.dfw.state.or.us.

Spokane area man killed in fall at Palouse Falls

PALOUSE FALLS STATE PARK, Wash. (AP) — The body of a Spokane area man who slipped off a cliff at Palouse Falls State Park has been recovered.

The Franklin County Sheriff's Office says the fall occurred on Monday afternoon at the eastern Washington park.

The body of the 25-year-old man was recovered on Tuesday afternoon.

The Spokesman-Review says the Franklin County Sheriff's Office will release his identity.

KXLY-TV reports that the man fell off a ledge while taking a selfie with a young woman with whom he was visiting the park. The woman told authorities that he hit a rock as he fell toward the water, and was swept downstream.

Washington State Parks has been concerned about the safety of unmarked trails at the falls in recent years. Visitors are encouraged to stay in designated viewing areas.

Garden aims to attract monarch butterflies

College student leads downtown Portland project

PORTLAND (AP) — Vigor's 60-acre shipyard at the tip of Swan Island is a sea of steel and pavement, where cruise ships, naval vessels and ferries all turn to for crucial repairs that can take months and cost millions of dollars.

In the heart of the north Portland shipyard and in the shadow of North America's largest floating dry dock — which stretches more than three football fields long and is as tall as the White House — a series of raised flower beds are starting to sprout tiny green plants.

The manufacturer that can repair ships weighing upward of 170 million pounds is partnering with the University of Portland to create habitat for a vulnerable creature that weighs no more than a feather: the monarch butterfly.

Whether the garden project in the heart of the Portland Harbor Superfund site succeeds is anyone's guess.

"If we even had one show up we would all just be doing backflips," said Alan Sprott, Vigor's vice president of environmental affairs.

But it's off to a positive start.

One year after first planting various milkweed seeds, Vigor intern Gabe Ablin will be one of 780 UP undergraduates collecting a diploma this May. He's also among thousands of students across the state who will be graduating over the next six weeks.

Ablin says he knew next to nothing about milkweed, which is crucial to the distinctive orange and black butterfly's survival, when he started the project a year ago.

"This is confirmation that it worked," he said of the first phase of growth. The milkweed survived Portland's worst winter in a century under Ablin's close eye. Buds are popping out of the ground.

Sprott said this is a three- to five-year project that will eventually see thousands of milkweed and other native plants installed along the river bank and spread throughout the shipyard. The company said it will devote 2.25-acres to the project, a substantial investment.

Butterflies won't make Vigor any money, but Sprott said it's not about that.

"We operate in the Pacific Northwest," he said of the company's 10 locations in Oregon, Washington and Alaska. "The environmental ethos of the people here is pretty strong, and you're either at the dinner table with them or you're on the menu. So, we're trying to be at the table."

Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian via AP

In this April 27 photo, Gabe Ablin, 21, an Environmental Ethics & Policy major at the University of Portland, stands near a series of raised flower beds as part of a project that hopes to create a habitat for the monarch butterfly in Portland.

Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian via AP

In this April 27 photo, Gabe Ablin stands near a series of raised flower beds. One year after first planting various milkweed seeds, Vigor intern Ablin will be one of over 700 UP undergraduates collecting a diploma Saturday.

Bakersfield to Portland

Ablin, 21, arrived in Portland four years ago from Bakersfield, a city he described as the most polluted in the country.

He and his older brother grew up going to the Jameson Ranch Camp each summer in the Sequoia National Forest northeast of town, where he fell in love with the outdoors and saw a career in environmental work as possible. He learned how to garden, weld and split wood. His dad went to the ranch as a child as well, and the years of summers were affecting.

"There's something beyond the smog cloud. Literally, and metaphorically," Ablin said.

For college, he landed at UP and pursued an environmental ethics and policy degree.

During his sophomore year, Ablin learned in an air pollution class about an internship opportunity at Vigor, which he only knew at the time as "those boats you see off the bluff."

In response to neighborhood complaints to the Department of Environmental Quality about paint and other noxious smells wafting up from Swan Island, Vigor decided to investigate whether it was responsible.

Ablin was one of several paid interns who canvassed the neighborhood and took air samples as part of what would become an 18-month study.

The Californian's first job was at one of Bakersfield's oil companies so he liked the idea of working for a big company on environmental projects.

"I want to walk the line between being just a total eco-hippie warrior sitting in trees 40 hours a week and just fully working for a company and selling my soul," Ablin said of his calculus.

He saw that Vigor cared.

"It was super cool that a big industrial company like Vigor was doing something that they did not have to do," Ablin said.

The company shut down a wastewater treatment plant that it determined was responsible for some of the complaints, and shifted practices to try and boost air quality. Sprott said the company wants to be a good neighbor, and "walk our talk."

Vigor had built a pipeline to UP. At the end of his air quality internship, Ablin pitched the company with a larger habitat restoration project on the island.

Vigor had another idea. The company had seen a story in The Oregonian/OregonLive about the benefits of planting milkweed in home gardens. Monarch butterflies lay their eggs exclusively on the perennial, but their numbers have been in steep decline for 20 years as milkweed vanished from the sides of roads, rivers and gardens.

Sprott offered Ablin a solo project starting a milkweed habitat at the shipyard.

"We wouldn't be able to go out and hire an entomologist or botanist to do this," Sprott said on an April day as he and Ablin overlooked the garden. "We tap into, no offense, Gabe, cheap labor, and the resources of the university to guide it along."

Threatened species

Monarch butterflies have distinct migration patterns on each coast, and both have been in steep decline for years.

The pollinating insects can travel thousands of miles, spending their winters in Mexico or Southern California.

Monarchs rely on milkweed. They lay their eggs on the once ubiquitous plant, and caterpillars depend on it for food. Nectar plants help fuel the butterflies on their lengthy road trips.

But milkweed is harder to find these days, and the effects are indisputable.

According to a 2016 report from the Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation, the western population's numbers have plunged 74 percent in the past two decades.

Sarina Jepsen, director of endangered species at the Portland-based nonprofit, said the numbers are "startling."

In 1997, estimates put the butterfly population in the West at 1.2 million. Today, the count is as low as 200,000.

In the eastern U.S., Jepsen said, the use of the chemical giant Monsanto's Roundup weed killer and Round-up-ready crops are likely to blame for the precipitous decline in monarchs.

"We are not as certain as what's causing the decline in the West," she said.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is evaluating whether the insects should be listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. A decision is expected in 2019.

In a good year people can see monarchs flying around Portland, Jepsen said, but the city is just outside of the historic range of the butterfly.

Vigor consulted Xerces about its project, and Jepsen said the nonprofit is supportive of planting native habitat.

"They are not the only threatened pollinator, threatened insect, that we have," she said, citing bees and other butterflies. "there is a whole suite of other species that will benefit from this project."

Vigor sits in the heart of the Portland Harbor Superfund site, an area of documented environmental hazards that dates back decades.

A Vigor subsidiary, Cascade General, is one of the dozens of responsible parties that is trying to sort out costs for the roughly $1.05 billion cleanup. Sprott said the company will be coping with the cleanup for the next 15 years, just as it has been bracing for the plan for the past 15.

The milkweed project is separate from that cleanup. It's a small thing, but it's been a hit with employees," Sprott said. "Most people in the Northwest are. That's why we live here."

For Ablin, now that his internship is finished, he still sees the possibility of more work with Vigor. There's a great chance for "full-scale habitat restoration" on the island. He envisions more partnership with the university.

As with thousands of students at Oregon colleges and universities set to graduate, he is excited for the next chapter. He hopes that includes a job at Vigor.

Study finds that wolf attacks give cows 'PTSD-like' symptoms

By ANDREW THEEN
The Oregonian/OregonLive

Cows whose herd comes under attack by wolves remember the experience and show symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder, Oregon researchers say.

That's according to a study from Oregon State University and publicized Thursday.

Reinaldo Cooke, an associate professor and animal scientist based in Burns, conducted the research, which appeared in the Journal of Animal Science.

When wolves attack a herd of cattle, Cooke said in an interview Thursday, the surviving animals' life experience is "completely altered" by the event. Animals become jumpier around humans and pets, the cows give birth to smaller calves, and the animals are more likely to get sick.

It doesn't take much to trigger the memories of the wolf attack. "Those cows are grazing out there, man," Cooke said, "and they know what wolves can do."

"Every time they hear wolves howling, even if it's two miles away, they go through the stress process," he said."Every time they do that, they don't eat, they're always on alert."

The fact that a wolf attack would be traumatic to an animal isn't a novel idea, Cooke acknowledged, but said henow has scientific evidence of its effect.

Cooke's study was paid for by theOregon Beef Council, an industry group based in based in Portland that represents ranchers.

Oregon Wild, a nonprofit environmental advocacy and conservation group, criticized the use of PTSD to describe nature. "PTSD is a very serious condition afflicting millions of Americans," Oregon Wild said in a statement. "It is incredibly disrespectful for it to be used by an industry association to make a point that should be obvious to anyone who has ever seen a nature documentary: prey don't like predators."

OSU took 10 cows from a commercial herd in Idaho that survived a wolf attack to Burns for the project. They also gathered 10 Burns-based animals that had never seen a wolf.

The animals were separated into different pens scented with wolf urine. Wolf howls were piped in over a stereo.

Three trained dogs that resemble wolves — two German shepherds and one collie-Alaskan malamute — paced outside the corral during the 20-minute study period.

"The cows from Burns couldn't care less," Cooke said in an interview.

In the news release about the study, Cooke said the Oregon cows "showed no signs of agitation and actually approached the dogs."

"They also didn't have biological signs of PTSD, according to PTSD-related biomarkers evaluated in their blood or brain tissue," he continued.

But the Idaho cows did seem affected. Their blood work showed biomarkers indicating extreme stress. None of the Idaho cows had been wounded or attacked by wolves directly.

Cooke said the study's results are normal, and simply document a fact of life in the wild. "We have to think of the welfare of the cows, the wolves, and the producers," he said, citing the cattle owners.

"The wolves deserve their space, the cows deserve their space," Cooke said, "We just need to know what's going out there."

The study comes as state wildlife officials are considering some changes to how the threatened canine is managed in Oregon.