

Oregonians lead effort to delist wildflower

By **KATY NESBITT**
For EO Media Group

ENTERPRISE — North-eastern Oregonians are lead-ing a grassroots effort to get Spalding’s catchfly, a wild-flower endemic to the inland Northwest, removed from the Endangered Species List.

Convinced that the elu-sive plant with its irregu-lar blooming cycle is more populous than some fear, the Wallowa County Stock-growers Association asked Kelly Birkmaier, a rancher and rangeland consultant in Joseph, to spearhead a community-wide project to map the county’s Spalding’s catchfly.

The plant is found all over Wallowa County from ridge tops to canyon bot-toms, but is most preva-lent on the Zumwalt Prairie and around Wallowa Lake. Its range extends north into eastern Washington, north-ern Idaho and northwestern Montana. Ever since it was federally listed as threatened in 2001 Birkmaier said there has been ongoing National Environmental Policy Act analysis on federally man-



Courtesy National Park Service

The Spalding catchfly is listed as a threatened species by the federal government. A group of Oregonians is trying to get the wildflower removed from the list.

aged pubic grazing allot-ments that includes protec-tion of Spalding’s catchfly.

“Stringent mitigation measures have been placed on allotments where catchfly is located,” Birkmaier said.

At the Stockgrowers

scholarship dinner in Janu-ary, Birkmaier asked for vol-unteers to help locate catch-fly on their land. Those who sign up are asked to photo-graph plants they find and either mark the location with a GPS unit or flag the site.

Birkmaier will then go out to confirm the plant’s identity.

If the landowner approves, Birkmaier said she will upload the informa-tion into a database run by Oregon Biodiversity Infor-mation Center, part of Ore-gon State University’s In-stitute for Natural Resources based at Portland State. Cre-ated by the legislature in 1979 ORBIC houses the most comprehensive data-base of rare, threatened and endangered species of Oregon.

“If you have the plant on your land, by law noth-ing can happen — the gov-ernment can’t tell you what you can or can’t do, but if someone has catchfly on their property, putting it in the database can help their neighbor grazing on feder-ally managed land.”

Once sites are docu-mented Birkmaier said she will begin monitoring pop-ulation trends in different areas around the county.

“Then we can start doing soil disturbance monitor-ing, but it’s going to require funding,” Birkmaier said.

In April Birkmaier received a grant from U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service to find and document catchfly.

Jodie Davalan, a biologist with Fish and Wildlife, said Fish and Wildlife is already funding a contract for catch-fly monitoring on the Wal-lowa Lake moraines for the Wallowa Land Trust.

“It’s not uncommon to find someone who spe-cializes in a particular sur-vey,” Davalan said. “A lot of times it is more efficient to pass money to someone who does this regularly.”

Researchers with The Nature Conservancy’s 33,000-acre Zumwalt Prair-ie Preserve have been docu-menting catchfly for a cou-ple decades. Manager Jeff Fields said his staff has data eligible for OSU’s database and is happy to share the information.

“Our general goal is sup-porting ORBIC so it can be as complete as it can be,” Fields said.

Fully involved in the catchfly monitoring effort, Conservancy staff has served on a multi-agency technical committee the last 10 years and alongside the U.S. Forest Service, Fields said his staff has devel-

oped successful monitoring methods.

“Across thousands of acres we can get an esti-mate of population sizes based on a repeatable survey method,” Fields said.

All together, at least 100 new sites have been found in Wallowa County over the last few years, Birkmaier said.

Fields said his staff is going to try to do a small scale case study on the Pre-serve’s grazed pastures looking for impacts of cat-tle browse and hoof shear on the plant.

“We want to observe those populations of catch-fly before and after livestock grazing,” Fields said.

Wallowa Resources, an Enterprise-based natu-ral resource organization, is also contributing to catchfly monitoring.

Wallowa Resources Director Nils Christoffersen said, “The most productive step now is to get more bot-anists in the field to assess the distribution and condi-tion of Spalding’s catchfly; not only in the grazing allot-ments but in the surrounding areas as well.”

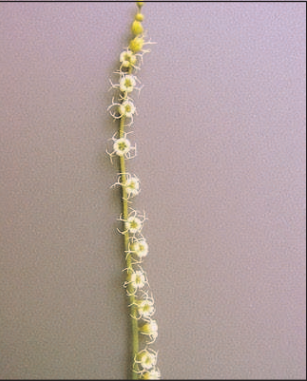


Photo by Bruce Barnes
Side-flowered miterwort, Mitella stauropetala, flowers



Photo by Bruce Barnes
Side-flowered miterwort, Mitella stauropetala, leaves

BLOOMIN' BLUES

Side-flowered miterwort stands out

By **BRUCE BARNES**
For The East Oregonian

Name: Side-flowered miterwort
Scientific name: *Mitella stauropetala*

This plant and four other nearly identical *Mitella* species in the Blues are among my favorites, mainly because there are no other plants in the Blue Mountains that look like them. All of their leaves are attached at the base of their stems, are nearly cir-cular in outline with rounded lobes and rounded teeth, and are about 2-3 inches across. The stems are usually 10 to 15 inches high, and are erect and very thin, so they are easily overlooked. Conse-quently, people don’t see the flowers.

The flowers are evenly spaced about a half-inch apart, and are all on the same side of the stem in a very straight row. The flow-ers bear close examination to appreciate their unusual structure. At first one sees a row of tiny white rings along the stem. The white rings are formed by five sepals. Look even closer and note what looks like a total of five fine white hairs sticking out from between the sepals around the edge of each ring. Those white “hairs” are the petals, and each petal ends in three branches.

There are about 12 spe-cies of *Mitella* in North

America, including the five in Northeast Oregon, though the odds of seeing any of the other four is very slim. All miterworts have their flow-ers on one side of the stem. They are mainly distin-guished from each other by the number of branches on the hair-like petals.

Miterwort comes from the Latin *mitra*, meaning “cap,” due to the shape of the fruit, which is a very tiny capsule. “Wort” is another word for “plant” from old English. Another common name for this plant is “Bish-op’s Cap.” The top of the fruit capsule is said to resem-ble the two-pointed hat worn by a bishop. Common names used in other parts of the country include Coolwort, Crystal Flower, Currant-leaf, Fringe-cup, Snowflake, and False Sanicle. The species name *stauropetala* means star-like petals.

The *Mitella* species have long been used for medicinal purposes. The leaves were used in New England to make tea for treating a fever, and some Indian tribes have used the plant as a purgative for intestinal disorders.

Where to find: The plant likes damp forest soil, often near streams or seeps, and often near the base of tree trunks. It can be found along the sides of trails in the Uma-tilla Forks area throughout May. Look for the slender pale stalks.

EOU students try to grow morels

By **ALYSSA SUTTON**
The La Grande Observer

On the second floor of Badgley Hall at Eastern Oregon University, Patrick Morales and Jakob Dewald are attempting a science project that could change the game for mushroom hunters.

The Oregon State University juniors are attempting to grow Morel mushrooms in a controlled environment.

“They’re growing mycelium, which is pretty much the root of the mushroom,” Oregon State University Crop and Soil Science instructor Austin Hawks, who is part of the Eastern Oregon Agriculture and Natural Resource program, said “the mushroom is the fruiting body that then releases the spores, and the mycelium is what grows underground. So we’re not having a fruit yet, but we’re having pretty good luck with growing the mycelium.”

“Right now we’re just drying (the mushrooms),” said Morales, who is a Crop and Soil Science major. Explaining that in the process of drying they are attempting to get spores from the body of the mushroom to drop into the agar plates.

An agar plate is a Petri dish that contains a solid growth medium, typically agar plus nutrients, used to culture small organisms such as micro-organisms.

“The (agar nutrients) is pretty much like jello,” Hawks said. “The spores will release from the mushroom and then the agar plate catches the spore.”

The students have collected Morel mushrooms from Mt. Harris and Mt. Emily, as well as ordering a few online.

“We’re (testing) different mushrooms from around the region, testing data points and spores, to see which ones cultivate better than other ones,” Morales said. “From what I’ve seen with indoor growing, it’s been a specific species (that cultivates). (Plus), since spores that get released are in their own way their own species, we’re trying different mushrooms to make that possible.”

Both Morales and Dewald explained that in Michigan someone successfully grew a Morel mushroom indoors, but the mushroom was contaminated by a bacteria fungus and the grower was never able to replicate the mushroom again. They also said that China is cultivating



Photo courtesy La Grande Observer

Eastern Oregon University students are trying to grow Morel mushrooms in a labratory setting.

‘Cultivating (Morel mushrooms) indoors all year round would provide chefs access no matter what.’

Patrick Morales
Oregon State University student

one species of Morel — the Black Morel mushroom — successfully in a controlled environment outdoors, but the students’ goal is to grow one of the Morel species indoors.

“A lot of people have success outdoors, but indoors is definitely a challenge,” Dewald, who is earning an agricultural major and a crop and soil minor, said. “Capturing the spores, I think, is where a lot of the challenge comes from, because a lot of contamination can occur, so that’s probably the hardest step right now.”

“(Other) mushrooms have a cap and their spores come out of the bottom, but with Morels it’s more out of the top,” Morales said. “To get an official spore print with a morel is a little bit different. Usually we just lay it down or we do the drying method.”

Morales has grown other mushrooms before, such as Lions Mane and Shiitake mushrooms.

He is pulling on that experience for the current project after Dewald had the idea of growing Morel mushrooms.

“I’m originally from Hawaii and had never heard of a Morel before,” Dewald said. “My friends said we should go hunting this mushroom and later I realized how hard it is to cultivate indoor spores.”

He brought the idea to Morales who came to the same conclusion, and they decided to see what they could do.

“Cultivating (Morel mushrooms) indoors all year round would provide chefs access no matter what,” Morales said. “Especially since they’re in such high demand during the season.” He explained that Morel mushrooms also have a different life cycle than other mushrooms.

“Normally they have a wintering period — like an apple tree,” Morales said.

Morales and Dewald plan on collecting as many spores as they can, then while they’re gone for the summer, the mushrooms will be in their wintering period.

“We’re trying to cultivate a fruiting body,” Morales said. “What we want to do is find a way to cultivate them indoors all year round (in a way that) doesn’t affect the ecosystem as much as it normally would.”

The students are also asking the community to share Morel mushrooms to benefit their project. They’re only asking for one mushroom, and don’t have to know the region it was collected from, but if they were informed would keep it a secret.

“All of my students think outside of the box,” Hawks said. “Some students create a whole new box, and these two have done that.”

To provide Morel mushrooms for the research project contact Austin Hawks at austin.hawks@oregonstate.edu or call (541) 962-3543.



Molly Sprayregen via AP

Molly Sprayregen smiles be-side her favorite tent while leading a backpacking trip for teens in Mt. Robson Provincial Park in the Canadian Rockies.

By **MOLLY SPRAYREGEN**
Associated Press

I don’t remember the first time I slept in a tent. It feels that doing so was always part of me.

I remember when I was very young, curling up beside my sib-lings on family camping trips, falling asleep to the sound of our crackling campfire mingling with our dad’s voice telling us stories. At summer camp, I would lie in my tent with my best friends, tell-

ing jokes, playing games, and hud-dling together in the middle when it rained and water seeped through the sides.

There was the time when my friend Sally woke me up in the mid-dle of the night, telling me to peek outside because the stars were shin-ing so brightly and she didn’t want me to miss it. When I was a coun-selor, I would sing my campers to sleep outside their tents before crawling into my own, breathing in the crisp, mountain air as I drifted

off to the lullaby of a rushing river.

Sleeping in a tent has brought me closer to the people I love and to nature. It has taught me I don’t need as much as I think I do to be happy. It has trained me to be tough and resourceful.

There are so many benefits to sleeping in a tent, so many reasons people love it.

Grace Brofman grew up with me at summer camp and went on to become a wilderness trip leader. As a child, she loved tents’ com-

munal aspect. “We’d all cuddle up together and squeeze five people into a four-person tent when it was raining,” she remembers, “and we loved being together.”

Now, her tent is her refuge, a place to reflect.

“It’s a lot calmer because you don’t have all of these things blink-ing around you. You probably don’t have your phone next to you. You don’t have a TV. It’s probably one of the only times you can really be alone with yourself,” Brofman says.