

CAUGHT OVGARD

A record of a new discovery

By **LUKE OVGARD**
For the East Oregonian

BROOKINGS — I first started writing about fishing in paper journals as a 13-year-old kid.

After about five years, those paper journals progressed to shortened, digital records in a spreadsheet.

Roughly five years after that, my blog, www.caughtovgard.com, and this column were born.

While my early writing was certainly narrative, it was far from entertaining. It was typically just a rote accounting of facts and events, focused more on the details of where, when, why and how I caught fish than on telling a story. Quite frankly, this early writing was blasé at best.

Fortunately, I've progressed to the point where only some of my stories are blasé and then only when referencing my love life.

Despite humble beginnings as a writer, there were some gems early on; I just had to dig to find them.

One such gem was the story of a fish I described four years before popular science.

It happened to be the last "new species" I'd record in my paper journals before going paperless, which made it even more valuable.

Paperless

I noted this was the last "new species" I'd recorded in my paper fishing journals, but as of the time that final journal entry was written in 2011, that wasn't true.

It took more than five years and a lot of taxonomic discussion, but on August 27, 2015, the day after my 25th birthday, I received a surprise gift in the form of science validating a new species I'd first caught four years earlier.

The deacon rockfish, *Sebastes diaconus*, had officially been described.

I smirked quietly as I read the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife press release because I knew it. Then I yelled "I knew it!" over and over again, this time not so quietly.

For good measure, I went back to the journal entry and read it one more time.

Flashback

I knew something was up. This fish was different.

Though my first instinct was "blue rockfish," it didn't add up.

I'd learned to tell the difference between black and blue rockfish, but this one featured characteristics of both fish.

I began keeping score mentally in my head.

First, the color was wrong. The body was neither blue nor slightly mottled as in all of the blues I'd previously caught. Its coloration was dark brown-gray, just like a black rockfish.

Black 1, Blue 0.

Second, the head was wrong for a black. It was striped like a blue's, only the stripes were very faint.

Black 1, Blue 1.

Third, the fins were blue — at



Photo contributed by Luke Ovgard

The three common species you might mistake for one another in Oregon waters (black, blue and deacon) are not found in equal numbers. You'll catch roughly three blacks (pictured) for every blue and three blues for every deacon. INSET: The deacon rockfish, *Sebastes diaconus*, is Oregon's newest saltwater fish.

least, the ends of the pelvic and pectoral fins were.

Blue 2, Black 1.

Fourth, with the mouth closed, a blue's jaws should be even, and the bottom jaw of this fish was a victim of the underbite found in blacks.

Black 2, Blue 2.

It was tied, but the deckhand told me it was just a variant of blue rockfish. I wasn't convinced and recorded it as a "Black/Blue Rockfish Hybrid" in my journals.

I caught three more in the time it took for them to be identified as their own, unique species, recording each one as "Black/Blue Rockfish Hybrid" in my increasingly digital records.

That wasn't the first time my identification had been corrected, resulting in a new species, but it remains the only time a species I'd already caught became a species new to science after the fact.

Records

In the Fall of 2017, I got another deacon, this one much larger though still not huge.

Captain Levi Schlect of Tide-winds Sportfishing helped me catch what would've been a world record had I submitted it. I saved the line sample, had multiple pictures and witnesses, but I just didn't know if a deacon of that size was worth the hassle for a record.

My decision was made for me

because I lost the line sample. I'd set it aside with some old fishing gear and threw it away.

Missing out on a world record might bother some people, but not me. I just sit and smugly appreciate my handwritten journals, another type of record that only I can hold.

Read more at caughtovgard.com; Follow on Insta and Fish-brain @LukeOvgard; Contact luke.ovgard@gmail.com.

Oregon reports boom in camping, longer season

The Associated Press

Oregon set a record for the number of campers at state parks last year, and the number of day-use visitors was the second-highest ever, according to a report by the state's Parks and Recreation Department.

The report said 2.9 million people camped at a state park in 2018 and 54 million people in total visited a park, the second-highest number ever after a blockbuster summer season in 2016 that attracted 54.5 million visitors, *The Oregonian*/OregonLive reported Wednesday.

Coastal parks saw the biggest gain in campers. Fort Stevens, South Beach and Bullards Beach — all along the Pacific Ocean — together accounted for more than half of the growth in overnight visits. They collectively attracted 59,300 campers last year, the newspaper said.

The camping season is also spreading beyond the traditional busy summer months. Crowds have begun to come to camp in the



The Daily Astorian/Joshua Bessex, File

A cabin at Fort Stevens State Park in Warrenton. Fort Stevens is one of three state parks that collectively accounted for more than half of the increase in overnight camping stays at Oregon's parks.

spring and well into the fall, filling yurts and cabins on rainy days, and taking advantage of months with unseasonably warm weather.

"The camping season is stretching itself," state parks spokesman

Chris Havel said. "The peak time is getting longer and longer."

Smaller state park campgrounds also saw big growth, from Viento in the Columbia River Gorge to Lake Owyhee in Eastern

Oregon. Tiny Jackson F. Kimball State Recreation Site in southern Oregon saw the highest percent increase, with an additional 557 campers that added up to a 64 percent increase.

Those increases at smaller campgrounds are exactly what the parks department is looking for. Last year, the department launched an initiative to decrease camping fees at less-popular state parks, hoping to spread out the growing crowds.

Havel said it seems to have worked, so in 2019 the department will implement a one-month trial of increased camping fees at a few of the more popular parks, which could offset the discounts if made permanent.

As more people move to Oregon, the agency is working hard to accommodate increased demand.

The department's budget is funded by fees it collects, as well as slices of state lottery earnings and RV registrations.

Ninety percent of state park sites are currently free of charge — but Havel told the newspaper that park officials aren't considering adding fees in those locations. Part of the ethos of Oregon state parks is ensuring that these natural public spaces are accessible for everybody.