

CAUGHT OVGARD

Chasing ‘common’ fish can be exercise in frustration

By LUKE OVGARD
For the East Oregonian

PORTLAND — “Common” is a rapper, the least valuable Pokémon card designation and the most prevalent stock you can buy.

It’s a word that gets thrown around a lot, and it can be very frustrating for those who hear it — especially for anglers who routinely try to catch “common” fish and fail miserably.

For those looking to catch something new for a change, those common fish present a great opportunity. They’ll usually take a worm, can be found all over and can stave away the skunk on an otherwise slow day.

For a species hunter such as myself, someone who is constantly trying to catch new species in an eternal #SpeciesQuest, “common fish” are irresistible.

In Oregon’s Columbia River Basin, two of the most common native fish are the peamouth chub, *Mylocheilus caurinus*, and the largescale sucker, *Castostomus macrocheilus*. These fish are found all over the Pacific Northwest and well into the Rockies.

Chubs and suckers aren’t terribly popular as gamefish or food fish and tend to be bycatch.

Peamouth chubs live up to their name. They are small fish with small mouths that only grow to a maximum of around a pound.

Largescale sucker, on the other hand, feed on the bottom and can grow quite large. In some circles, largescale suckers actually quite popular as food fish given their firm, white flesh.

Neither is regularly targeted by anglers.

Neither is supposed to be hard to catch.

Both proved to be a struggle for me.

Rare

I’ve caught dozens of fish in Oregon supposedly rarer than these two. Within the Columbia system alone, I’ve caught chiselmouth, threespine stickleback, trout, sturgeon, salmon and half a dozen species of sculpin — all of which are native.

To make matters worse, I’ve caught common carp, largemouth and smallmouth bass, bluegill, green sunfish, pumpkinseed, black crappie,



Photo provided by Luke Ovgard

Largescale sucker are a widespread western species capable of reaching nearly 30 inches in length. They are allegedly a good food fish, though I had nowhere to cook mine, so I let both go.

yellow perch, brown and yellow bullhead and even banded killifish — all of which are invasive species and almost all of which are popular with anglers.

But no peamouth and no largescales.

It’s infuriating, really.

Any time I was in Portland for work, I’d plunk worms with my free time. When the sturgeon weren’t biting, I was waiting on the shores of the Clackamas, Willamette or Columbia hoping for a different bottom-feeder. I saw a dozen largescales and a handful of peamouth caught by anglers fishing right next to me, but I never caught one myself.

When my brother, Gabe, lived in Corvallis, I spent hours at the nearby Willamette hoping a sucker would take a worm. None did.

Some people have a fish they just cannot catch, a “nemefish” of sorts. I had two. In fact, I’d caught all but three native fish found in the Lower Columbia Basin (sand roller, Paiute sculpin and mar-



Photo provided by Luke Ovgard

Peamouth chub are a common native fish throughout the Columbia system. They’re often confused with native northern pikeminnow and chiselmouth but can be differentiated by the short, rounded head and jaw that ends well before the front of the eye.

gined sculpin) before I finally caught these “common” species.

Salt

Throwing a pinch of salt over your shoulder is said to be lucky. I don’t know if that’s true, but I know Morton Salt’s slogan “When it rains, it pours” certainly is.

On a rainy day in late March, I decided to yet again try for my nemefish.

I was fishing far enough downstream that I knew I could luck into a starry flounder (one of my saltwater nemefish that often ventures into the river), so I was confident. I was bound to catch a new fish.

I connected a 1-ounce weight to the bottom of what I’ve most commonly heard called a “fishfinder rig” or a “crappie rig” with two hooks pointed in opposite directions. For me, No. 8 hooks each baited with half of a nightcrawler were the ticket.

I quickly caught a prickly sculpin. Then a juvenile salmon. Then a northern pikeminnow.

All fish were released unharmed, but my patience was suffering.

When it started pouring rain, I lamented leaving my rain gear in the car a distant walk away and set the timer on my phone to 15 minutes.

Apparently, my ultimatum worked because my rod bounced, and I landed my first largescale.

Minutes later, I got another. Not only had I defeated a nemefish, but I’d caught two in under 15 minutes. Not bad.

Rain

“When it rains, it pours,” I mused to myself, running

to the car minutes later completely soaked but incredibly happy with my morning so far.

I drove to the other side of the river and set up fishing the public docks.

It was more of the same as prickly sculpin found my bait almost immediately.

After almost two hours of moving along the shoreline, battling intermittent rain and more consistent hunger, my rod dipped again.

Imagine my surprise when I reeled in my other nemefish: a peamouth chub.

Here I’d spent years chasing these fish only to get them both in the same morning.

Amazing. They just might be common, after all.

Read more at caughtovgard.com; Follow on Instagram and Fishbrain @lukeovgard; Contact luke.ovgard@gmail.com.



Courtesy photo

Zoos and aquariums with outdoor exhibits make for wonderful, family-friendly weekend getaways.

Kid-friendly weekend getaways in the outdoors

Metro Creative Services

Weekend getaways in the great outdoors can be a great way for families to break from the norm and spend some quality time together while getting some fresh air. Such trips are popular, as the U.S. Travel Association notes that nearly three out of four domestic trips are taken for leisure purposes.

Families looking to get away from home on weekends often look for activities or locales that appeal to kids and parents alike while getting everyone out of the house. The following are a handful of outdoor getaway ideas the whole family can enjoy.

Hiking: By 2015, the

United States was home to nearly 240,000 miles of hiking trails on federal and state lands. Hiking opportunities also are abundant in Canada, where the 2016 General Social Survey found that 44% of Canadians go hiking in a given year, making it the country’s most popular outdoor activity. Hiking is a rewarding, healthy hobby that also happens to be free, which can be especially appealing to budget-conscious parents. When exploring potential hiking destinations, parents should look for parks with kid-friendly trails. Many parks have paved trails on flat surfaces, which are ideal for families with small children.

Rivers/lakes: Escaping

to a nearby river or lake for a day on the water can make for a memorable, family-friendly getaway. Look for activities like fishing and bring your own rods or rent from nearby bait and tackle shops. If cruising is more your family’s style, look for boat tours that offer a chance to explore local history while giving the whole family a chance to relax on a boat and soak up some sun.

Zoo/aquarium: According to the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, there are more than 220 accredited zoos and aquariums in the United States and Canada. That makes it easy for families that live just about anywhere to plan day trips to local zoos, where they can spend the

day soaking up some sun and marveling at exotic wildlife. Zoos and aquariums with outdoor exhibits make for wonderful, family-friendly weekend getaways.

Theme parks: Theme parks make for a great weekend getaway for families. Many theme parks even offer rides and attractions for young children, but parents should call ahead to confirm this before planning their trips.

Weekend getaways are great ways for families to spend time in the great outdoors and take advantage of local attractions. With some simple investigation, families might find there are lots of local attractions within driving distance of their homes.

Northern Gentian a hidden Blue Mountain gem

By BRUCE BARNES
For the East Oregonian

Name: Northern Gentian
Scientific Name: *Gentianella amarella*

This is a small plant about a foot high that I found and photographed in 2005, but I haven’t seen this plant anywhere since. It was along the northwest border of Emigrant Springs State Park in fairly dense woods. It is known to grow across Alaska and Canada, and in the western half of the U.S. to Mexico, and is native to that area. Northern Gentian is one of 13 species of plants from the Gentian family that are found in the Blue Mountains.

The Gentian plant family, and three genera in the family, *Gentian*, *Gentianopsis*, and *Gentianella*, were named for King Gentius of Illyria. He was credited with discovering medicinal uses for the plants. Illyria refers to European tribes of antiquity in the western portion of the Balkan Peninsula.

The “ella” at the end of *Gentianella* is Latin for small, likely referring to the small flowers of this plant. *Amarella* is Latin for bitter. So the name of this plant translates as a small, bitter gentian.

The leaves are somewhat egg-shaped, are attached directly to the



Photo provided by Bruce Barnes
Northern Gentian, *Gentianella amarella*.

main stems, and have acutely pointed tips. The stems branch freely to create a somewhat bushy overall shape for the plant. The flowers are about an inch long or less, and are pink to blue or purple in color. The flowers are somewhat funnel-shaped, with four lobes, which is consistent with other species in the same family.

In spite of the efforts of King Gentius, I am unable to find any information indicating medical treatments or other uses for this plant.

Where to find: Though I’ve only found this plant once, it should be more common than my luck would indicate and should be in moist soil in meadows or in dense woods.