

Oregon Coast Aquarium issues 'Blue tide' warning along coast

Most of us have heard of "red tides," those unusually dense blooms of marine algae that stain nearshore waters a brownish red and can be toxic to wildlife and humans.

But what about a "blue tide," when beaches are strewn with an aquamarine layer of jelly-like organisms in spring?

These are the innumerable bodies of "by-the-wind sailors," and their strandings are a regular yet fascinating phenomenon in coastal Oregon.

Ranging in size from a few millimeters across to seven

centimeters, these brilliant blue and purple animals, known formally as *Verella*, are common offshore visitors to the Pacific coast.

While they might sometimes wash up on our beaches in alarming quantities, this "blue tide" poses far less of a risk to animals and people than the red variety.

The common name of these gelatinous creatures — "by-the-wind sailor" — refers to the clear, triangular sail at the top of the animal's body which catches the wind and propels it

across the surface.

Short tentacles hang from the underside of the sail. Found in all the world's oceans, these animals have no independent form of movement and will drift at the whim of the breeze.

Their bodies have evolved to capitalize on prevailing winds, which differ depending on season and locality.

On our side of the North Pacific, the sails of *Verella* are set in a northwest-to-southeast direction, to take advantage of regional wind patterns. On the other side of the North Pacific,

the sails are set in a northeast-to-southwest direction—and in the Southern Hemisphere, the sails are reversed.

With gentle winds, *Verella* sail at about a 45-degree angle in front of the wind, aiming always to be blown away from shore.

Despite *Verella*'s simple yet effective sail, heavier winds during the spring and summer months may nevertheless cause mass strandings of these animals.

During such conditions, it isn't uncommon to see miles

and miles of Oregon beach carpeted with stinking heaps of *Verella*, which quickly die and decay on shore, turning from a metallic blue to a lifeless white.

By-the-wind sailors feed mainly on plankton drifting near the ocean's surface. They capture these tiny animals by stinging them with barb-tipped cells contained within their tentacles.

Their venom is considered harmless to human beings, but beachcombers are cautioned not to touch any jellies or jelly-like animals found washed up

on shore, as some may react more strongly to the venom than others.

Other, more dangerous jellies might also be mixed in with *Verella*.

Although originally classified as a jelly, current research suggests that by-the-wind sailors are actually a unique species of large hydrozoan, a class of predatory animals distantly related to corals, sea anemones and jellies, which live mostly in salt water.

Spring Chinook season reopens along lower Columbia

Recreational anglers will get an additional nine days of spring Chinook fishing on the lower Columbia River under rules adopted today by fishery managers from Oregon and Washington.

Under the rules adopted during a joint state hearing, anglers will be allowed to retain Chinook during two fishing periods.

The first period began Thursday, April 13, and continues through Monday, April 17.

A second fishing period is set for Thursday, April 20 through Sunday April, 23.

The effective area is from Buoy 10 upstream to Beacon Rock for both boat and bank anglers, and bank angling only from Beacon Rock upstream to the Bonneville Dam deadline.

The closure area near the

mouth of the Lewis River remains in effect.

This is the second time this year fishery managers have extended the season, citing continued poor fishing conditions and low catch rates in making their decision.

The daily bag limit is two adult salmonids per day, but only one may be a Chinook. Only adipose fin-clipped fish may be kept. All other permanent regulations apply.

Anglers are reminded that under previously adopted rules, retention of adipose fin-clipped steelhead from Buoy 10 to the Highway 395 Bridge (Pasco, Wash.) and shad from Buoy 10 to Bonneville Dam is allowed only during the same days and in areas open for retention of adipose fin-clipped spring Chinook.

Managers will continue to monitor the returns and catch rates, and plan to meet again on Wednesday, April 19 to evaluate ongoing fisheries.

For more information, visit

ODFW's Columbia Zone Regulations Update Page at www.dfw.state.or.us/resources/fishing/reg_changes/columbia.asp.

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