

Oregon Coast Aquarium issues 'Blue tide' warning

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.

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.


The venom of Verella is considered harmless to human beings, but beachcombers are cautioned not to touch any jellies or jelly-like animals found washed up on shore.

With gentle winds, Verella sail at about a 45-degree angle

white.

By-the-wind sailors feed mainly on plankton drifting

ATHLETE OF THE WEEK



Carissa Oliver

Siuslaw H.S. Vikings Track & Field

The senior thrower finished fourth in two different events at the prestigious Oregon Relays at Eugene's Hayward Field last week. In the process she improved her previous best mark in the shot put with a toss of 40' 5 1/2", the fourth longest in school history. Her discus mark was also the fourth longest in school history, 130' 11 1/2".

Honorable Mention Trent Reavis

Honorable mention is given to fellow thrower Trent Reavis who was sixth in the shot put, 12th in the discus and seventh in the javelin at the Oregon Relays with a personal best throw of 164' 7 1/2" in the javelin, the fifth longest in school history.

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NED HICKSON/SIUSLAW NEWS

Siuslaw senior Heidi Jones gets the go-ahead from Siuslaw coach Sean O'Mara (far left) en route to stealing home in game one against Marshfield.

Softball from 1B

Vikings had trouble generating offense against Pirates pitcher Mackenzie Johnson, who threw

a 1-hitter in game two before ending things in the fifth inning, 15-1.

Abby Coday provided Siuslaw's only hit in the game, smacking a double to drive in

the Lady Viks' only run.

In the opener, however, Siuslaw pitcher Heidi Jones struck out 8 batters and, from the plate, went 2-for-3, scoring the team's only 2 runs.

Marshfield rallied to tie the game at 2-2 in the top of the fourth inning, then generated 2 more runs in the top of the sixth to hold out for a 4-2 win.

The win puts Marshfield at

2-1, with the Viks at 1-2 in league.

Siuslaw will host Douglas (2-0) Friday for a doubleheader, beginning at 3 p.m.

Siuslaw News garage sale GUIDE

"PICC-A-DILLY" Flea Market THIS SUNDAY, 10am-4pm Fairgrounds, Eugene, 541-683-5589.

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Track from 1B

Other finishers for the boys included freshman Ryan Rendon-Padilla with 10th in the javelin at 154-11; senior Clark Hooper, who didn't qualify for the finals despite setting a PR in the 110 hurdles at 15.65. He was also 26th in the 300-meter hurdles in 42.41; and in the boys freshman 3,000 meters, Brendon Jensen finished 18th in a sub 10-minute time of 9:46.94, followed by fellow freshman Kiger Johnson in 28th place at 10:04.15.

For the girls, senior Celie Mans ran the 1,500-meters in 5 minutes and 1.42 seconds for 25th place. She was also 14th in the 3,000 meters the previous day in 10:39.38; senior Destinie Tatum was 35th in the 400 meters in 1:03.69 and landed 34th in the high jump (4-7); sophomore Madison Reynolds threw for 27th place in the shot put at 33-0.25; in the freshman girls 3,000 meters, Hannah Rannow placed 18th in 11:45.24 and Anne Wartnik placed 26th in 12:17.34.

Friday, Siuslaw will host the Central Coast Invitational, beginning at 4 p.m.

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