

Siuslaw News

Community Voices

NATURAL PERSPECTIVE — Newt love is in the air



By EMILY J. UHRIG, PhD
Special to the Siuslaw News

Our new year is in full swing and February is upon us, the month where we see the first glimmers that winter is fading away. This month also brings Valentine's season and the usual thoughts of romance. However, it is not just the time for budding human relationships. Oregon's rough-skinned newts, sometimes referred to as "waterdogs," are beginning their move to breeding ponds where they will locate a partner and prepare to produce the next generation of offspring.

The bumpy, dark brown skin on their backs gives the newts their 'rough-skinned' moniker, but it's their yellow-orange bellies that make them particularly recognizable. The vibrantly colored underbellies signal that they carry a potent neurotoxin and essentially warns predators, "I'm poisonous, don't eat me." The poison, known as tetrodotoxin, is more toxic than cyanide, making it such an effective defense mechanism that humans and most potential predators would become sick or

even die from attempting to eat a newt. Garter snakes are notable exceptions and some Oregon populations have evolved resistance to the poison, allowing them to safely partake in a meal of newt.

Like frogs, newts are amphibians and require a moist habitat, although they can spend a significant amount of time away from standing water. Damp Oregon forests are excellent homes for adult newts throughout the late fall and early winter, which they spend hibernating

under logs or amid leaf litter. Around February, as the newts rouse themselves from hibernation, it's common to see them trekking overland to their breeding ponds. Upon arrival, males and females pair up for mating.

Newt couples can often be seen floating in shallow water as the male grasps the female's back with all four legs in a courtship posture called 'amplexus' that can last for hours or days. Despite their intimate contact, this is not the actual act of mating. Instead,

once the pair eventually separates, the male deposits a packet of sperm on an underwater surface. The female then sits on the packet to bring the sperm into her reproductive tract where it can fertilize her eggs, which she will lay in a mass on submerged roots or branches. A few weeks later, tiny newt tadpoles will hatch.

So, if you're out enjoying a hike with your Valentine, keep an eye out for newts on their own quest for love.

MILITARY HERITAGE CHRONICLES — Cold War revisited



By CAL APPLEBEE
Special to the Siuslaw News

article or even a two-hour class. Secondly, with recent events concerning North Korea and Russia over the past couple years, it is also certainly no longer "cold."

Of course, our Cold War battle goes back decades to the end of World War II (WWII), when relations with communist Soviet Union continued to decline in the post-war years, followed then shortly with the Korean War just a few years later, and the far-reaching control of the Kim family in North Korea, also dating back to WWII.

While those relations with the Soviet Union began to improve, at least for a period, with their dismantling in 1991, that has never evolved with North Korea.

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, relations with the reformed Russia seemed to be

improving. However, with Vladimir Putin rising through the communist party ranks and coming to power, that progress became jeopardized. Just as his predecessors installed communist-leaning governments in Eastern Europe in post-war years, he too has extended his tentacles of power with incursions into Ukraine, annexation of Crimea and intervention in Syria. Some members of the international community view the annexation of Crimea as a move towards re-creation of the Soviet Union.

While Putin continues to deny Russian interference into our 2016 elections, U.S. intelligence officials say otherwise. In fact, he accuses then-Secretary of State Hilary Clinton of interfering in Russian internal affairs. After Putin congratulated Trump

on his presidential victory, a Gallup poll reported 22 percent of Americans had a favorable view of Putin.

Although North Korea's communist leanings pre-date WWII, the Kim family dynasty came into power shortly thereafter with North Korea's liberation in 1945 by the Soviet Red Army. Up until 1994, Kim Il-sung, grandfather of today's dictator, wielded power, followed by Kim Jong-Il. But as North Korea witnessed the Soviet Union's demise in 1991, they actually replaced communism with a Juche philosophy, creating a socialist state with a military emphasis.

Current family dynasty dictator (say that fast three times) Kim Jong Un has certainly capitalized on that emphasis since coming to power in 2011. Despite repeated UN sanctions and US pleas to

China to bring pressure on North Korea to de-accelerate its nuclear program, Kim continues to rattle his nuclear saber and flaunt his growing nuclear capabilities.

There have been a variety of incidents over the decades, some more recent than others, that have caused concern, starting way back in 1948 with the Russian blockade of Berlin. Then over the next few decades we saw the botched Bay of Pigs in 1961, the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and the USS Pueblo attack and capture by North Korea in 1968. More recently, we've seen the missile tests by North Korea and repeated air space violations to American military aircraft by Russian aircraft. Russia has switched over the years from enemy to ally back to enemy, and it seems as if the Korean War never really did end

So, that Cold War than began over 70 years ago, has heated back up to the extent that Americans once again face a possible nuclear attack. The Oregon Coast Military Museum's Feb. 21 class will take a closer look at this dilemma and its heritage, including a 1957 video of how one Oregon community prepared for the Red Threat back then. Think about joining us - might make a great training film. And I promise, no "duck and cover" exercises - I couldn't handle it either!

You can learn more about military heritage by visiting our website: www.oregoncoastmilitarymuseum.com or visit the museum, open Thursday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and located at 2145 Kingwood St. in Florence.

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