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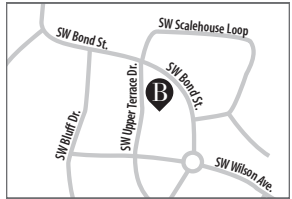
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Lottery results can now be found on the second page of Sports.

LOCAL, STATE & REGION

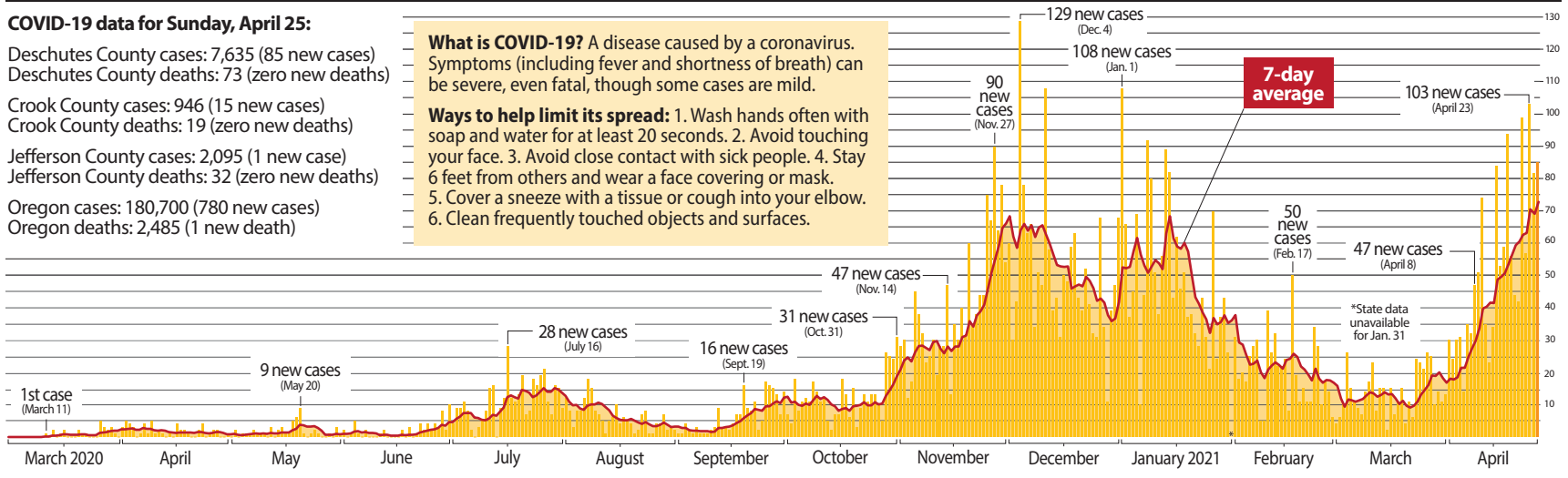
DESCHUTES COUNTY New COVID-19 cases per day

SOURCES: OREGON HEALTH AUTHORITY, DESCHUTES COUNTY HEALTH SERVICES BULLETIN GRAPHIC

COVID-19 data for Sunday, April 25:

Deschutes County cases: 7,635 (85 new cases)
Deschutes County deaths: 73 (zero new deaths)
Crook County cases: 946 (15 new cases)
Crook County deaths: 19 (zero new deaths)
Jefferson County cases: 2,095 (1 new case)
Jefferson County deaths: 32 (zero new deaths)
Oregon cases: 180,700 (780 new cases)
Oregon deaths: 2,485 (1 new death)

What is COVID-19? A disease caused by a coronavirus. Symptoms (including fever and shortness of breath) can be severe, even fatal, though some cases are mild.
Ways to help limit its spread: 1. Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. 2. Avoid touching your face. 3. Avoid close contact with sick people. 4. Stay 6 feet from others and wear a face covering or mask. 5. Cover a sneeze with a tissue or cough into your elbow. 6. Clean frequently touched objects and surfaces.



INVASIVE OR INTRIGUING?

Starlings in Oregon are a pest to some and a fascinating species facing 'bio bigotry' to others

BY MEGAN BANTA

The Register-Guard (Eugene)
As employees at Short Mountain Landfill maneuver heavy machinery to compact trash, a throng of birds lifts and swarms before settling back down on the garbage.

The birds aren't seagulls, ravens, crows or magpies — all of which are common at landfills. They're European starlings.

An invasive species, starlings closely resemble blackbirds and often draw the ire of many birders, farmers and others because they can pose a threat to native bird species and crops. Invasive species are living organisms that are not native to an ecosystem and cause harm.

On farms, starlings are most noticeable among the pest birds, said Jenifer Cruikshank, who works for the Oregon State University Extension Service focusing on dairy farms.

"There's just so many of them, and they're kind of voracious eaters," she said.

Starlings also have some beneficial qualities, though, said Dan Gleason, a former University of Oregon ornithology professor and owner of Wild Birds Unlimited in Eugene, such as the ability to eat some invasive insects.

People can do things to discourage starlings from coming back if they see them, said Gleason and Rick Boatner, invasive species coordinator for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The species is so well-established, Boatner said, that any efforts to drive them out might work temporarily but aren't likely to be permanent.

Introduction to Oregon

European starlings, as the descriptor in their name would suggest, did not originate in the United States.

While starlings look a lot like and often flock with blackbirds, there are ways to tell them apart. Both species have iridescent plumage, but starlings have a dark upperwing and pale underwing. During mating season, they also have a bright yellow bill.

They were introduced to Central Park from Europe in the late 1800s. The goal at the time, Gleason said, was to bring over every bird mentioned in Shakespeare's plays.

It took a couple tries for the birds to survive — starlings aren't forest birds, Gleason said. But starlings started flourishing after being released on Long Island, where it was urbanized enough for them to nest.

The state defines starlings as predatory animals and invasive and doesn't provide protection for the species like it does for native birds.

By the 1960s, the species was common in Oregon, Gleason said, and they have become numerous because "we've made good habitat" for them.

And where they go, they often drive other birds out of their nests to use as their own home.

Starlings are assertive, said Barbara Gleason, who runs Wild Birds Unlimited along



A European starling eats berries from a tree in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, after a winter storm in 2015.

with her husband. Dan Gleason goes a step further, describing them as "a little aggressive." They can even drive a wood duck out of its nest, he said.

Damage to fields and crops

They effect animals beyond other bird species, too. On feed lots, Boatner said, they'll eat food that's supposed to go to pigs and cows.

Cruikshank, who holds a doctorate in dairy science, works with dairy producers of all sizes and said starlings are a "major problem" on dairy farms and other farms with livestock.

Most dairy farmers are feeding hundreds and hundreds of cows, she said, and will store food in open bays so it's accessible. That also leaves it open to pest birds, including starlings, she said.

The birds will pick grain out of mixed food meant to cover all of a cow's nutritional needs, she said, and they mostly deplete spots near the entry of feed barns.

"What you'll get is the cows that end up in those more greatly depleted spots in the feed bunk are going to be your cows who are lower in the pecking order," Cruikshank said.

They also do damage on grass fields, Boatner said. Starlings have a long beak and can pull up and eat planted seeds, hindering crop production.

They generally don't enjoy seeds, Dan Gleason said, but they do like to eat apples, blueberries, cherries, strawberries, figs and many other cultivated fruits.

They'll take little bites out of individual cherries, Cruikshank added, and generally cause issues for fruit producers.

Starlings also are numerous in the United States — based on population counts, there are more in the U.S. now than there are in Europe.

They're especially abundant in urban areas.

"They're especially abundant in urban areas. They're especially abundant in urban areas. They're especially abundant in urban areas."

"As a birder, you don't really want to see them around. As a biologist, I find them fascinating."
— Dan Gleason, a former University of Oregon ornithology professor

take advantage of humans." Yet many humans find them an annoyance.

Little things make them 'not as negative'

For some people, that's simply bias toward starlings as a non-native species, Dan Gleason said.

He called this attitude "bio bigotry" and said it can mean people don't really take the time to look at a species because of prejudice.

Dan Gleason doesn't want to see starlings proliferate, but they do some things that are beneficial.

For example, they can push their beak down in a hole and push deep enough to get larvae of crane flies that native birds miss, and they eat other agricultural pests, many of which also aren't native.

They're pretty in their own way, Barbara Gleason said, and it's often beautiful when they fly in swooping, intricately coordinated patterns through the sky. That pattern, known as a murmuration, is more common in Europe, and scientists believe the birds use it as protection from predators.

They're also good mimics, Dan Gleason said. If you hear a duck up a tree or a hawk screech without seeing one in the sky, it could be a starling.

Little things, he said, make them not as negative, and there are plenty of fascinating things about starlings.

"As a birder, you don't really want to see them around," he said. "As a biologist, I find them fascinating."

Biologists like Dan Gleason know so much about starlings — and, often by extension, other birds — because they're used heavily in research. You don't need a permit to take starlings from the wild or research on them like you do for native birds.

Take away their food source and they'll leave

For those who do find see starlings as pests, though, there are ways to get rid of them.

People can do "just about anything" to starlings, including shooting and trapping them, if they don't violate a city or county ordinance, Boatner said.

The Gleasons recommend less drastic measures, though.

People can drive them away with CDs or foil tins or noise cannons, they said, but the birds typically figure out the distractions or loud noises won't hurt them and come back.

The best thing to do, Dan Gleason said, is to take away their food source.

That's going to be hard somewhere like the landfill, he

said, where they're likely gathering because of an abundance of insects and other invertebrates.

The county tries to manage starlings and other bird populations at the landfill by restricting how much area is being used to compact trash, spokeswoman Devon Ashbridge said.

"By reducing the footprint of the open cell, we make it a less attractive location for the starlings," she said.

The landfill supervisor implemented the technique a few years ago, she said, and it has helped.

People can help the landfill manage starlings by reducing the amount of food waste they throw out, Ashbridge added.

Food makes up about 18% of what an average resident throws away and is the single largest category in the county's waste stream, said Angie Marzano, a waste reduction specialist for the county.

Around 20% to 30% of what people throw away could have been eaten, she said, and part of the county's effort to reduce food waste is "just trying to teach residents to eat the food that they buy."

"One of the single greatest things you can do is just eating the expensive, organic food that you buy," Marzano said.

People who live in a house in Eugene can put any food waste they do generate into their yard debris container, she said, and those who live in apartments could try reaching out to a neighbor or a participating restaurant nearby.

It doesn't take a lot of effort, Marzano added, but has many benefits.

In the case of bird feeders, it's a little easier to deter starlings, Barbara Gleason said.

She recommends people use a suet feeder and put it in a cage so the starlings can't reach in.

There are "all sorts of bird-feeder designs" that can discourage starlings, Boatner said.

Farmers, landfill operators and others dealing with large populations can contact a wildlife control agent with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

There's an office of the department's wildlife services program in Portland.

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