

LIGHTS and SHADOWS

from the
Dishman Hills

January 2006

SIGHTINGS

Last year, as with every year, there were a variety of sightings of special things that live, grow, and fly in the Dishman Hills Natural Area. Sightings that were reported included deer, coyotes, a yellow-rumped warbler male in breeding plumage, and possible truffles (special fungus). The following article was sent in by Don Nelson to share his special sightings for 2005.

In a Spokane city park my son Henry pointed out a green butterfly. It was a Sheridan's Green Hairstreak (*Callophrys Sheridanii*). Seeing it gave us a thrill. It feels essential to know that if we keep "getting out" we will find extraordinary things to share.

On a sunny July day in '05 a little blue butterfly in the Dishman Hills Natural Area kept the string of wonders going. The inch-wide "Acmon Blue" (*Icaricia acmon*), also known as the Silver-studded Blue, is recorded in Tom Roger's 1987 "Butterflies of the Dishman Hills-Tower Mountain Area" list, along with 58 other butterfly species. I found "my" Blue on a bit of Knapweed, growing along the Goldback spring trail. I used binoculars to see the details; orange lightning-bolt-like marks on the closed hind wing, blue green splotches capping those, with a pattern of black spots, like a constellation, against the silver wings. I sat down on the trail next to the itchy insect to watch its activities. Noticing me, it began scissoring its wings back and fourth, a behavior aimed at confusing a potential predator, giving the butterfly the split second it needs to escape. A little breeze altered the Acmon's attention, and it adjusted its position on the flower to point open wings at the sun. Little blue solar panels soaking up the solar radiation, warming its flight muscles. The insect left its perch and flew down to a patch of damp trail where it soon began probing for minerals and water, a sodium rush. While it clambered over a flake of mica I looked in my guidebook and found that this Acmon was a male. Female wing-tops are mousy brown. In 2006 I'll be looking for 8 other blue species that are probably in the park.

AMPHIBIAN ISSUES

The Dishman Hills with its numerous small ponds is a haven for amphibians, specifically frogs. These small critters have suffered from the changes in their environment and several studies have been made of the populations in the Natural Area to see how they are doing. For quite awhile frog problems were attributed to pollution, decreased habitat, or maybe additional radiation involved with thinner ozone layers. New studies are suggesting that frogs worldwide are victims of a parasitic skin fungus called chytrid. Frogs do spend a lot of time being wet and it is no surprise that fungus is an amphibian issue. The fungus is thought to have originated in Africa and was transported in frogs exported for laboratory use, frog leg feasts, as specimens for pets or zoos, or maybe, hitchhikers in freight. The rapid spread of the fungus is thought to be partially attributed to global warming that has greatly expanded the area of its temperature comfort range. The climate change credited for the spread is not temperature rise but rather the increase of cloud cover causing warmer nights and cooler days. Fungus does not like extreme temperatures either high or low.

Advice from a Tree— Stand tall & proud, remember your roots, reflect the light of your true nature, drink plenty of water, enjoy the view! Anonymous—2000

Chytrids (pronounced ki-trids) spread by free-swimming spores that invade the animal's skin and disrupts their internal organs with toxic byproducts. Frogs breathe through the skin and the fungus infections may disrupt respiration. Both frogs and tadpoles can be infected and the time from infection to death has been found to be one to two weeks. The fungus appears to infect all frog species but is devastating in some and not in others. The infection area now includes the western U.S., and parts of Washington State. The one thing that the fungus hates is hot and dry conditions and hopefully, the long, dry season of eastern Washington summers will protect the Dishman frog populations. Maybe in several decades our Natural Area will be best known for its surviving amphibian species.

MISCELLANEOUS

The annual Buttercup hike has been scheduled for April 8th. As usual we will start from Camp Caro at 1pm with an optional picnic lunch before hand. The hike will last 2-3 hours and we might hike to some of the back-lot ponds in the Natural Area.

We are now on line with a temporary address of <http://members.toast.net/noblevideoman/>. Comments are welcomed. We hope to get a domain name soon; this is a work in progress.

ORGANIZATION NEWS

We are a non-profit organization dedicated to saving nature areas in the Spokane region for public enjoyment and education. Call Michael Hamilton, 747-8147, if you have any questions. We meet every other month on the third Tuesday at Opportunity Elementary School, S. 1109 Wilbur, in the teacher's lounge, 7pm. Our next meeting will be March 20.

The following are our December donors that have consented to be listed: Andrew Ashmore, Dick & Ivah Behm, Vivian & Thomas Caufield, Joseph Collins, James Conaty, Helen Cook, David & Gail Duba, Carol Ellis, Joan Fergin, Walter Fernau, Dr. Kenneth Gudgel, Isabel Hawkins, Steve Heaps, Harry Hendron, Karol Kaye, Glen Kivett, Stephanie Lambert, Patrick Lettenmaier, Jean Mann, Pat Manners, Linda Martin, Patti Muncy, Bob Peregoy, Joy Peterson, Diane Rogers, Luella Rowberg, Jan Strobeck, Patricia Sweeney, Edwin & Betty Weilep, Mike & Jody Wende, Mary Ann Wilharm, Larry & Mary Wright, Hershel Zellman, and one anonymous donor. Thank you all for making 2005 a wonderful year for conservation

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