

# BELFAIR HERALD

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Serving the communities of Belfair, Allyn, Grapeview, Tahuya, Mason Lake, South Shore and Victor

## Inmates set record with rare butterflies

By Dana Kampa  
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Grow a caterpillar, and it will live for a season; teach people throughout the state to breed caterpillars, and you just might save a species.

Incarcerated technicians in Belfair took a big stride in the recovery of a rare butterfly species this year and are excited to see the reach of their research in bringing back the Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly.

Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women facilitated a record-high season of butterfly production with 8,000 eggs.

The Sustainability in Prisons Project, which facilitates these green projects in corrections centers throughout the state, started in the early 2000s as a partnership between The Evergreen State College and the Washington State Department of Corrections.

"We have programs in all 12 of the Washington state prisons," said Keegan Curry, an SPP program coordinator.

The butterfly recovery program began as a collaborative effort between the Oregon Zoo and corrections centers in the Pacific Northwest. The Taylor's Checkerspot Butterfly, once abundant in the area's inland prairies west of the Cascade Mountains, grew rare as suitable habitat dwindled.

"There are only about eight populations in Washington, and they're isolated," Curry said.

Curry said the species officially joined the state list of endangered species in 2006, and the federally endangered species list in 2013.

"They've lost up to 99 percent of their historic prairie habitat in Washington since the arrival of Eu-

ropeans," he said, which played a large roll in the species' plummeting numbers.

That's when the zoo reached out to partner with organizations, hoping to bring the bright orange butterfly back from the brink of extinction. The program in Belfair started when the first greenhouse was built in 2011 on the facility's grounds — funded by the Department of Defense as part of an effort to help get the butterfly off the endangered species list — and inmates began raising butterflies the following year.

Mission Creek has five incarcerated technicians responsible for the butterflies' care. Alexis Coleman and Nichole Alexander are two of the most experienced, each with three seasons under their belts. Getting involved in the program came with a fairly steep learning curve.

In January, the caterpillars remain in hibernation. The insects, smaller than a fingernail at that stage, were nestled between layers of paper towel in plastic containers, each marked with the caterpillars' origins. Some are captive-bred from previous years, and some are wild-caught.

Alexander said one of her greatest fears when starting in the program was accidentally sending the little creatures flying when opening the containers. With a deft tap to knock any early risers off the lid, she opened the container to show the little black fuzz balls. When in deep hibernation, they clump together in a small web, awaiting the first signs of spring.

While they hibernate, the technicians keep them under inverted

see **BUTTERFLIES**, page A-20



## Digging a day at the park

Sasha, a 3-month-old Shiba Inu, enjoys the last day of 2018 at Belfair State Park with owner Lacie Adelman. Herald photo by Dana Kampa

## Grapeview considers condemning sought-after property

By Dana Kampa  
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The Port of Grapeview plans to hold a special meeting "for the purpose of a Final Action to consider condemnation of two parcels," according

to a public notice.

Both parcels belong to Robert Bianchi and are located near Case Inlet in Grapeview. For several months, the port has tried to obtain the property either by purchase or eminent domain. In either

case, the port is required to fairly compensate the landowner.

As reported in the Dec. 27 issue of the *Shelton-Mason County Journal*, the port reached an impasse in negotiations with Bianchi as it

sought to obtain the land for additional parking and turnaround space near its public boat launch at Fair Harbor. The port broke ground Jan. 3, 2018 on the first phase of construction, building a boat ramp, and hopes to soon be-

gin construction on the second phase, installing a floating dock.

An appraiser hired by the port valued the land at \$120,000, while the

see **PROPERTY**, page A-22

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**ABOVE:** A checkerspot butterfly absorbs the warmth from afternoon sunlight. Incarcerated technicians at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women in Belfair have been raising endangered Taylor's Checkerspot Butterflies since 2011, and this season they set a record by raising 8,000 eggs.

**BELOW:** Taylor's Checkerpoint Butterfly caterpillars, pictured in the middle of the summer, show their orange spots. Herald file photos by Dana Kampa

## Butterflies: Mission Creek's success furthers research

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terracotta flower pots to shield them from the worst of the weather without completely disrupting their connection to natural temperature fluctuations with the seasons.

"The more artificial these conditions are, the more likely we are to create unhealthy patterns," Curry said. "We want them to feel like they're in the wild as much as possible."

Looking at the season's success, Curry said the technicians can control some elements, but not everything.

"There's always natural factors that are beyond our control," he said. "So we can't say for sure if the things that we did really led to this outcome. There's always the factor of maybe the butterflies just having a really good year. Maybe they were just feeling the weather conditions."

The checkerspot is fairly unique in that it has a long record of study, dating back to the 1960s, as a model system for population biology. Given their very specific ranges, citizen scientists could easily get involved in spotting and counting the brightly colored butterfly.

"It has that legacy, and it's a butterfly that just seems to really bring people together," Curry said. "The butterfly itself is sort of a life force. It's endangered, so people are trying to help it, but I think about the people when I think about the butterfly, all the different agencies involved."

Curry said one of the best parts of the program is how incarcerated technicians can learn from zoo staff, and share

their own research.

By the end of the year, the technicians will log 1,500 hours of labor.

"It is kind of a back and forth," he said. "It's not set in stone how to do this. We're all learning about the best way to raise butterflies."

Several thousand caterpillars will be released in February or March, depending on the weather conditions, along the South Puget Sound.

Curry said the program is not only supporting the butterflies, but also the technicians. He noted one alumne of the program sought higher education with one of SPP's partners, and several more were looking at similar options.

"She was so inspired by her work in this program that she decided to become a student at Evergreen after she was released from Mission Creek," he said.

Alexander said she especially appreciated how the program allowed her to share the knowledge she's gained with her daughter, one of the local Girl Scouts who visited Mission Creek to learn about the life cycle of a butterfly. Alexander and Coleman play a large part in developing the curriculum and worksheets for the children, who can earn a badge for learning about checkerspots.

"What we do is rewarding, and we can see a difference in what we're doing every single day," Coleman said. "This last season, I actually saw eggs hatching. ... It's just super motivating to come out and be able to see the changes every day, and just to know that we're making a difference."





# What can you learn from a butterfly?



**ABOVE:** From right, incarcerated technicians Nichole Alexander and Alexis Coleman explain the life cycle of the Taylor Checkerspot Butterfly as Keegan Curry, coordinator from the Sustainability in Prisons Project, listens Jan. 8 at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women in Belfair. **LEFT:** Alexander shares photos from the day her daughter visited Mission Creek as one of the local Girl Scouts learning about the life cycle of butterflies. **LOWER LEFT:** Alexander and Coleman show how well their greenhouse plants were growing, plants they use to feed the Taylor Checkerspot Butterflies when they come out of hibernation. **BELOW:** The small caterpillars, some of which will be released in the spring, and some of which will be kept to breed future butterflies, hibernate in small containers that are shielded underneath flower pots during the winter. Coleman said the caterpillars are smaller than an eyelash when they first emerge. *Herald photos by Dana Kampa*



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