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## Rare Butterfly Gets Help From Oregon Prison Inmates

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The Oregon silverspot butterfly. It's protected as a threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. | credit: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service | [rollover image for more](#)

It's not often that those sentenced to long prison terms have a chance to help restore a threatened wildlife species.

But these days the federally listed Oregon silverspot butterfly is getting a helping hand from inmates at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville.

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Thanks to the Oregon Sustainability in Prisons Project, a select group of inmates from the state's only women's prison recently planted more than 50,000 *viola adunca*, a species of violet, as part of a project that will eventually install thousands of host plants for butterflies at four restoration sites in Oregon.

Inmates from the Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility in Albany also are taking part in the project, which involves the Oregon Department of Corrections, Institute for Applied Ecology, Oregon Zoo, Audubon Society of Portland and other partners, in a multilateral exercise intended to support the zoo's ongoing effort to raise silverspot butterfly larvae.

"This is a new project for the Institute of Applied Ecology," Stacy Moore, the Corvallis-based group's director of ecological education, said during a break in the Nov. 22 planting held on prison grounds. "The women here are very enthusiastic. They're working assembly-line fashion, and it's been going very quickly."

From the mechanized mixing of soil and planting of six seeds per planting tube, to watering the pallets full of newly planted seeding tubes and stacking them for shipment back to Salem, the eight-hour operation provided the project with thousands of soon-to-be violet plants that will be used next spring to feed butterflies at the zoo.

"I think it's cool," said inmate Sarah Campbell as she stood at a planting table inserting seeds into tubes filled with potting soil. "I plan to take my kids to the zoo when I get out."

Other inmates watered pallet after pallet of fresh seedlings alongside Institute for Applied Ecology and corrections department staff. Still others moved and stacked the fresh pallets alongside hundreds of others intended for cold storage until needed.

Only 20 "gate-cleared" inmates selected for their exemplary disciplinary records were allowed to participate in the silverspot project. That it took place at all is part of a "new way of thinking" inside the corrections department, said Chad Naugle, who serves as the agency's sustainability coordinator. "We're bringing nature and science back into prisons."

The department joined the national Sustainability in Prisons Project a year ago. The project works by pairing prisons with community groups involved in conservation, education and other tenets of sustainability. In this case, the Audubon Society awarded grant money to the Institute for Applied Ecology specifically to allow the latter to work with the Department of Corrections on the silverspot project.

Ultimately, tens of thousands of mature host plants for butterflies will be placed at four state restoration sites, as well as providing a stable food source for captive-reared larvae at the Oregon Zoo that will later be released to those same sites.

Education is also part of the project. Moore explained that Institute for Applied Ecology staff held a lecture on the silverspot butterfly for participating inmates before the planting was held.

"We wanted them to learn about butterflies before they got started," Moore said. "We wanted to get them excited about conservation."

Additional lectures will be held on the topics of conservation in general, as well as reptiles and birds.

Inmates who aren't cleared to work outside the the confines of Coffee Creek's minimum-security wing also may eventually play a role in the project.

"We've got about 20,000 trays left to plant," Naugle said, gesturing toward the planting site, which was located outside a pole barn that houses a large selection of the prison's groundskeeping equipment. "We'll bring some of them inside to allow inmates who aren't gate-cleared to help out. We thought we'd give them an opportunity to participate too."

Naugle also noted that those taking part share a sense that they are redeeming themselves in the eyes of society for the crimes they committed.

For inmate Carrie Goodenough, it's also important that her children know about the good things she has done.

"We think this is very cool," Goodenough said during a break in the assembly line. "We get to tell our kids about this when we get out."

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