

Oregon Silverspot Butterfly by Rebecca Lexa

One of the rarest butterflies in the Pacific Northwest is the Oregon silverspot butterfly. It once ranged along the coastline from California all the way into southwestern Washington, with the Long Beach Peninsula as its northernmost reach. Fire suppression and the spread of invasive beach grass led to the loss of most of the butterfly's habitat. Now it only exists in the wild in a few isolated pockets of Oregon and California. Recovery efforts have been underway for several years, and breeding programs at the Oregon zoo and Lewis and Clark College in Portland, and the Woodland Park zoo in Seattle.

The only flower the Oregon silverspot's caterpillars can feed on is the early blue violet, also known as the hookedspur violet. It needs open spaces to grow, preferably without being crowded out by beach grass. This violet is actively cultivated at sites where captive-bred silverspot caterpillars are released into the wild. Willapa National Wildlife Refuge is currently undergoing habitat restoration, both to benefit current wildlife species, and to hopefully facilitate the return of silverspots.

If you would like to help the Oregon silverspot and other native butterflies, consider planting native flowers in your yard, to include early blue violets, which can be bought from some native plant nurseries. Pesticides are also very dangerous for butterflies and other pollinators, especially those with chemicals known as neonicotinoids; by reducing or stopping your use of these poisons you can help both the butterflies and other beneficial insects.