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High school club makes science fun

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Interest in wildlife led student to form zoology group

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Statesman Journal

May 23, 2007

When Ashley Seeley found out there weren't enough resources to start a zoology class at West Salem High School three years ago, she was disappointed.

Seeley, though, was far from defeated. She took her love of animals and science and decided to start a zoology club.

"I wanted to make science fun, and it is fun," Seeley, 17, said. "The club is a lot more fun than I expected."

Formed in the fall, the after-school zoology club has blossomed into a proactive group of students who take educational field trips to learn about everything from animal biology to ecosystems.

Club members have gone to the Portland Zoo where they got a behind-the-scenes look at animal exhibits, planted cattails for a Turner farmer who wanted to attract wildlife to his man-made pond, and toured the Brush College Creek area wetlands with the Oregon Department of Transportation.

They've also volunteered at the Oregon Humane Society in Portland and dissected fetal pigs.

"We get to go places and see sites," said club member Katie Cox, 15, who wants to be a zoologist. "It's really fun. We learn about different types of animals."

It was Seeley's desire to learn about animals that drove her to start the club. The senior, who wants to be a veterinarian, wasn't sure other students shared her interests, but it turned out that many did.

At least 15 students regularly attend the club's meetings every other week, and even more turn out for the field trips. Seeley, club president, organizes all of the activities with help from club adviser Steve Holman, a science teacher at West.

"This is the best run club that I've seen and the most directed to what the club is for," Holman said. "This has truly been about zoology."

Unlike many other clubs at West that tend to have social focuses, the zoology club, he said, is geared toward hands-on, learning activities. The group gives students who are interested in studying animal biology an outlet.

"This is a way for students to feed their passion," Holman said.

Club members said they've learned a lot about animals and their habitats. They've seen first-hand, for example, that pigs have similar anatomies to humans, and they've heard from local experts that people's actions affect ecosystems.

The information gathered on field trips, Seeley said, is more likely to stick with students than anything that is read in a textbook.

Senior Nathan Palin, 17, said he was surprised by how much he has learned being in the club. He initially joined because his friends were in it.

"I didn't expect much, but I'm glad that we're actually doing something," Palin said.

Sophomore Brendon Seeley, 15, joined because his sister started the club. He soon started to take an interest in zoology.

"It's taught me a lot of respect for animals and wildlife," he said.

West Salem High School principal Ed John praised Seeley for starting the academic club.

"It's pretty rewarding when a student takes the initiative to create a club and organize activities," he said. "It's really a student-driven organization. It goes above and beyond the other school clubs."

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West Salem High School zoology club president Ashley Seeley, 17, leads the rest of the club through wetlands near West Salem High School.

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