



# Sniffing to save butterflies

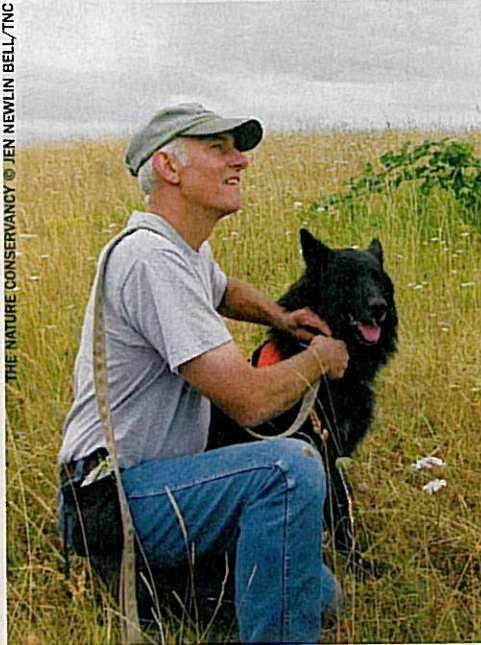


Dogs' noses have many uses, such as finding missing people and detecting illegal drugs. Recently, though, a Belgian Sheepdog named Rogue helped uncover yet another use: finding a plant that could save a butterfly species from extinction.

The plant is Kincaid's lupine, which hosts the eggs of the endangered Fender's blue butterfly, found only in the Willamette Valley of northwestern Oregon. Rogue and his owner-handler, Dave Vesely of the Oregon Wildlife Institute, were part of a study to determine whether dogs could find the plant, which grows among prairie grasses on steep, rough terrain. Dogs navigate that terrain much more easily than humans do. That ability — plus dogs' keen sense of smell — could help scientists pinpoint where the plant is, making efforts to protect the butterfly more effective.

The study was the brainchild of Nature Conservancy stewardship ecologist Greg Fitzpatrick. He'd heard that Vesely had

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trained Rogue to find a rare turtle, so "I figured he could probably train his dog to find a rare plant," Fitzpatrick says.

With the help of Alice Whitelaw of the Working Dogs for Conservation

Foundation and two of her dogs, Vesely trained Rogue to find the plant in a controlled setting. "I lined up six cinder blocks, put some leaves from the plant in a glass jar and stuck the jar in one of the blocks," he says. "When Rogue stuck his nose in the block with the leaves, I clicked and gave him a treat."

The next step was to see whether the three dogs could find the plant in a natural setting. Vesely and Whitelaw took the dogs to eight locations where the plant was known to grow and turned the dogs loose. According to Fitzpatrick, the results were amazing. Of 378 performance trials, the three dogs combined made only six mistakes.

Next season from May to July, Fitzpatrick hopes to have the dogs perform some actual reconnaissance surveys of habitat believed to hold Kincaid's lupine — where those endangered butterflies might be present, too.

— Susan McCullough

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