

Benton County Special Management Species: Peacock larkspur

PEACOCK LARKSPUR (*Delphinium pavonaceum*) is an endangered plant under the State of Oregon ESA, and federally listed as a Species of Concern. It is a member of the buttercup family with white petals fading to blueish-purple at the center.

Peacock larkspur blooms from April to early July but reproduces only by seed. It is a relatively long-lived plant. The seeds germinate in the winter, but it may take up to 5 years to produce a flowering plant. It cannot self-pollinate and requires pollinators such as bumblebees to transfer pollen between individual plants.

Significant numbers of peacock larkspur can be found near roadsides in Benton, Marion and Polk counties and populations tend to have between 10-100 individual plants. Peacock larkspur also occurs on private lands throughout the Valley.

Peacock larkspur lives in moist, silty soils in wet prairies, along fence lines, and edges of ash and oak woodlands.

The Willamette Valley was historically grassy prairie dominated by oak trees. When human development increased, prairieland shrunk which endangered many species. Less than one percent of the original prairie habitat that once existed is still present today!¹

The genetics of the peacock larkspur are in danger of persisting due to hybridization between other species of larkspur, including garden species.



PLEISTOCENE PETALS

Researchers believe that peacock larkspur evolved after Pleistocene floods of the Columbia River (known as the Bretz or Missoula floods) between 12,800-15,000 years ago. A lake was created from this flooding that repeatedly filled and drained which created rich soils that gave rise to the Willamette Valley's impressive diversity of plant species today. The peacock larkspur is a result of historical hybridization and evolution of other *Delphinium* species.

¹ Black, S. H., and D. M. Vaughan. 2005. Species Profile: *Icaricia icarioides fenderi*. In Shepherd, M. D., D. M. Vaughan, and S. H. Black (Eds). Red List of Pollinator Insects of North America. CD-ROM Version 1 (May 2005). Portland, OR: The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation.

² Oregon Department of Agriculture. Plant Conservation: Peacock larkspur. Accessed online 5 April 2022.

<https://www.oregon.gov/oda/shared/Documents/Publications/PlantConservation/DelphiniumPavonaceumProfile.pdf>