



## Early July 2012



*Vanilla Leaf in bloom at Oregon Caves National Monument*

### This month on the Monument

Be sure to stroll through the historic Chateau at the Oregon Caves. Lodging, fine dining, gift gallery, historical film, 1930's era coffee shop, a relaxing lobby, live music, and more are just across from the cave entrance. Inquire at The Chateau or visit their website for information about entertainment and events: <http://www.oregoncaveschateau.com/>

Explore the caves in the old style - candlelight tours take place on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Want to get muddy? Make your reservations online now for the Off-Trail Adventure tour [www.nps.gov/orca](http://www.nps.gov/orca) or request more information at the Visitor Center.

### Vanilla Leaf (*Achlys triphylla*)

The moist, shady forest of the Monument provides habitat for the Vanilla Leaf, currently in bloom with its showy white spike. Sometimes called deer foot, this perennial in the Barberry family features three fan-shaped, asymmetrical, coarsely blunt-toothed leaflets.

In some areas of the Monument the leaves of Vanilla Leaf form a continuous, light-green carpet over the forest floor. They are interconnected

underground by numerous crossing rhizomes or horizontal, underground stems that often send out roots and shoots from its nodes.

Traditionally, its dried leaves have been hung to repel flies and mosquitoes, or to provide a sweet, vanilla scent. Vanilla Leaf: just one example of the Monument's biodiverse plant life, can be found on all trails.

### Pileated Woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*)



*Pileated Woodpecker*

*Dave Herr*

If you hear a wild laugh from the treetops while you're hiking the trails, don't be alarmed. It's probably the pileated woodpecker. Commonly heard but seldom seen, this shy woodpecker lives only in mature forests salted with dead trees.

A crow-sized woodpecker with a flaming red crest, the pileated prefers to eat carpenter ants and wood-boring beetle larvae, but also consumes fruit, acorns, nuts, and sap. It drills or drums with its powerful beak, producing large holes in its search for food.

The male excavates the nest. Besides providing a refuge for its own offspring, the pileated is an "ecosystem engineer;" other birds and mammals depend on the cavities it creates for their own survival.

The largest woodpecker in most of North America, this year-round resident is a protected species. Its numbers have risen dramatically since 1900 due to reforestation and the protection of large expanses of mature forests, like those surrounding you at Oregon Caves National Monument.

**California  
Ground Cone**  
(*Boschniakia strobilacea*)



*Ground Cones on Old Growth Trail*

If you're walking along the Old Growth Trail and see what looks like big pine cones stuck into the ground, take another look. What you're seeing is actually the California Ground Cone, a wildflower. The "cones" are 3"-7" in height, and reddish-brown to dark purple. Because it lacks chlorophyll and cannot produce its own food, as most plants do, this plant is parasitic on the roots of madrones and manzanitas, causing large knots to form on their roots. This plant is a perennial, flowering for many seasons.

The California Ground Cone is just one of many unusual plants waiting to greet you here.

**Columbian  
Black-tailed Deer**  
(*Odocoileus hemionus  
columbianus*)



*Columbian Black-tailed Deer*

Resident black-tailed deer and their newborn fawns are easy to see this time of year on both Highway 46 and the trails at Oregon Caves National Monument. Mother deer are selecting isolated spots for labor and then leading their babies to new nursery spaces, such as the steep slopes of Highway 46, to avoid some predators.

The fawns are sporting new spotted coats, which makes them blend into sun-dappled foliage.

**If you encounter deer on the highway, please stop your vehicle, put your flashers on, and wait until the deer move off the road - otherwise you might separate the fawns from their mothers.** Look for the bouncing youngsters as you drive slowly!

**Pacific Rhododendron**  
(*Rhododendron  
macrophyllum*)



*Rhododendron on Old Growth Trail*

One of the most spectacular sights of early summer is the blooming of the Pacific Rhododendron. "Rhododendron" means "rose tree," and this shrub is well named, for its large clusters of flowers range in color from pale pink to red. These colors are striking against the dark green of the conifers the rhododendrons grow among.

Rhododendrons provide year-round cover for wildlife, but no food. Toxins in the leaves and flowers keep mammals, including deer, from nibbling on them. Even honey made from the flowers can sicken humans. Additionally, the undersides of the large leaves have hairs that help them resist drought and insulate them from freezing.

**Old Growth Trail**  
0.5 mile (0.8 km)

*Moderate, hilly*

Take the scenic route from the Visitor Center and main parking lot. This historic pack trail takes you through several forest types in a short distance.



*Old Growth Trail*

**Directions:**

Option 1: You can start this hike at the trailhead directly behind the Visitor Center. Bear left.

Option 2: At the main parking lot, walk to the far end toward the highway and continue up the Forest Service road. Access the trailhead on the right side of the road.

**Time:** Allow 20-30 minutes  
**Climb:** 200 feet (60 m)

The forests of the Old Growth Trail provide habitat for Vanilla Leaf, Black-tailed Deer, Rhododendron, Ground Cone, Pileated Woodpecker, and a diversity of other flora and fauna. Inquire at the Visitor Center about additional hiking trails on the Monument. Maps are available.