

Kids' KOrner

Big tree hunters stalk largest living things

WASHINGTON — Douglas firs in Oregon twice have grown big enough to become national champions, the biggest trees of their kind.

But both times, the giant coast firs were blown down in storms. Oregon hasn't had the Douglas fir champ since 1975.

The title reverted both times to the same mighty rival in neighboring Washington's Olympic National Park. Oregon big-tree hunters were not about to take that lying down; they posted a \$300 reward for anyone knowing the whereabouts of a bigger fir.

"We want the record fir back. After all, the Douglas fir is Oregon's state tree," said Maynard Dawson, a Salem barber and veteran tree hunter, who put up \$100 of the reward.

Register for the Biggest

The statewide alert asks citizens to be on the lookout for a fir taller than 221 feet, more than 45 feet, 5 inches around the trunk, and broader than 61 feet at the crown.

While some people may be out hunting big game, birds on the wing, or buried treasure, others are stalking the biggest living things on Earth: trees. Of the billions of trees in this country, some tower above the rest as the biggest of their species. The hunters' challenge is to find even bigger specimens.

Champions are listed in the National Register of Big Trees, which has been kept for nearly 40 years by the American Forestry Association. Currently there are about 655 titleholders.

Only those trees that appear in the U.S. Forest Service's "Checklist of United States Trees (Native and Naturalized)" are

eligible. The 679 species range from popular varieties of oak, elm, pine, and maple to more exotic trees such as devil's walkingstick, fiddlewood, parasol tree, and darling plum.

It's not enough for a tree to come from the right background and grow to championship size, a combination of height, girth, and crown spread of the branches. To get into the Register, a tree must first be noticed and nominated.

The national champion American elm had been growing for more than 260 years before it was discovered by chance in 1977 on the edge of a Kansas wheat field.

Known as the Louis Vieux elm, it is now the only tree in the only state-owned forest in Kansas. The 1½-acre, circular forest, created by the State Legislature in 1981, stands near the site where the Oregon Trail crossed the Vermillion River.

The solitary elm, which is 99 feet tall and spreads its branches out over 133 feet, had been scheduled to be cut down for construction of a county road when a Kansas wildlife official happened to spot it in the rearview mirror of his car.

Oasis for Pioneers

Records show that the tree's shade refreshed weary pioneers whose covered wagons moved westward along the trail. The elm was named for its original owner, a part-Indian, part-French trader who acquired 315 acres—and the tree—in an 1867 Potawatomi Indian treaty.

"Why the elm was never cut down, no one can say," observed Gene W. Grey, assistant state forester. "It certainly stood in the



A champion tree, the venerable Wye Oak spreads its branches out 158 feet. Growing for more than 400 years on Maryland's Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, it is the largest white oak in the United States. As biggest of its species, it is one of 655 trees that appear in the American Forestry Association's National Register of Big Trees.

way of farming a fertile river-bottom field. Maybe it got so big so fast that the cost of cutting it down was too much. The thing we fear now is Dutch elm disease."

Big-tree hunters say that many champions, like the elm in Kansas, are found by chance. For this reason, tree hunters never leave home without a long tape measure, a broomstick or its equivalent—used to determine height—a notebook, a camera, love of trees, and sixth sense for spotting the biggest of a species.

While driving along, even when in a hurry, they may suddenly slam on the brakes, turn around, and go back to put a tape measure

around the trunk of some tree they just passed.

"Wherever I am, I'm always looking at the trees. I've known people who've nearly run off the road because their eyes were on the trees," said Oregon tree hunter Dawson.

At 58, he has been stalking trees for more than 20 years, written books about trees, and given talks about them. He has found at least six of the current national champions—one on an unusual tip from an inmate at the state penitentiary.

Dawson was giving his standard big-tree talk to the prisoners when one said that he knew the

whereabouts of a bigleaf maple that had to be bigger than the existing titleholder. It turned out to be no tall-tree tale. At Jewell Junction, Ore., beside the road in plain view, is the new national champion—101 feet tall, 35 feet around, 90 feet at the crown.

Growing in Cemeteries

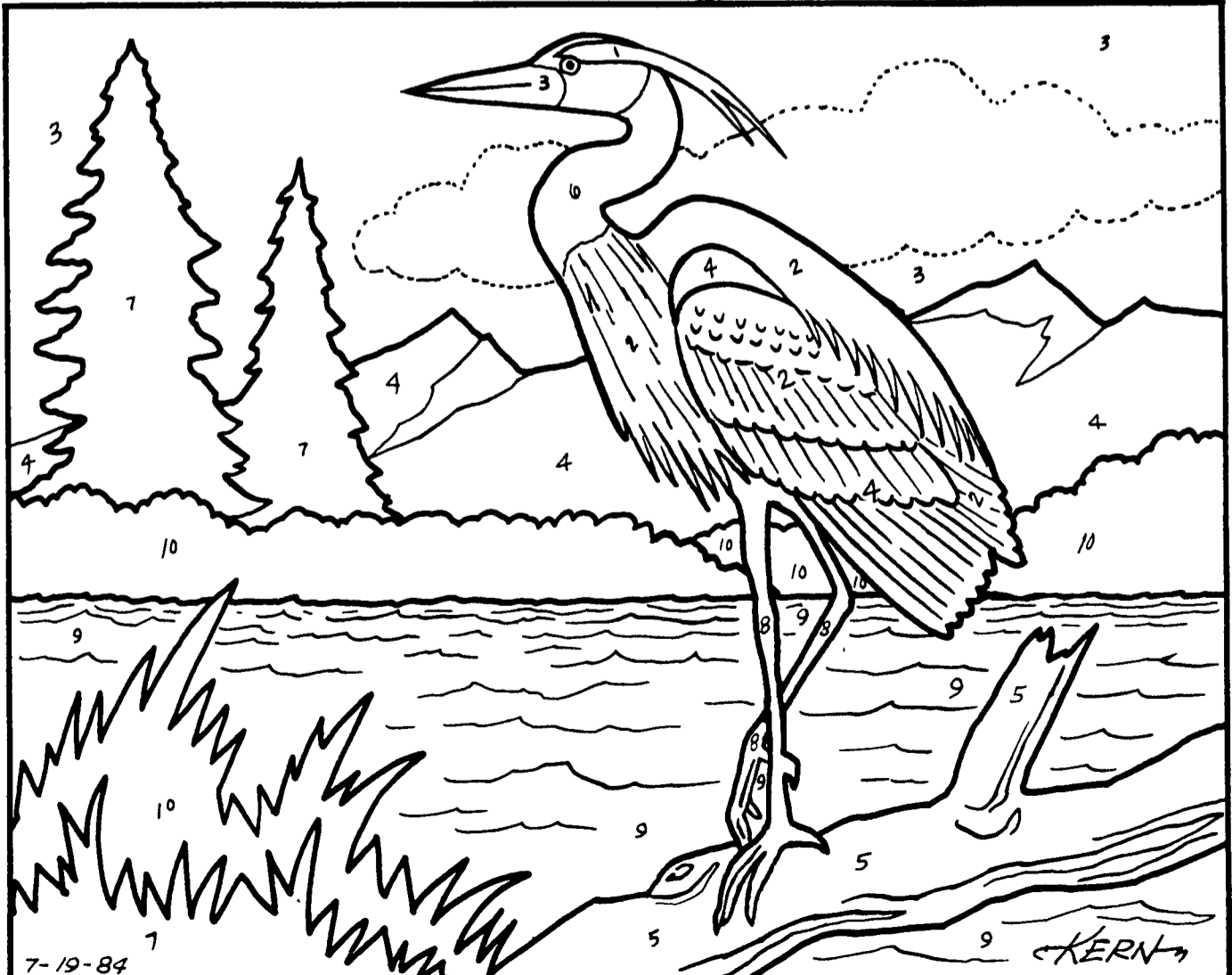
Champion trees, generally older members of the species, are usually found in places where they have had time enough and room enough to grow: old estate lands, national and state parks and forests, yards in older city neighborhoods, along fences, and in cemeteries.

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COLOR THIS!

- | | |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. BLACK | 6. ORANGE |
| 2. LT. GREY | 7. GREEN |
| 3. YELLOW | 8. LT. BROWN |
| 4. BLUE | 9. LT. BLUE |
| 5. BROWN | 10. LT. GREEN |

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THIS BIRD IS OUR LARGEST COMMON WADER. IT FLIES WITH A SLOW REGULAR WING BEAT. THEY USUALLY NEST IN FLOCKS BUT THEY HUNT FOR FOOD ALONE. THE NEST CONSISTS OF LOOSE MASSES OF STICKS BUILT IN TREE TOPS OR IN BUSHES. YOUNG HERONS ARE SCRAWNY, HELPLESS BIRDS FOR SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE THEY LEARN TO FLY.



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