



THE BRANT

VOLUME 3

FRIENDS OF DUNGENESS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

SUMMER 2019

The Dungeness River Supports Western Hemisphere Shorebirds

By Judi White

Tens of thousands of birds from across the Western Hemisphere use the mudflats at the mouth of the Dungeness River as a critical resting and feeding stop during migration. Dungeness Bay is so noteworthy that it has received the designation “Important Bird Area,” identified as being significant habitat for the conservation of bird populations.



Baird's Sandpiper Photo: Judi White



Baird's Sandpiper Photo: Judi White



Dungeness Bay Important Bird Area Photo: Judi White

Over 40 species of shorebirds have been recorded in and around Dungeness Bay, yet only four of these regularly nest in Clallam County: Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, and Black Oystercatcher.

Some of the most abundant migrant species—Black-bellied Plover, Dunlin, and Sanderling—also remain in Dungeness Bay through the winter. These three species are cosmopolitan, nesting in high Arctic tundra around the entire northern Hemisphere then migrating to spend the winter on coastlines throughout the world. Some of their North American populations winter in coastal areas from British Columbia to South America, including our own Dungeness Bay. Studies with Sanderlings have shown that some fly to the exact same sites year after year, both for nesting and for winter.

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REFUGE EVENTS

2019 Dungeness River Festival Friday, September 27th

Learn more about this event at www.dungenessrivercenter.org
Contact Gary if you are able to volunteer for the event.

2019 Volunteer Picnic Thursday, October 17th

Meet at noon at the group picnic area of Dungeness County Park. Please bring a side dish to share. Hamburgers will be provided by Friends.

Friends 2019 Annual Meeting Thursday, November 14th

The Friends Board of Directors will hold their annual meeting along with the regular board meeting on Thursday. If you are interested in learning more about what the Friends do, please join us in the Refuge office conference room at 2:30pm.

Visit the Friends web site:

Learn more about Friends,
become a contributing member,
or make a donation.

<http://www.fodnwr.org>

Dungeness: Important Bird Area *continued from page 1*

Who are the other epic travelers who gather on the Dungeness River mouth mudflats? The most abundant migrants are Least and Western Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plovers, and Short-billed Dowitcher. Of these, Least Sandpipers have the broadest and southernmost breeding distribution, nesting in subarctic tundra and boreal forest across Alaska and Canada. They weigh less than an ounce, yet likely have astounding 2000 mile NON-STOP transoceanic migrations. Western Sandpipers have a restricted breeding range using coastal tundra in Western Alaska and Siberia, then migrate after nesting along the Pacific Coast all the way to Peru. Semipalmated Plovers nest in the subarctic and winter in widespread coastal areas, including Central America. The Short-billed Dowitcher subspecies seen in Dungeness Bay nests in Alaska and winters on the Pacific Coast all the way to South America.

Less abundant migrants are no less epic in their travels. Whimbrels, Marbled Godwits, Ruddy and Black Turnstones, Red Knots, Baird's Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpipers, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers, Spotted Sandpipers and Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs all fly from northern or inland breeding areas on their way to widespread sites along the Pacific Coast, some as far as Tierra del Fuego. The longest-distance champions of these species are Baird's Sandpiper and Red Knot. After departing their high-arctic breeding grounds, Baird's Sandpipers travel all the way to the southern tip of South America. Some complete the entire 9000 mile one-way journey in as few as 5 weeks. Red Knots also fly extraordinary long distances, sometimes flying six to eight days without stopping to rest or feed. Like many shorebirds, adult Red Knots depart the breeding grounds before the young birds, leaving the juveniles to grow and mature before they migrate. The young birds then migrate unaccompanied by adults along a route they have never traveled, to a destination they have never seen.

These astounding feats of migration offer important scientific information on lightweight energy storage and conversion, along with astonishing innate navigation skills. Advances in monitoring migrating birds using GPS and satellite transmitters have added greatly to our knowledge. In 2018, the United States joined partner countries like Japan, Mexico and Russia to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which protected migrating shorebirds across international boundaries and made it unlawful to kill, hunt, sell or possess nests, eggs, or feathers without a permit. Still, the greatest threat facing long-distance migrating shorebirds lies in disturbance and habitat loss at mid-migration stopover sites like the Dungeness River mouth mudflats, their crucial refueling stations.

What's so special about the Dungeness River mouth mudflats? As it descends from the Olympic Mountains, the Dungeness River accumulates rich nutrients from the soil and forest. Flowing into Dungeness Bay, it creates an estuary, where fresh water from land meets and mixes with salt water from the ocean. Estuaries transport and trap nutrients and sediment, providing critical habitat for birds, fish, amphibians, insects and other wildlife. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) calls estuaries "important natural places to the economy and the environment."

Dungeness Bay is one of the premier estuaries in the Pacific Northwest. The "Important Bird Area" includes intertidal and subtidal waters of Dungeness Bay, Dungeness Spit, the Dungeness River Estuary and adjacent wetlands. Dungeness Spit and adjacent intertidal areas also lie within the Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge. Its sandflats and mudflats provide extensive feeding areas for many bird species, including some of the largest eelgrass beds in the Northwest.



Dunlin Photo: Judi White



Black Turnstone Photo: Judi White

Volunteers in Action on the Refuge

2019 has been a busy summer for Refuge volunteers. Here are some examples of volunteers having fun at work this summer.



Weed Warriors in San Juan Island National Wildlife Refuge Photo by L. Davis



Weed Warriors on Matia Island Photo by L. Davis

CONTACTS

Friends of Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge

Mailing Address

715 Holgerson Rd.
Sequim, WA 98382

Web Site

<http://www.fodnwr.org>

Friends Email

fodnwr@gmail.com

Refuge Phone

(360) 457-8451

FRIENDS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ellie Ausmus, President

Bruce Brod, Treasurer

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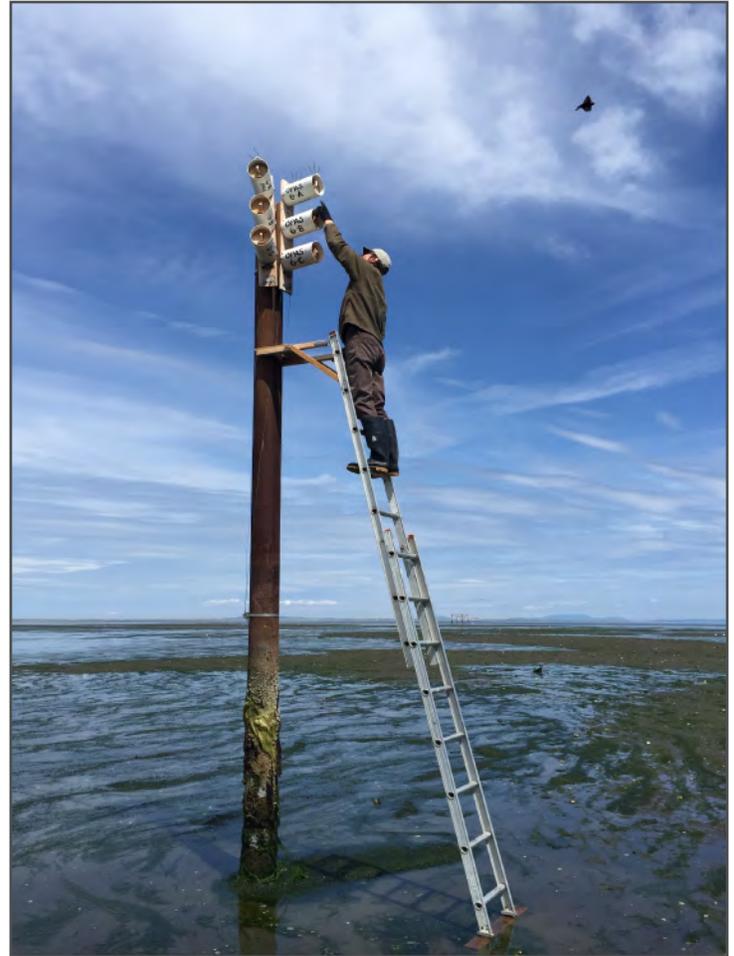
Outreach

Jason West

Refuge Protection



Volunteer Jessie Christiansen on Matia Island Photo by L. Davis



Alan Smith maintaining Purple Martin boxes. Photo by L. Davis



EGC clean up work. Pat Schoen and Rick Mazzotta Photo by L. Davis



Julie Merluccio & Kathy Anderson catching green crabs. Photo by L. Davis



Maintaining Purple Martin boxes. Photo by L. Davis



Volunteers erect deer fencing on Protection Island Photo by L. Davis



Volunteer George Llewellyn and Ranger Gary Tarleton install the first of several new replacement benches on the main trail. The bench being replaced was a relatively new one built by George last year but it was severely damaged in a storm in February. Two older benches are rotten and scheduled to be replaced as well.

Photo by USFWS