



THE BRANT

VOLUME 2

FRIENDS OF DUNGENESS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

SPRING 2021

The Charismatic Bluebird

by Joyce Volmut, *Coordinator OPAS Bluebird/Climate Watch & Co-Chair OPAS Conservation Committee*

Each spring two of the Bluebird species arrive in Western Washington: the western bluebird seeking nesting sites and the mountain bluebird migrating through. Only the western bluebird currently nests here, though the mountain bluebird does nest in other parts of the state and was recently seen at 3 Crabs in the Dungeness Valley.



Male and Female Western Bluebird in Clallam County. Photo by Cindy Fullwiller.

All three of the Bluebird species, the eastern, western and mountain, began to decline in numbers around the turn of the century. This was due to several factors, habitat loss from deforestation, housing development and urbanization, crop-row conversion, the introduction of more aggressive species like the house sparrow, and starling and increased pesticide use that decimated the insect population.

To help increase the species, farmers in the 1920s and '30s began building and installing nest boxes. In the '60s Bluebird Trails were introduced. These trails quickly became popular, first east of the Rockies and later in the southeast and southwest United States. Currently the eastern bluebird is considered residential in much of its range. Although the western and mountain bluebird populations have grown, they are still considered threatened.

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Female Mountain Bluebird at 3 Crabs. Photo by Cindy Fullwiller.

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Bluebirds *Continued from page 1*

The western bluebird has magical qualities. The male feathers are electric blue, the female a powdery grey. It is a member of the Thrush family and like its cousin, the robin sports a russet chest. Unlike the robin however, the bluebird is a secondary cavity nester. It thrives in open woodland, clear cuts and grassy fields bordered by trees and water. Eighty-five percent of its diet is composed of insects caught on the fly. Insects are also the primary food of nestlings.

In March, both the male and female begin searching for nest sites—generally together. They may choose snags, decayed fence posts, abandoned woodpecker holes or nest boxes. The female does most of the building, gathering grass and other plant fibers to line the nest. Two broods are common. A brood may contain four to seven blue eggs. While both parents care for the nestlings, the male takes on primary parenting responsibility once nestlings fledge. At this time the female must begin building the second nest.



Male Mountain Bluebird at 3 Crabs. Photo by Cindy Fullwiller.

For the past five years the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society (OPAS) has been helping the western bluebird by building and installing nest boxes, on private land with aid from local residents, and on public land with permission from the Department of Natural Resources. Recently 14 OPAS nest boxes were installed. Four of those are already occupied by western bluebirds.

Unlike the mountain bluebird, the western species is not migratory. They do however leave their breeding grounds for brief periods, moving to lower elevations in winter to forage for berries. In the spring, they tend to return to the same nest sites.

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Bluebirds *Continued from page 2*

Since 2017, the OPAS Bluebird project has been a part of National Audubon Climate Watch. The Bluebird species is one of the target birds. Twice each year, volunteers collect data to learn more about Bluebirds, where they winter and nest. The winter survey was from January 15–February 15 this year and the summer is coming up soon from May 15–June 15.

Climate Watch was created as a means of testing a National Audubon study of 604 North American bird species. The purpose was to see the effect of climate change on birds. Data was gathered from 140 million bird records. This resulted in a 2019 report “Survival By Degrees.” Alarmingly the study found that two-thirds of the North American bird species are vulnerable to extinction as ranges contract with global warming. Some birds like the western bluebird may see the range expand while others like the Rufous Hummingbird may suffer serious consequences as their range contracts. From the study Audubon concluded that climate change is one of the greatest threats birds face. There may be hope because of the relationship between people and birds. The story of the bluebirds is testimony of what happens when people help.

For more information about Audubon “Survival By Degrees” and what it means for birds in our area visit: www.audubon.org

For more information about the OPAS Bluebird Watch or if you would like to volunteer visit: www.olympicpeninsulaaudubon.org/western-bluebird-study

Rough Seas

It seems to happen every few years. On Sunday, March 28, 2021 the outcome was better than it was six years ago. The weather forecast included a gale warning but the day started out deceptively calm. A group of kayakers headed toward the lighthouse only to have a strong west wind arrive during their journey. Winds grew to 50 mph, as forecast, and waves to four feet. An observant resident noticed the kayakers struggling and reported it to authorities.

U.S. Coast Guard Air Station Port Angeles dispatched a boat and helicopter. The two kayakers in distress were rescued and returned to John Wayne Marina in good health. Others in the group returned under their own power.

A similar scenario unfolded in 2015 where out-of-town kayakers paddled to the lighthouse, ignoring the forecasted gale warning. On their return trip the wind went from calm to gale force within minutes and two in the group perished, a third was left in critical condition.

This is a good reminder to always check weather conditions before heading out on the water and be prepared for conditions to change rapidly.

Two-thirds of North American birds are at increasing risk of extinction from global temperature rise.

Survival by Degrees

www.audubon.org



Ideal paddling conditions can change within minutes. Check the forecast first.

Refuge Volunteer Program Update

by Dave Falzetti

Hello Refuge Volunteers, I hope this message finds you healthy and vaccinated. I really hoped we'd be back in action by now but here we are at the beginning of May and still not able to resume normal operations. As I'm sure you are aware, Clallam County is currently in the high transmission risk category, so the Refuge Volunteer program remains mostly in a "holding pattern." We really need to be in the low risk category to begin normalizing volunteer activities. So, unfortunately, we're going to have to be patient a little while longer.

As soon as the County is in the low transmission category we can move forward with our requests to approve specific activities like fee counting, trash runs and beach clean-ups. Those requests will require approval of a job hazard analysis and what's referred to as a phased recovery plan document. However, even if an activity is approved it could be suspended later if conditions deteriorate. Activities that require public contact will probably be the last to resume.

I know people are eager to return to volunteering, especially those who are vaccinated, but we're not quite there yet. Please remain vigilant. It would be a shame for you or a loved one to fall victim to the virus after so much effort to avoid it. Thank you all for your incredible patience and I look forward to seeing you all back in the Refuge soon.

Cheers, Dave



A mature bald eagle soars above the Dungeness Spit.



A busy Tuesday afternoon in April. The pandemic continues to make the Refuge a popular destination.

2021 Maxwell Awards

The Friends have selected two Sequim High School seniors to receive the John and Margaret Maxwell Future of Conservation Award. Irina Roybal and Rylie Hough were selected as this year's recipients. We'll have more information on our web site and in the next edition of *The Brant*.

If you're interested in supporting the Maxwell Award for 2022 please visit: www.fodnwr.org/maxwell.html to learn more or make a donation to help us support next year's senior class graduates pursuing careers in environmental science or wildlife conservation.



John and Margaret Maxwell were honored by Friends at the 2019 Volunteer Banquet.

Friends Host First Online Event

On March 16th, Friend hosted their first online educational event. *Birds of the Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge* by Judith White was well attended. In case you missed it, a recording of the event is now available on the Friends web site. It's a great introduction to birding at our refuge and the surrounding areas.

Would you like to see more events like this? What topics would you suggest? Please let Friends know what would be of interest to you. Email us at: fodnwr@gmail.com



Birds of Dungeness event now available to watch online.

New Sign Installed at Cline Spit

A new sign has been installed at Cline Spit County Park to help educate and inform visitors of the boating regulations in and around the Refuge. The map will help direct non-boating visitors to the Refuge entrance.



New sign should help orient visitors and educate about accessing the Refuge.



Kelp in the spring sunshine.

WCC Removes Toxic Logs from Spit

Usually the sound of chain-saws on the Dungeness Spit would be cause for alarm. In April, however, it was a good thing. Washington Conservation Corps sent a crew to remove creosote logs that have washed up on the spit.



Moving logs down the beach for removal.



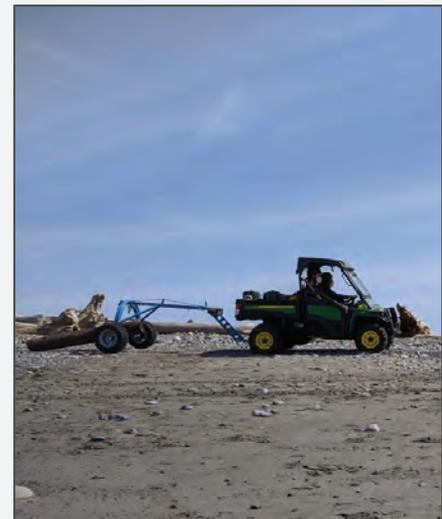
Workers stack logs as they prepare to load the truck.

Did you know you can earn money for Friends while shopping on Amazon?

Sign up for AmazonSmile and select Friends as your designated charity and Amazon will donate 0.5% of the price of your eligible purchase to Friends.

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WCC workers drag toxic logs back to their truck for loading.

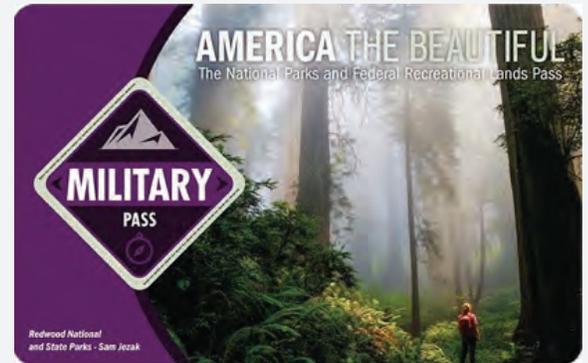


Ready for loading and transport.

Changes to the America the Beautiful Military Pass in 2021

Expanded eligibility includes Veterans and Gold Star families

On Veterans Day 2020, Gold Star Families and U.S. military veterans became eligible to receive free access to more than 2,000 federal recreation areas, including national parks, wildlife refuges, and forests. The free access program is a way to thank America's veterans and Gold Star Families for their support of our country and to encourage them to explore recreational opportunities on their public lands and waters.



What is the Military Veterans and Gold Star Family Free Access Program?

The Interagency Annual Military Pass has been expanded to include both veterans and Gold Star Families. On November 11, 2020, agencies began issuing Interagency Military Passes to veterans and Gold Star Families upon request and with proof of eligibility as described below.

The entrance fee waiver does not cover expanded amenity or user fees for activities such as camping, transportation, special recreation permits, reservation fees or special tours.

Who is eligible to gain free entrance as a veteran?

For purposes of this program, a veteran is identified as an individual who has served in the US Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, and is able to present one of the following forms of identification or the Interagency Military Pass when entering federal lands that charge an entrance fee:

- Department of Defense Identification Card (CAC Card)
- Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)
- Veteran ID Card
- Veterans designation on a state-issued U.S. driver's license or identification card

Who is eligible to gain free access as a member of a Gold Star Family?

Gold Star Families are next of kin of a member of the US Armed Forces who lost his or her life in a "qualifying situation," such as a war, an international terrorist attack, or a military operation outside of the United States while serving with the US Armed Forces. Eligibility requirements are in section 3.2 of Department of Defense Instruction 1348.36.

Does the waiver include others traveling with the veteran or Gold Star Family member?

Free access is for the veteran or the holder of the Gold Star Family voucher as well as travelling companions who are occupants of a single, private non-commercial vehicle OR the veteran or voucher-holder and three persons (16 and older) where per person fees are charged. The voucher is non-transferrable and void if altered.

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For additional information please visit:

<https://www.nps.gov/planyourvisit/veterans-and-gold-star-families-free-access.htm>

What agencies are participating in the free access program?

The program waives entrance or standard amenity fees for the following agencies:

- National Park Service
- Bureau of Land Management
- Bureau of Reclamation
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

How does a veteran gain free entrance to federal fee lands?

On federal lands that charge an entrance fee, a veteran will need to present one of the following forms of identification to receive a free annual Interagency Military Pass:

- Department of Defense Identification Card (CAC Card)
- Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)
- Veteran ID Card
- Veterans designation on a state-issued U.S. driver's license or identification card

It's especially important to obtain the annual Interagency Military Pass to display on the vehicle dashboard at unstaffed sites.

At sites that do not issue annual Interagency Military Passes, showing the above forms of identification will allow free entrance.

How does a Gold Star Family gain free access to federal lands that charge a fee?

Before visiting the site, Gold Star Family members must download and print a voucher to present to federal lands staff, exchange for an annual Interagency Military Pass, or place on the vehicle dashboard at unstaffed sites (representations of the voucher are prohibited; the physical voucher or pass must be present). By downloading and signing the voucher, Gold Star Family members are self-certifying that they meet the required criteria as identified in sections 3.2 and 3.3 of Department of Defense Instruction 1348.36.

Following is the self-certification language on the voucher:

I hereby affirm that I am an eligible next of kin (NOK) of a member of the United States Armed Forces who lost his or her life in a qualifying situation, such as war, an international terrorist attack or a military operation outside of the United States while serving in the United States Armed Forces, as identified in sections 3.2 (Qualifying Situation) and 3.3 (Eligible NOK) of Department of Defense Instruction 1348.36.

How long will free access be available?

Free access for veterans and Gold Star Families will continue indefinitely, unless the Secretarial Order and/or FLREA are amended, superseded, or revoked/expired. The Gold Star Voucher is valid for one calendar year. New vouchers for successive years can be obtained by downloading a new voucher and completing the self-certification (see information in the question above). Annual Interagency Military passes are valid for one year from the month of issuance.

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Are there any costs to participate?

No. The voucher covers entrance fees at national parks and national wildlife refuges as well as standard amenity fees (day use fees) at national forests and grasslands and at lands managed by the National Park Service, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation and US Army Corps of Engineers.

Fees still apply for expanded amenities such as camping, tours and special recreation permits. Reservation fees and fees for organized groups or concession-operated facilities or activities may not be covered by the voucher or Interagency Pass.

What is covered by the free access program?

The voucher covers entrance fees at national parks and national wildlife refuges as well as standard amenity fees (day use fees) at national forests and grasslands and on lands managed by the National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation and US Army Corps of Engineers.

What is not covered by the free access program?

The program does not cover expanded amenity fees such as camping, tours or special recreation permits; reservation fees and fees for organized groups or concession-operated facilities or activities may not be included.

Can current members of the military receive free entrance to federal lands that charge a fee?

Current members of the US Armed Forces and their dependents can enter federal fee lands for free with an annual Interagency Military Pass through the America the Beautiful – the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands (Interagency) Pass Program. There are a total of seven Interagency Passes available.

Are passes available for disabled veterans or other people with disabilities?

Yes. The Interagency Access Pass is a **lifetime** pass that is free for any US citizen or permanent resident, including a veteran or Gold Star Family member, who has a permanent disability. An Access Pass may also provide discounts for expanded amenities like camping, guided tours etc.

Is there a “Lifetime Pass” for Veterans and Gold Star Families?

No. Only an act of Congress to amend the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) can establish a new interagency lifetime pass. The January 2, 2021 FLREA amendment allows for an annual pass for Gold Star Family members, which is being encompassed under the annual Interagency Military Pass. The only authorized lifetime passes are the Interagency Access Pass (free) for persons with permanent disabilities and the Interagency Senior Lifetime Pass (\$80) for persons age 62 or older. These lifetime passes also grant up to 50% discounts for expanded amenities at many federal recreation sites.

What if I have a current Interagency Military Pass or other type of Interagency Pass?

If you have a Military Pass, Access Pass, or one of the other Interagency Passes, you can simply use that pass for free access.

If you have recently purchased an Interagency Annual or Senior Pass, unfortunately no refunds are permitted.

Veterans and Gold Star Family free access vouchers and Interagency Passes are non-transferable.

