



# THE BRANT

VOLUME 3

FRIENDS OF DUNGENESS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

SUMMER 2020

## Virus Creates a Busy Summer for the Refuge Without Volunteers

The Refuge volunteer program has been on hold since mid-March. Since the main volunteer activity is greeting visitors at the entry kiosk, USFWS determined the risks were too great and suspended all on-site activities. Refuge staff have been working remotely when possible and the office remains closed to the public.

While the Refuge never officially closed, the closure of Clallam County Parks meant no access for visitors from March until early May. Since then, it's been a very popular destination, with seemingly more visitors than usual.

Without volunteers to greet and educate visitors, some visitors are not following rules. While poor behavior may be frustrating to see, it is important that volunteers not interact with the public.

Three of the more interesting events of the summer include: 1) a sinkhole developed in the main parking lot, which made for some creative parking. It's been determined not to be a significant issue. 2) a small plane landed on the Dungeness Spit. It did not appear the plane was having issues. The pilot took off shortly after landing. 3) In late August a sailboat ran aground on The Spit. It remained there for several days before being towed away.



Stranded on The Spit. Photo: USFWS



No, this is not the new parking lot design. Visitors got creative with the limited parking making three rows of vehicles. Photo: USFWS

## Refuge Update

by Dave Falzetti

Hello Refuge Volunteers, I hope this message finds you safe and healthy at home. We had hoped to be back in action by now, but that didn't quite work out. As the "busy" summer season ends, it appears there is no end in sight to the global pandemic. As you must have already guessed, there will be no picnic this year. We encourage you to picnic with those in your "bubble." We'll simply have to eat twice as much next year.

There has been one bright spot in the otherwise silent Volunteer program. We recently received approval from the Regional Office to resume limited mission critical habitat management activities utilizing specific trained Volunteers. That approval came with a long list of precautions and requirements. Although far from normal operations, it's an encouraging first step towards a distant return to normal operations. However, even those activities will be extremely limited at first, consisting primarily of established Weed Warrior projects. There are no new Volunteer opportunities at this time. I know it's not much, but it's a start. Hopefully more will follow.

For now please stay home and stay healthy. Hopefully we can regroup next year. Thank you all for your incredible patience. I look forward to seeing you all back on the Refuge soon.

— Dave

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## A Note from the President

by Jason West

Well, I'd hoped 2020 was going to be the "Year of Awareness for Friends" but it seems 2020 had other plans. For the second year in a row Dungeness Discovery Day was postponed. Last year it was the government shutdown. This year the pandemic. I'd like to be optimistic and say perhaps we can make it happen next summer, but the reality of the amount of planning required for an event like this means that isn't very likely. That's okay. We'll resume planning again when it is safe to do so and we can safely host a large event.

Hopefully we'll get back to volunteering together again soon. Until then we can all still go enjoy the Refuge as visitors. While there we can lead by example and practice leave-no-trace principles.

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# Gulls of Our Region

by Judith White

Adaptable, intelligent, opportunistic—during summer we have an excellent opportunity to see and learn about our region’s gulls. In the summer, Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge and Protection Island National Wildlife Refuge, both parts of the Washington Maritime National Refuge Complex, are literally packed with both resident and migrating gulls. Dungeness Bay is also designated as an Audubon Washington Important Bird Area, and a viewing platform at Dungeness Landing County Park affords good views of the gulls in the Bay. The Three Crabs Nearshore and Estuarine Restoration Area, a Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Viewing Area along Dungeness Bay, is also a great place to view the gulls. Protection Island can be seen well from Marlyn Nelson County Park at Port Williams, Panorama Vista County Park, Miller Peninsula State Park and Diamond Point.

Our resident gulls, fondly nicknamed “Olympic Gulls” by local birders, are usually hybrids of large pink-legged and pale-winged gulls from the north (Glaucous-winged Gulls) and large pink-legged and dark-winged gulls from the south (Western Gulls). Gull hybridization is fairly common where similar species overlap, and, unlike many hybrid animals, gull hybrids are usually not sterile and raise chicks just like normal. Protection Island, a National Wildlife Refuge and Important Bird Area at the entrance to Discovery Bay, is the largest breeding colony of Glaucous-winged Gulls in the state, with several thousand breeding pairs. Researchers estimate that about half of the nesting gulls at Protection Island look like pure Glaucous-winged Gulls and the other half look like hybrids. Gulls take two to four years to attain their distinctive adult plumage, so be on the lookout for first-year brownish-gray or later splotchy “in-between” immature birds.

From summer through winter, the Strait of Juan de Fuca is a magnet for migrant gulls arriving from all over North America. During June to October, our resident gulls are joined by thousands of California Gulls that migrate here from their nesting grounds on islands in inland lakes, mostly from the prairie provinces of Canada and Great Salt Lake



Glaucous-winged Gull face Photo: Bob Boekelheide



Gulls in a feeding flock Photo: Bob Boekelheide



Adult Heermann's Gull Photo: Bob Boekelheide

in Utah. Salt Lake City even has a statue commemorating the California Gull's role in ridding the settler's crops of plagues of grasshoppers, and the California Gull ironically is the state bird of Utah. California Gulls are often joined by Ring-billed Gulls, distinctive for their black-encircled bills. Ring-bills are also migrating to inland nesting sites. On open water, lovely Black-legged Kittiwakes and Sabine's Gulls will be passing offshore on their way to nest in Alaskan sea-cliffs or arctic tundra ponds. Northern-nesting gulls spending the winter here also include dainty Mew Gulls and Bonaparte's Gulls, larger Iceland Gulls, and Herring Gulls.

Heermann's Gulls, with their flashy red bills, gray bodies, and black legs, arrive here in summer after nesting in the Gulf of California. They disperse northwards only for the later summer and fall season, retreating in winter to California and Mexico. These distinctive gulls may often be seen at Dungeness National Wildlife Refuge.



Iceland (Thayer's) Gull with Glaucous-winged Gulls  
Photo: Bob Boekelheide



Western Gull between two Glaucous-winged types  
Photo: Bob Boekelheide



Second-year California Gull Photo: Bob Boekelheide

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