



THE BRANT

WINTER

FRIENDS OF DUNGENESS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

2022

Beauty Circles Into the Air, Nourishes the Soul

by Laura Davis

Our calendars organize and frame our expectations; this is Swan Season. With such robust Trumpeter Swan numbers returning to our Sequim-Dungeness area in the autumn of 2020, we watched the skies early this past fall and had to simply hold onto our hats. Predictions of colder and wetter than average weather due to La Niña were verified with rain and strong winds across the Salish Sea, which may have diverted or delayed the swans' migration across from British Columbia. Following the deep freeze of late December, additional waves of swans arrived, doubling our tallies and adding another unique season to our ten years of citizen-science data. Questions of "how many" and "why fewer" circle, linger and take flight from the tongue: comparisons with the past and what these data mean for the future. When monitoring for migratory wildlife in winter, we look for indications of a successful breeding season, as well as the flocks' targeted return to an environment that provides sustenance in rich and diverse habitats. *continued page 3*



The primitive trail on a snowy morning February 2022. Photo: Jason West



Trumpeter Swans glean in corn field after harvest. Photo: Dee Renee Ericks

Follow Friends
on social media



@FriendsOfDNWR

Refuge Volunteer Program 2022 Update

Hello Refuge Volunteers, I hope this long-awaited update finds you all well. As we wake up from the long winter, I wanted to give you a brief update regarding the Volunteer Program. As you know, we've had a two-year hiatus, an unprecedented occurrence. Except for the Friends of DNWR, and the Weed Warrior team who did a little bit of work here and there, there have been no substantial Volunteer activities since March of 2020. In fact, we only recorded 1,000 volunteer hours in 2020, and just 106 in 2021. Normally we would have around 12,000 Volunteer hours per year.

I'm pleased to report that at the end of February we resumed two additional activities, lighthouse trash runs, and much needed trail maintenance. We chose these activities specifically because of their isolated nature. The current plan is to ramp up slowly. As the pandemic subsides, we are planning to increase Volunteer activities a little bit at a time.

The European Green Crab Team is currently preparing for another season of trapping, the Weed Warriors are planning projects, and we are discussing how to do an online refresher. However, some activities such as kiosk and fee station staffing, which normally start in April, remain difficult to safely implement. Fee counting, which has continued over the last 2 years with just two staff members, remains a challenge. Trail roving, on the other hand, is likely to begin soon. Resumption of these activities is reliant on a much lower level of virus transmission in our community.

You will be receiving 2022 timesheets soon. We'll also be issuing new updated Volunteer Service Agreements.

With some luck, we're hoping 2022 will be a productive year rebuilding the Refuge's Volunteer Program. Our focus will be on getting current Volunteers back in action rather than recruiting new ones. Volunteering as we move forward is likely to look a little different. I don't anticipate gathering for a refresher or working side by side in the immediate future. Masking is likely to continue, especially for certain activities, and additional safety protocols will be implemented, but I think things will slowly evolve and 2022 will begin to look more like the good old days.

Perhaps we will even be able to enjoy a picnic together.

Your incredible patience has been much appreciated. It will be even more critical going forward, especially when we begin interacting with visitors again. There's a lot of anxiety in our world and it's important people are able to connect with nature and reduce their stress levels. Refuges are a great place to do that. As such, our 2022 goal is harmony. We want both Volunteers and visitors to have a safe, peaceful, and relaxing experience when visiting the Refuge, even if it means compromising on compliance. Our focus this year will be on rebuilding the Volunteer program and reconnecting people with nature. It's been a long struggle, but good things are on the horizon. I look forward to seeing you all back in the Refuge.

Cheers, Dave Falzetti

CONTACTS

**Friends of Dungeness
National Wildlife Refuge**

715 Holgerson Rd.
Sequim, WA 98382

www.fodnwr.org

Friends Email
fodnwr@gmail.com

Refuge Phone
(360) 457-8451

FRIENDS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ellie Ausmus, Secretary

Bruce Brod, Treasurer

Jessie Christiansen

Linda Gutowski

Jeanie McNamara, Vice Pres.

Jason West, President

Judith White

FRIENDS COMMITTEES

Environmental Education
Linda Gutowski

Environmental Restoration
Jessie Christiansen

Membership
Ellie Ausmus

Outreach
Jason West

Refuge Protection
Judith White

Beauty Circles *continued from page 1*



Trumpeter swans take off from Kirner Pond at dawn. Photo: John Gussman

Complexity (and mystery) are inherent in the work of the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society (OPAS) Swan Team. Our regular observations tease out local patterns – over space (the fields, bays, marshes and ponds) and time (the 24-hour day, across weather systems, the lunar month, the season). But it is the *grace* of the swans, *engagement* with the spirit of place, and the *sharing* of that experience with others that draws us in and binds the community finding meaning in these studies.

*Taken with beauty
our joy also circles up.
Aloft with the swans.*

The Pacific Coast population of Trumpeter Swans that overwinter in western Washington spends the breeding season along Alaska's south-central coastal plain, and the interior boreal forest and taiga habitats of Alaska, western Yukon and northwestern British Columbia. Studies show that the positive effects of summer habitats expanding northwards due to extended ice-free periods have outweighed the negative effects of wetland shrinkage in those

habitats due to climate change. Researchers suggest that it is the availability of sufficient wintering habitat that may ultimately control and limit swan-population growth. We can certainly see the changes in habitats and land use in our local area, with agricultural and pasture land converted to home lots, and development encroaching on wetlands and small lakes. While the swans are surprisingly tolerant of roadway use during their daytime foraging, they are most sensitive to direct human disturbance at their roosting sites where there is also a negative association with nighttime lights.

This season, we are recovering from the toll on the psyche caused by Kirner Pond power-line injuries and casualties we witnessed last year. Many individuals made a positive impact by funding the power-line removal, both personally and through the Friends of Dungeness NWR. The generosity of the local community generated the funds needed to underground that span of Clallam PUD and Wave Cable wires adjacent to this important swan overnight roosting site. That work was completed in August and September, prior to our first swans' arrival on the 27th of October.

This year we watched the swans returning to roost at Kirner Pond (also known as Gaskell Slough). Although this man-made pond and slough was originally created for irrigation, it provides a regular roosting spot that is an especially important refuge for swans and other waterfowl when local waterfowl hunting season is underway. The swans consistently take off from the water and gain height – or lift – by flying into the wind. This season, in the absence of the power lines, swans did not have to gain as much height. The swans flew lower, just clearing the

willows at the road edge. Watching the swans mobilize at dawn, it has been easy for our volunteers to imagine how in previous years, at that height, the swans would have hit the lines in their flight path. With these hazards removed, swan families with juveniles have been able to depart the roosting site for daytime foraging earlier in the day.

Familiarity with a site and its features helps the swans learn practical flight paths and the safe negotiation of difficult-to-see hazards. Last summer, a local farm field



Comparison of the road edge of Kirner Pond, before and after power-line removal. Photos: John Gussman

that is edged and bisected with power lines was planted with corn for the first time in our team's ten years of surveying. Numerous late-autumn casualties caused alarm as well as quick response from PUD, WDFW, and swan-team volunteers. PUD promptly removed a power-line segment used only during irrigation season.



Trumpeter Swan at daybreak. Photo: Bob Phreaner

Line markings are a practical solution to improve the swans' visibility of power and telecommunications lines during low light. Power-line burial is an expensive proposition; look at the extensive matrix of overhead power lines throughout the human environment. With support and some cost sharing from PUD due to the identified hazard and the PUD Avian Protection Plan, the farmer has requested the under-grounding of power lines adjacent to these fields to prevent future bird injuries.

OPAS works with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Clallam PUD to identify areas of known or likely future hazard. Since the issues last year at Kirner Pond, an OPAS volunteer specialized in avian protection with Pacific Northwest utilities has worked to provide PUD with recommendations for the state-of-the-art marking configuration using diverters hung on the wires. These diverters incorporate a combination of motion, reflectivity, and glowing light to reduce bird strikes. The design requirements and features of the various diverter models are most effectively used in combination. OPAS is working with PUD to initiate a proactive approach of marking the power lines by identifying line segments



Again, this year, some team members assisted WDFW and helped protect farm fields from incurring swan damage before harvest. Photo: Shelly Ament, WDFW

deemed most vulnerable on the basis of past mortality, the proximity of lines to swan-usage areas, and both present and future farming practices. Our goal is to mark the lines during fair weather as time permits rather than during the winter outage season.

Improved swan-safe roosting and foraging in our human-modified environments is certainly an important side benefit of volunteers' engagement in our local place. Quietly observing nature is a gift to ourselves – focused but unhurried. Peaceful. Those of us who rise early to count sunrise swan takeoffs experience the rituals of the early morning – preening, chattering, family groups milling around the pond, patterns of body language, murmurings, as well as group response to the distant gunfire or a flock of Canada Geese overhead. Then, several heads bob. No – false alarm. Perhaps a few powerful stretches of the body high above the water. Wings extend. Then, white wings in unison, a group flaps, flaps, and lifts off into the wind.



Swan Team volunteers count swans as they fly from their roosting site. Photo: John Gussman

They bank, circle about, and direct themselves out toward forage. Our gaze follows, out toward the horizon.

Our foraging and roosting surveys are pandemic safe. We each contribute one to two shifts monthly for five months. Pairs of trained volunteers drive about 25 miles to survey all the Sequim-Dungeness fields, pastures, marshes and ponds the swans may use for midday foraging. Then, a smaller group of early-bird volunteers collaborate once a month for synchronous counts of swans at known roosting sites. We arrive at the sites while it's still dark, count and age the swans around sunrise as they fly out. Their flights are quite an amazing spectacle rewarding those with a sense of adventure, warm clothes, good eyes and excellent optics. Please contact **OPAS** if you would like to join the winter swan team.

Thanks to Bob Phreaner and John Acklen for the knowledge and insights they have provided on Kirner Pond and the power-line mitigation options, and to OPAS swan colleague Liam Antrim for his review of this article. If you are interested in reading more on the Kirner Road project, the swans that visit our area, and the local survey work, please see:

The Brant, Autumn 2020 issue

The Conservation Matters and Swan Study webpages and the *Harlequin Happenings* newsletter all on the OPAS website at olybird.org.

Drone photography at Graysmarsh helps us verify that we have counted all the swans during dawn takeoff from this remote landscape.
Photo: John Gussman



The BIG Beach Cleanup

The Weekly “Trash Run” to the Lighthouse

By Ellie and Mark Ausmus

Many of you have participated in the monthly beach cleanups on the Spit by getting ferried out to various mile markers to clean specific portions of the Spit. You might be interested in hearing about the BIG beach cleanup that occurs every week and is fondly known as the “trash run.” The drivers of the Refuge’s UTV take turns heading out to the lighthouse to empty the cans in the wonderfully-named fenced “trash corral,” just off the beach on the main trail to the lighthouse. The corral boasts five 50-gallon cans to collect trash that hikers to the lighthouse helpfully deposit from their own picnics, or more often, items they pick up along the way and haul to the lighthouse. Without the help from these visitors, the Spit would look like a dump! We also empty the cans at the base of the Spit and the ones at the kiosk.

Rick and Roberta DeWitt and Mark and Ellie Ausmus recently completed the first two of these runs after the difficult two-year COVID-induced hiatus from volunteer work that we’ve all had to endure. Our spiffy rig was a new Polaris Ranger 3-seater complete with solid doors (rather than nets), not just two but four cup holders, and, as Rick described it, “A great turning radius; you could probably run into yourself.” Mark and I laughed when Rick said no less than four times in his trip report, “Did I mention I really like this new rig?”

Both of the initial trash runs hauled back an astounding amount of stuff, in the bed of the UTV and in a little utility trailer. Even after Rick and Roberta’s efforts, Mark and I loaded seven huge full garbage bags at the lighthouse, plus about a half dozen crab buoys, coils of rope, piles of that strange black plastic mesh we find on the beach, and last but not least, a blue plastic snow shovel. We had just enough room to add one tire to Mark’s carefully lashed-down load, but had to leave three more along the Spit for the next trash run. We added several more full bags at the bottom of the Spit, plus a pink plastic boat seat. Our new maintenance guy, Glenn, said Lorenz has told him it will be his new desk chair.

Both runs enjoyed good weather and smooth sand. It felt wonderful to be wearing our uniforms again (but of course, we forgot our name tags!). As Rick put it so beautifully, “This was work, but fun!”



Ellie and Mark at the lighthouse.



Photo: Ellie Ausmus



Photo: Rick DeWitt

Maxwell Award Applications

Friends are currently accepting 2022 Maxwell Award applications from Sequim area high school seniors interested in pursuing an environmental or conservation related college degree. Learn more about the Maxwell Award or download the application here: <http://fodnwr.org/maxwell.html>

The deadline to apply is April 15, 2022. Donations to support this scholarship can be made to Friends via our web site or by mail. Please make checks payable to FODNWR and write Maxwell Award in the memo section. Thank you.

New USFWS Websites

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recently upgraded all of the Agency's many hundreds of websites. The beautiful websites that we've all enjoyed for well over a decade have become obsolete and are therefore being retired. The information on those sites has migrated into a new centralized content management system (CMS). It's more than just a website platform, it's a true data system. The CMS is more efficient, more adaptable, and can be seamlessly expanded as needed. It centralizes all our information and dramatically increases accessibility. It also has an attractive user friendly interface.

For Washington Maritime NWRC the upgrade to a CMS means we can now manage our own websites in real time while being able to draw content from the entire system. For example, a photo or any type of document uploaded by any office, refuge, or hatchery anywhere in the country is instantly accessible to the entire Agency. Imagine how much information has been gathered and stored at individual stations, entire library collections. With the new CMS we can now begin sharing that information across the Nation. It's truly a remarkable upgrade, a massive undertaking. It's also a work in progress so there's still a few bugs, especially when using Internet Explorer. Microsoft Edge appears to work better. The national trails database integration is currently in progress so some of the trail information is out of date. With some luck that will be completed soon.

You can easily search the internet for any National Wildlife Refuge, National Fish Hatchery, or USFWS office or program. Just click on the official fws.gov link. Here's quick links for the 6 refuges in our Complex including Dungeness. Once you are in any of our refuge websites you can check out the "About Us" section for links to all of the others. These are just 6 tiny pieces of a much larger puzzle. Thank you to all those who helped make it possible. We hope you enjoy the upgrade.

– Dave Falzetti

www.fws.gov/refuge/dungeness

www.fws.gov/refuge/protection-island

www.fws.gov/refuge/san-juan-islands

www.fws.gov/refuge/copalis

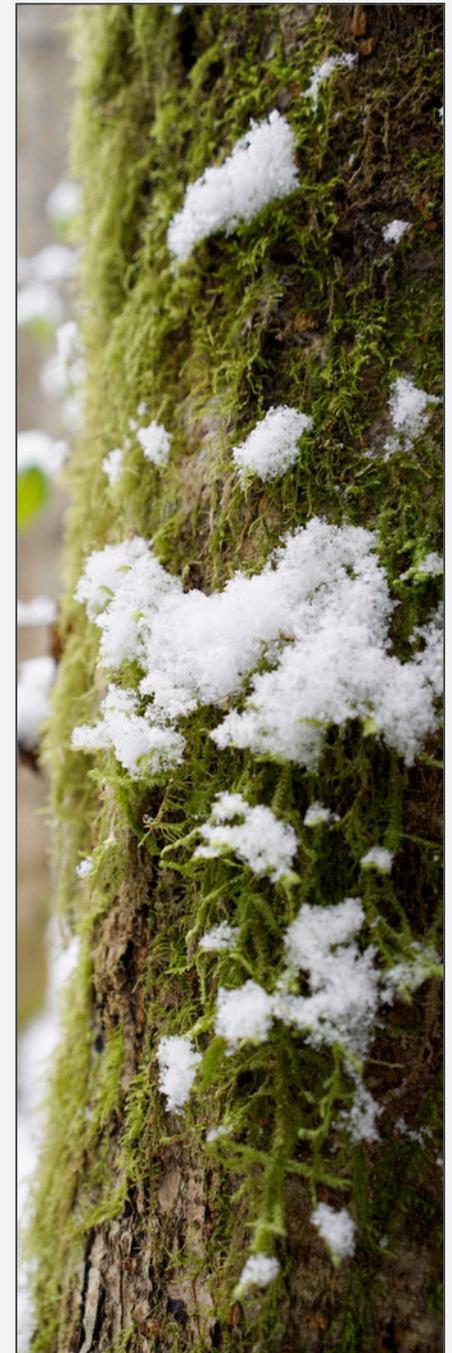
www.fws.gov/refuge/flattery-rocks

www.fws.gov/refuge/quillayute-needles

Donate to Friends today!

DONATE

Click here to visit the
Friends Donation Page
Thank you!



February snow on moss



