

NOVEMBER ALL POINT BULLETIN PART 1

Wild at the Point: Shore and Sea Birds

During the past several years I found an exciting and challenging way to spend the down time that occurs when waiting to do Liferforce's orca protection programs. Yes, I must confess to be a "birdwatcher". But nowadays there are more and more people are seeking birding adventures. In the US it is the fastest growing wildlife-related activity with at least 50 million Americans. Trying to capture a perfect image of wildlife by camera takes patience, skill and some luck. Every species also has very interesting life stories. You can challenge yourself and friends by seeing how many you can each find and photograph.

There is diversity of shore and sea birds living in or migrating through Point Roberts. While many others can be seen I will list mainly the 40 plus species that I have recently seen. You can read a lot more about them in books such as "The Sibley Field Guide to Birds of Western North America" and National Geographic's "Field Guide to the Birds of North America".

Waterfowl -Geese, Swans, Dabbling Ducks

Snow Geese were flying over as I was photographing for this article. They breed on Arctic tundra from Russia to Greenland and winters in Mexico. Brant geese start arriving from the North America tundra in November and stay through to May. American Wigeon is a common winter resident. They arrive in late August and leave by May when they go to Central America.

There are migratory and resident races of Canada Geese. Decades ago BC hunters crossbred Canada Goose with domestic breeds to have a year-round source for hunting. That is one reason why large populations are seen year round.

Mallard and Gadwall are also found year round. Both will start courtship in the fall and nest by late March. These ducks dabble for plant material at water surface and will graze on land.

Waterfowl – Diving Ducks

Male Harlequin Ducks are darkly coloured with rusty sides and bold white marks. Females are brown with white spot on cheek and white belly. Females may assist in the care of mixed broods.

Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter and Black Scoter can occasionally be seen all on the same day off the park. The white and black Surf Scoters used to be called the skunk-duck. In the spring many gather off Saltspring Island for the Pacific herring smelt. Post-breeding moult migration result in large gatherings along the BC coast. This includes Boundary Bay.

Red-breasted Merganser is one of the fastest flyers. They have been clocked at 160 kilometers per hour.

Long-tailed Duck were previous named Old Squaw but it was changed to be politically correct. I guess some were not "old" or was it the reference to "squaw" that means 'woman', or 'wife' in the Algonquian language?

Greater Scaups were also called “Bluebills”. They were seen in large flocks of 60 plus off the park. They breed in boreal forests worldwide.

Buffleheads’ genus *Bucephala* comes from the Greek word meaning ox-head since they have a similar high domed forehead.

Rarer Birds and Algae Bloom Deaths

Not commonly seen in the area is the red-billed Heerman’s gull. Two birders reported sightings to Liferforce. Most of the entire population nests on one island off Baja California. The rarely sighted Brown Pelicans were not seen this year but were present in 2008.

Not included in any “marine” type families is the Belted Kingfisher who are usually found around the marina. This summer one male was constantly chasing another male in a game or expression of dominance. Kingfishers are in the same family as hummingbirds and woodpeckers.

In October the largest West Coast mortality event occurred when an unusual algae bloom stretching from the northern Oregon coast to the tip of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state killed thousands of seabirds. The majority of seabirds were Common Murres, Common Loons, Red-throated Loons and grebes. You can report these types of wildlife problems to National Marine Fisheries Service (US) 1-800-853-1964 or Fisheries and Oceans (Canada) 1-800-465-4336.

The Shore and Sea Bird Part 2 will be in the December issue. You can view all the “Shore and Sea Birds Report” photos at www.liferforcefoundation.org

Respect and Enjoy Wildlife

While we marvel at the wonders of wildlife please don’t approach, feed or try to touch. They may look cute but they can cause severe injuries. Bread and junk food can kill them. So respect and enjoy them from a distance.

Liferforce Wildlife Reports, Nature Moments videos, and Wildpeace photographs are available at www.liferforcefoundation.org.

Note: This is the sixth article about birds and wildlife on and around the Point in 2009. The other stories are at <http://www.allpointbulletin.com/archives/archives.html>

Donations are greatly appreciated and can be sent to Liferforce, Box 121, Point Roberts, 98281 or Box 3117, Vancouver, BC V6B 3X6. Thank you.