

July 2009 Wildlife Report

On July 3rd Lifeforce spotted the Southern Community orcas off the Westshore Terminals (Tsawassen) heading towards the Lighthouse Marine Park in Point Roberts. J pod was travelling through with no stops or activities such as breaches. Harbour porpoises were also present.

The July 4th US long weekend started with our education display at the Point Roberts' festivities. Many visitors commented on the Lifeforce nature photos that we sell.

The Barn Swallow chicks hatched on July 4th in the park. One of the three eggs was found broken on the ground. Perhaps by it was human tampering. As you can see an egg is about the size of a Canadian loonie.



On July 5th the orcas past Point Roberts at approx. 9:30 am. A Vancouver Watch Watch boat sped in and blocked the pathway way. This is against WA State legislation.



A child watches in awe as orcas pass the park.



Nine Black Oystercatchers were on shore feeding. Previously a photographer was with her boyfriend and I told them that "Some Black Oystercatchers might be on the beach." He replied, "I didn't know anyone could catch oysters here."



Later on July 5th, Lifeforce had the opportunity to view monitoring efforts in both Canadian and American waters. DFO, Straitwatch (a NGO) and Lifeforce were all present off East Point, Saturna. Since there were orcas in Haro Strait many companies had gone to them. Once past East Point it started to get busy as the orcas spread out across Boundary Pass heading south. Straitwatch assisted with a sail boat fire and Lifeforce proceeded with the boat traffic to continue boat monitoring. DFO had left the scene and WDFW came on scene.



In spite of the presence of the Washing Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) some whale watch companies flagrantly violated state legislation by blocking the pathway and not providing a minimum 100 yards clearance for passing orcas. Lifeforce took a series of photographs and forwarded the evidence to WDFW. (Note: An article in the San Juan Journal said that WDFW laid three fines in 2008 and one, so far, in 2009. In 2008 two of the fines were a result of Lifeforce investigation photos.)



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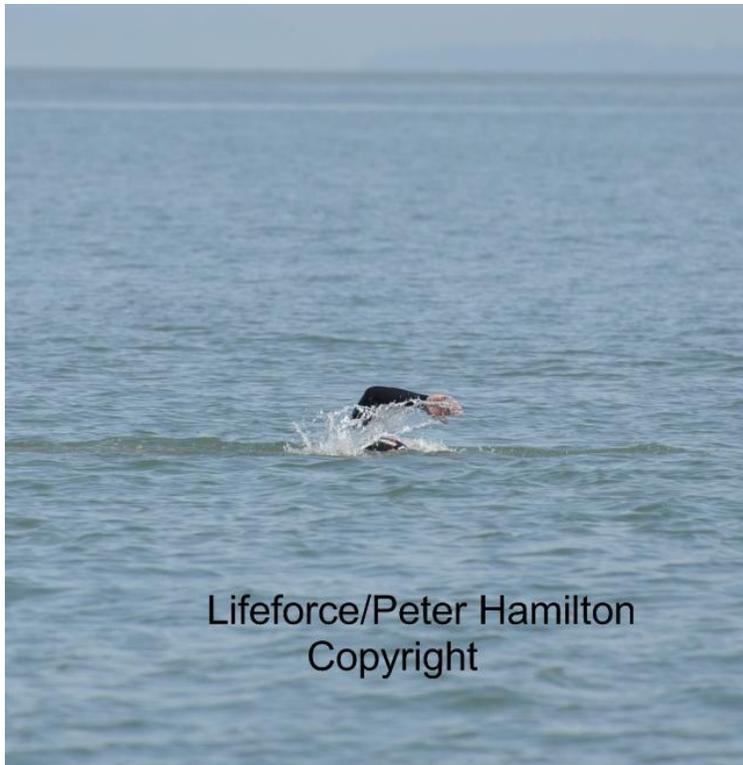
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On July 6th all Resident pods were in the Strait of Juan de Fuca after heading west yesterday. I got some good close-ups of Harlequin Ducks on the shore and in the surf.



On July 11th there was a most unusual creature in Georgia Strait. At first it looked like a seal splashing about with a salmon by a sail boat. Then it happened again by the same boat. I wondered if they were feeding a seal - that is illegal. Upon closer inspection it turned out to be a *homo sapien* swimming accross the strait.



On the light at the marina and the park in Point Roberts were the new born Barn Swallows. What is it with them? They appear to like nesting at the washroom entrances. Perhaps they should be renamed "Head Swallows"?

The two at the marina are flying but mom and dad still catch insects in flight for them.





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The nearly hatched Barn Swallows are not ready to fly and the parents were keeping watchful eyes on them and people passing by.



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The early morning and sunset are the best times to watch Great Blue Herons on the park side of Point Roberts.



It looked like these female House Finches were doing some town hall stomping and a fling.



Great Blue Heron eating an eel after floating on the water to get it.



Looking for lunch.



Barn Swallow feeding time





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Black Osytercatchers feeding on the beach.



And another type of “wild life” watching included these folks did some water skiing on “Lake Bob”. While the Georgia Strait can have waves that cancel ferry sailings there are the calm times.



July 23

One of the Vancouver whale Watch that we have shown you over the years repeatedly violating whale watch guidelines and legislation SANK! The 32 passengers were transferred to their other boat. An investigation is underway.



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For bird watchers it was Harlequin Heaven with 15 in a group off the park. Rhinoceros Auklets feeding in the waters attracted a loud frenzy of gulls and cormorants.



July 24

Great Blue Heron at the Marina



House Finches – the one with the red head is the male



Spotted Towhee



Northern Flicker (This is a Red-shafted Female. Males would have a red moustache.)



Black Capped Chickadee pulling off the bark in search of food



July 25th

It was a very disappointing day with many boats breaking whale watch rules. I started monitoring boat traffic at approximately 3 PM and by 6 PM had gathered many cases of boats harassing the orca. From Swanson Channel into the Georgia Strait it was a disgusting show of boats pursuing the orcas. Approximately 150 photos have been sent to the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Here are some examples:

The passengers on this boat said they were never within 100 meters.



“Vision” driving at a group of orcas



This pleasure boat continuously tried to intercept the orcas to take photos.



For at least one hour this company chased and drove at orcas. One orca slapped the pec fin near the stern – a sign of agitation.



July 26

Red-winged Blackbird



Lifeforce took photographs of a dead Harbour seal reported on the beach in Point Roberts. The photographs were sent to the Whatcom County Stranding Network.



That concludes this month Wildlife Report. Look for the August Wildlife Report with surprises and adventures that are yet to be encountered.

For Freedom,

Peter Hamilton

Lifewatch Boater Awareness Program

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Help Protect People, Animals and Habitats

Lifeforce is a registered Non-Profit Society Registered under the Society Act of BC since 1981 and Lifeforce Ocean Friends is incorporated in WA since 1997. ***Your important donations and memberships fund these important programs. Bequeaths can be made to Lifeforce Foundation. So please Help Lifeforce Help Wildlife.***

Here's the third monthly article that I wrote for the All Point Bulletin that is distributed in Point Roberts and Delta, BC.

Wild At The Point - Eagle Watching

The crowd was getting bigger and bigger with anxious people with cameras in hand. The attraction was not the popular orcas but was an eagle perched on a piling in Lighthouse Marine Park. He was only one hundred feet from those on shore. At one point he caught a fish and return to his perch to eat under the watchful eyes of all. There has been up to five eagles at one time sitting on the old dock pilings.

The majestic Bald Eagles are frequently seen along the shoreline and inland locations at Point Roberts. Eagles are thought to live up to 35 years. The oldest known eagle was a captive who was almost 50 years. The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) states that longevity record for bald eagles in the wild is at least 28 years, but the average life span is often much shorter. Causes of adult mortality include fighting with other eagles, and a variety of human-related causes including shooting, poaching for "parts", electrocution on power lines, vehicle collisions, and poisoning. The ban on DDT in the US helped with their recovery. The " bald" in the eagle's name comes from an Old English word that means white headed.

Eagles are easily identified in adult plumage by their unmistakable brown body set off by a white head and tail. They have bright yellow eyes, bill and talons. Both male and female eagles look identical, but the female is often larger and heavier than the male. Sexual maturity and the characteristic white head and tail are achieved at five years of age along with the beak and eyes turning yellow. The plumage of newly born eaglets is light gray but turns dark brown by the time they leave the nest at 12 weeks. Immature bald eagles are mostly chocolate brown with varying amounts of white over the body, tail, and under the wings. Their eyes are dark brown and the bill is dark brownish black.

Bald eagles are quite timid and opportunistic. Other smaller birds, such as crows, will dive at them trying to steal some food. Their primary prey is fish though they will take some mammals, waterfowl, seabirds and carrion. If a fish is too heavy an eagle will swim to shore with their catch. Their wingspan is between 6 and 8 feet.

Bald eagles mate for life, returning to nest in the general area (within 250 miles) from which they fledged. Once a pair selects a nesting territory, they use it for the rest of their lives.

A local Point Roberts group's "Eagle Eye Protection Program" monitors eagles' nests. In June they met with the US Fish and Wildlife Service agents. There are now two active investigations on the suspected violations of Federal Statutes under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA). One investigation centers around the destruction of a nesting tree and habitat, while the other one centers around the disruption of an eagle pair's nesting activities that caused the eggs to fail.

According to Eagle Eye, of the seven known nests only one nest was successful out of the four nests observed. There are also several night roosts. This is where 5 to 25 transient eagles will perch at night. A transient eagle is an eagle that does not have a territory but comes to Point Roberts to feed during their annual migration patterns. Night roosts are found on the border of two eagle territories where the nesting pairs will allow them to perch and not fight them.

More July Wildlife

There were the familiar sightings of orcas, Harbour porpoises, Harbour seals, Great Blue Herons, Spotted Towhee, Red-winged Blackbirds, Northern Flickers, Harlequin Ducks, Surf Scoters, Rhinoceros Auklets, Black Oystercatchers and the varieties of sparrows, finches and chickadees.

The foraging behaviour of Rhinoceros Auklets is attracting a lot of gulls and Brandt's Cormorants to them. When the "Rhinos" surface with a fish in their mouth other fish are uplifted to the surface. This creates quite a loud frenzy amongst the hungry competitors. Gulls and others will also encircle seals when they surface with their catch of the day.

Of note that when I told some park visitors about the Black Oystercatchers on the beach the guy responded by saying that he didn't know that one could catch oysters here. I guess he would have thought that there were lots of oysters being caught by other races if there were species of Red, White and Yellow Oystercatchers too.

Born on the Fourth of July was not Tom Cruise but the Barn Swallow chicks at the second washroom nest in Lighthouse Marine Park. There are two there and an older two at a marina washroom. What is it with them using these sites when they got their name from nesting in barns? Maybe they should be renamed Head Swallows?

Lifeforce received numerous reports about some great orca behaviours in the evening on July 1st. There were many, many breaches and head viewing as they passed the west side. One person said that it was more activity than he has seen during the past ten years combined.

Respect and Enjoy Wildlife

Point Roberts is a bit of paradise. 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. Junk food can kill them. So respect and enjoy them from a distance.

Lifeforce Wildlife Reports, Nature Moments videos, and Wildpeace photographs are available at www.lifeforcefoundation.org.

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

Look for more Wildlife Reports in the coming months or call Liferforce at 604-649-5258 for current information. Donations are greatly appreciated and can be sent to Liferforce, Box 121, Point Roberts, 98281 or Box 3117, Vancouver, BC V6B 3X6.

Up to five eagles have rested on the park pilings. Adult Bald Eagle with white head, white tail, bright yellow eyes, bill and talons. Immature Bald Eagles with dark brown and white body feathers and bills changing to yellow.



Born On the Fourth of July “Head” Swallows



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Black Oystercatchers in flight



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