The Coasst Line

COASST

News for COASST Citizen Scientists | Spring/Summer 2007

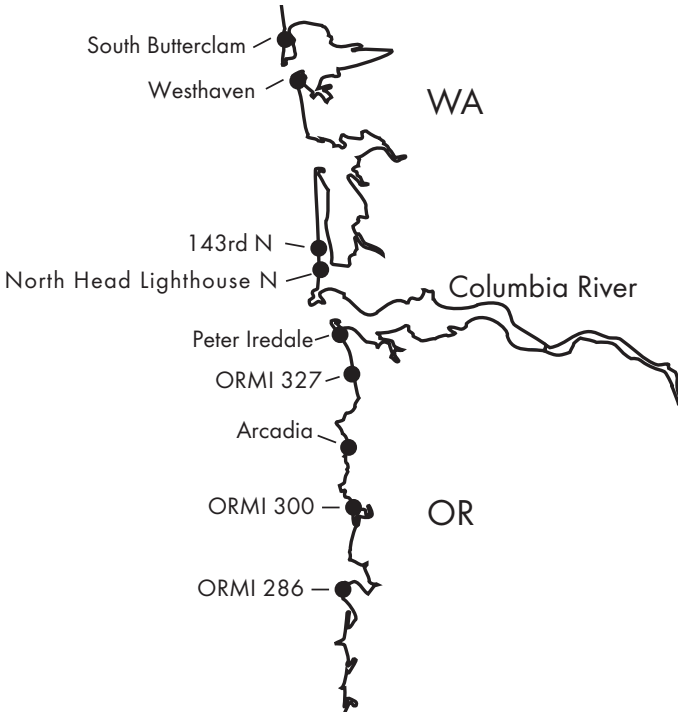
Calling All South Coast (WA) and Oregon North Volunteers—Daily Survey Project Underway

Recently, the COASST office received excellent news—we have been granted funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to explore whether we can use daily wind data to more accurately calculate monthly beached bird deposition. What do we hope to learn?

Currently, most COASST beaches are surveyed once, or maybe twice a month. These surveys give us a snapshot of beached bird deposition for each month. When it comes time to estimate total deposition, we assume that birds arrive on the beach at a monthly interval (conservative) or a weekly arrival and multiply by four–you can find a more detailed description of our methods in *COASST Reports 03-04*. In reality, we know that the number of birds washing up on the beach at any given time is related to the abundance and distribution of live birds, and local oceanographic patterns that impact whether or not floating birds drift onshore.

Every 3-5 days, coastal winds shift: first blowing offshore and pushing surface water (and floating carcasses) out to sea, and then flipping and moving the uppermost layer of the ocean back toward the beach. Starting in June 2007, we'll be ramping up survey effort on select beaches in the South Coast (WA) and Oregon North to conduct a series of 7-10 consecutive daily surveys each month. Why all the extra effort? Daily surveys will help us capture this oceanographic cycle and allow us to determine how surface water movement translates into carcass arrivals to the beach. Because wind data are collected all of the time, we'll be able to use this information to better understand what our monthly survey data really means.

While COASSTers are always contributing to valuable natural resource monitoring, you now have the opportunity to get even more involved in research with this exciting new project! What does this mean for current COASSTers in the area? Your beach may be one of the study sites. If you are interested in helping out with extra surveys, please contact the COASST office (206-221-6893, info@coasst.org). We need your help! Because many of you are already very busy with monthly surveys of your beach, we will also be recruiting new volunteers in the area to help you out. If you have any family, friends, co-workers, or fellow community members who might be interested in joining our team, please urge them to get involved!



These South Coast and Oregon North beaches will be participating in the daily survey study starting in June 2007.

If you would like to receive this newsletter via e-mail in PDF format, please send a request to coasst@u.washington.edu.

Funding Update

Modeling Daily Deposition

COASST received two years of funding, totaling $62,975, from the National Fish and Wildlife Federation (NFWF) to explore whether we can use daily wind data to model carcass deposition. This pilot project will focus on beaches in the vicinity of the Columbia River, with 7-10 consecutive days of surveying planned each month to create a more accurate baseline for carcass deposition patterns. The NFWF project will require a serious increase in local volunteers and yeoman's service on organization and logistics from the main office! But the pay-off, the ability to estimate total carcass deposition from our single monthly samples and wind data, will be huge!

Digital Cameras for Seward!

Thanks to Ami Wright, a COASSTer in Seward, Alaska, the Resurrection Bay Conservation Alliance received $1000 from the Ocean Alaska Science and Learning Center and National Park Foundation's Coastal Marine Resources Grant Program to purchase digital cameras for use on COASST surveys in the Seward area. We truly appreciate the efforts of COASSTers to improve data collection in their local areas. Know about a grant opportunity in your area? We are happy to provide you with the relevant COASST information.

North Coast (WA) COASSTers Be on the look out...

Current Meter (top) and Conductivity-Temperature Sensor (bottom) deployed by the Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary.

The Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary (OCNMS) deploys oceanographic moorings from Makah Bay to Cape Elizabeth each year from late April through early October to gather information on surface currents, phytoplankton productivity, upwelling events and depleted oxygen (hypoxic) events. Occasionally, a mooring breaks free due to storm conditions, vessel entanglement, or vandalism. A lost mooring represents a huge loss of data and equipment, but these lost components often wash up on the beach. So for all of the North Coast (WA) surveyors, please keep an eye out on your COASST surveys to help OCNMS find them! If you do find one, please contact OCNMS at 360-547-6622.

Upcoming Events

JUNE

Orcas Island, WA—Training Session
Saturday, June 16, Camp Orkila, 10am—4pm

JULY

Astoria/Seaside, OR—Training Session
Saturday, July 7, Pacific Grange, 10am—4pm
Cape Meares, OR—Training Session
Sunday, July 8, Cape Meares Community Center, 11am—5pm
Check our website for more details and updates about future trainings and talks.

Everybody's Neighbor: The Glaucous-Winged Gull

We see them eating our refuse, populating our parks, guarding our ferry docks, and painting our cars. They may be seabirds, but many species are ubiquitous on land. You all know who we're talking about—gulls! Even though we see them everywhere, gulls are still some of the most misunderstood coastal birds. Dirty, trashy, on par with pigeons and starlings? COASST thinks it's time we stood up for these fascinating and highly adaptable birds.

One gull species that is definitely worthy of recognition is the Glaucous-winged Gull, the most abundant gull in the Pacific Northwest. Found year-round along the Oregon, Washington, Canadian and Alaskan coastlines and during the winter all the way down to Baja, Mexico, these birds really are "everybody's neighbor." COASSTers from California to Alaska find them washed up on beaches year-round. Glaucous-winged Gulls typically make up 2-5% of all COASST finds each year, placing them among the top 10 COASST species.

Far from being drab and dirty, adult Glaucous-winged Gulls are stocky, regal-looking birds with light grey backs and wings complementing a bright white head, breast and belly. Adult birds even sport flashes of color with their red-spotted yellow bills, pink feet, and dark eyes with pink eye-rings.

Do you recognize this bird? Chances are you are familiar with the Glaucous-winged Gull–it's the most common gull in the Pacific Northwest!

No such luck identifying juvenile glaucous-wings. Unless you are a gull expert, first year and sub-adult gulls are nearly impossible to distinguish at the species level. Therefore, COASST lumps all of these mottled brown adolescents into one category, the LIGU (Large Immature GUlls).

Looks aren't everything though—Glaucous-winged Gulls are intelligent as well! Gull expert, Tom Good, of the Northwest Fisheries Science Center, notes that Glaucous-winged Gulls have an ability to recognize specific people. Good reports that gulls at his study sites can become accustomed to the presence of researchers who visit the sites regularly and allow them to approach their nests. However, if a stranger approaches the nests, the gulls become far more disturbed. It seems that gulls know which neighbors are friendly and which could be hostile.

Most people only observe city-dwelling Glaucous-winged Gulls, so many are under the assumption that the only thing gulls eat is garbage. On the contrary, gulls actually have a huge dietary repertoire and are highly adaptable foragers. Glaucous-winged Gulls hunt for live prey such as fish and shellfish, which they catch by wading in the water, or plunge-diving while in flight or swimming. Others will fish for injured or disoriented salmon at dams. Some enterprising birds will become kleptoparasites, stealing food from other birds. A few will even become cannibals, snacking on their neighbor's chicks. Many will follow fishing boats and feed on discarded fish and bait, while others will "clean up" carcasses on the beach, which is the neighborly thing to do!

Check out these websites for more information about Glaucous-winged Gulls:

www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Glaucous-winged_Gull_dtl.html

birdweb.org/birdweb/bird_details.aspx?id=206

www.adfg.state.ak.us/pubs/notebook/bird/gulls.php

COASST Chats with Tom Good, AKA the Gull Guy

COASST: You've been working at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Northwest Fisheries Science Center (NWFSC) since 2001. Can you tell us a bit about what you do there?

Tom: My job title is fisheries biologist, but I think that ecosystem biologist is a more appropriate description of what I do because I work across a number of disciplines, only one of which is fisheries science. Currently, I am looking at the influence of avian predation on juvenile salmon in the mid-Columbia River.

COASST: So, what's your opinion? Do seabirds have an impact on salmon populations?

Tom: Well, the impact varies from situation to situation. In the lower Columbia River, Caspian Terns and Double-crested Cormorants probably do influence salmon populations, but to what extent is hard to estimate. There are a lot of other factors involved, such as food supply, predation by other species, and human actions that might also account for changes in salmon populations.

COASST: Have you always been interested in salmon?

Tom: Actually, my favorite animals to study are gulls. Before I worked for NOAA, I completed my Master's at the University of New Hampshire, where I worked on gull diet. For my PhD, I traveled to the Pacific Northwest to do field work on Western and Glaucous-winged Gulls on Tatoosh Island and in Grays Harbor. Later, while I was doing my post-doctorate work at Brown University (on fruit flies of all things!), I was able to spend the summers studying Great Black-backed Gulls at Shoals Marine Lab, in Maine. At NWFSC, I still get to study gulls because they eat salmon.

COASST: Our director, Julia Parrish, also does a lot of field-work on Tatoosh. Have you guys ever worked together?

Tom: Definitely, Julia and I go way back. You could even say we laid the groundwork for COASST. Back in 1996, Julia and I decided that daily beached-bird surveys along the outer coast would be a great way to track seabird populations. Our surveys were conducted a little differently than they are today. In the first year, we used nail polish instead of cable ties to mark birds. By 1997, we noticed a huge spike in Common Murre carcasses corresponding to the El Niño event. It was an exciting time and many people in the Ocean Shores area took a real interest in our work. It's neat because these same people went on to become some of COASST's first volunteers.


Courtesy of T. Good

As a Caspian Tern chomps on Tom's finger, he marvels at just how exciting field work with seabirds can be!

COASST: Many COASST volunteers find that their passion for seabirds extends beyond their commitment to COASST. Are there seabirds in your personal life?

Tom: Of course! I take my binoculars everywhere I go—to meetings, vacation spots, and the coast. Birds seem to mark many significant events in my life. In fact, my wife, Beth, and I got engaged on Tory Island, a seabird colony off the coast of Ireland. We were lying on the edge of a cliff, 100 m above the Atlantic, looking down at colonies of Northern Fulmars, Shags, and Atlantic Puffins nesting on the rocks below us. It was spectacular! A rock, known as the Wishing Stone, juts out over the edge of the cliff. Legend says that if you succeed in throwing three stones in a row from the cliff edge onto the flat stone, then you will be granted one wish. We both tried and when Beth asked me what I had wished for, I turned to her and told her that I wished she would marry me. She said yes.

COASST Happenings

MARCH

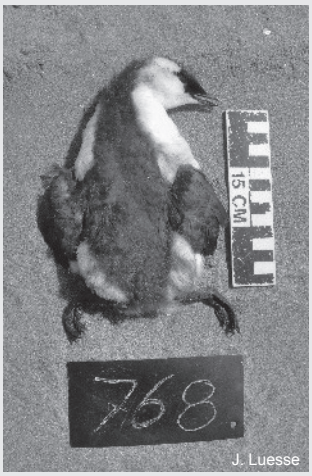
On March 16, Jane led a live seabird identification session for the West Coast Observer Program in Newport, Oregon, while Julia gave a talk about seabirds to an enthusiastic audience in Bellingham. Zipping by the office to pick up Christen, Jane arrived in Bellingham the next day for a volunteer training. Rounding out the month: Kate gave a presentation on COASST at the Puget Sound Georgia Basin Conference in Vancouver, BC.

APRIL

Julia was a guest on "Weekday" on KUOW in Seattle and spoke in People for Puget Sound's "Keeping the Sound Alive" lecture series. Both events focused on seabird population health and the value of COASST data. Not to be outdone, Kate was interviewed by California COASSTer, Maggy Herbelin, on her radio show, "Through the Eyes of Women." The show aired on May 14, in advance of Jane's trip to COASST's southern-most beaches to do a training with Pete Nelson. No slouch, Jane also represented COASST at Washington Weekend, where hundreds of young bird lovers measured wingchords, discovered foot type diversity, and learned the COASST ID method.

MAY

With spring in full swing, COASST really ramped up. On the 5th, Jane and Christen led a volunteer training in Westport, Washington. The next week, Julia spoke to the Skagit Audubon Chapter at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center, gave a seminar at the Shannon Point Marine Center in Anacortes, and presented a public lecture in Forks, WA. Saturday found Julia and Barbara training new COASSTers to volunteer on those tough north coast of Washington beaches. Midmonth, Jane went to Astoria, Oregon to work with Phillip Johnson of Coastwatch on introducing Oregon North COASSTers to our new NFWF project. With Jane continuing south to California, Christen represented COASST on Vashon Island, WA at the Low Tide Celebration. Meanwhile, in Alaska, the Alaska Maritime Wildlife Refuge sent researchers onto the peninsula and into the Aleutians to begin their seasonal field camps and surveys. At the other end of the COASST range, Jane joined Pete Nelson to lead the first COASST training in Del Norte County and the second in Humbolt County, California.



Found: 8/13/2006
Oregon Mile 327
Oregon North
Bill: 18 mm
Wing: 9 cm
Tarsus: 37 mm

Found: 4/19/2007
Moonstone
Humboldt, CA
Bill: 41 mm

POP QUIZ!!

Answers: Left) Pretty small guy with short, stubby wings. An all dark upperwing and no tube points to some type of Alcid-a Common Murre chick in fact-not yet fully grown into its feet. Right) A large, multi-colored bill-curved on top and straight below-looks like it could be some sort of waterfowl. That down-like bill belongs to none other than a male Surf Scoter, complete with white forehead and neck patches.

Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team
University of Washington
School of Aquatic and Fisheries Sciences
Box 355020
Seattle, WA 98195

COASST

Calling All Data Sheets!

Has a COASST data sheet made a permanent home under your coffee cup? Are important data hiding amongst your couch cushions or hanging out with dust bunnies? Remember, the data deadline for the 2006-2007 annual report is June 15. Make sure your data are included! If you usually plan your survey for the end of the month, take special care to send us your May data as soon as possible.

COASST Contacts

Julia Parrish, *Executive Director*
Editor, COASSTLine
206-221-5787
jparrish@u.washington.edu

Kate Litle, *Program Coordinator*
Editor, COASSTLine
206-221-6893
kalitle@u.washington.edu

Jane Dolliver, *Volunteer Coordinator*
Writer, COASSTLine
206-221-6893
info@coasst.org

Mary Sue Brancato & Barbara Blackie
Volunteer Coordinators
Washington North Coast and
Strait of Juan de Fuca Regions
360-457-6622, ext 20, 21
mary.sue.brancato@noaa.gov
barbara.blackie@noaa.gov

Pete Nelson, *Volunteer Coordinator*
Humboldt Region (CA)
707-443-8369
panelson@ucdavis.edu

Christen Foehring, *Writer, COASSTLine*