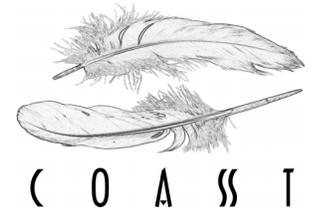


The Coasst Line



News for COASST Citizen Scientists

Spring 2006

Lots and lots of Rhinos!

This spring, thousands of Rhinoceros Auklets washed up along the Oregon coast. COASST volunteers Diane and Dave Bilderback found 25 of them in March on Bandon Beach. "In three years, we've never seen dead Rhinos on this portion of beach, so it is a new phenomenon to us." Farther north near Yaquina Bay, Bob Loeffel reported more than 100 Rhinos over his March surveys.

Rhinoceros Auklets, so called because of the distinctive horn-like structure on their bill during the breeding season, are actually more closely related to Tufted Puffins than their smaller auklet cousins. Like most of the Alcids, Rhinos nest underground, using their heavily-clawed, powerful feet and oversized bill to tunnel out burrows.

Rhino body morphology also helps them earn a living at sea. A football-shaped body and broad, stubby wings make Rhinos good deep-diving underwater flyers like the larger Common Murre. Specializing in forage fish, Rhinos feast on a coastal cornucopia of sandlance, herring, and smelt. Fred Sharpe, a researcher from Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, has documented these quirky birds working in groups to herd fish into tight schools by blowing bubbles, while individual birds jet through and pick off their hapless prey.



One of 11 Rhinoceros Auklets (out of 12 birds total) found on a single survey of Oregon Mile 168

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Funding Update

COASST's Northward Expansion

We are extremely excited that the North Pacific Research Board (NPRB) has awarded COASST a \$100,000 grant to expand into Alaska! Starting this summer, Julia will be working with coastal Alaskan communities to begin beached bird data collection in the Gulf of Alaska and Aleutian Islands. Part of the grant will also help us develop new data modules relevant to Alaskan communities and coastal environmental health. So stay tuned for reports from Alaska within the year.

NOAA Fisheries Support Continues

We'd like to thank Kim Rivera, National Seabird Coordinator, and the Protected Resources Division of NOAA Fisheries Alaska Regional Office for their continued support of COASST. For the third year, we are receiving \$10,000 to collect data on beaching rates of species sensitive to bycatch and other fishery interactions, from alcids to albatross.

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

Rhinoceros Auklets cont.

A northern species, the vast majority of Rhinoceros Auklets nest in British Columbia, with many fewer colonies to the north and south. Fewer than 1,000 pairs breed in Oregon. Did we just witness the die-off of the entire Oregon population? Probably not...

Many of the Rhinoceros Auklets discovered on Oregon beaches this spring were most likely from northern colonies. Reports from Russ Bradley at PRBO Conservation Science indicate that on the Farallon Islands in California, Rhino burrowing activity is right on track. No discernible population loss there. However, other northern denizens, including Alaskan breeding species Horned Puffins and Parakeet Auklets, have also been



A Rhinoceros Auklet complete with breeding “horn” and facial plumes

washing up on COASST beaches. COASSTers found the program’s first seven Horned Puffins last year, and they have shown up again on the south coast of Washington this year. Parakeet Auklets—a species that breeds in the Gulf of Alaska, Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea by the hundreds of thousands—washed up on Westhaven Beach and Hobuck Beach in Washington in February. What is going on?

During winter, many Alaskan species disperse offshore and south, from Washington to California. This is why Northern Fulmars appear on our beaches in fall and winter. The fact that one of the Rhinos found near Coos Bay was a first year juvenile banded on Middleton Island in the Gulf of Alaska supports this “northern population” interpretation.

When days start to lengthen in spring, Rhinos begin their trek back up to breeding colonies in the north. In fact, COASST data show a typical up-tick of Rhinos beaching in Oregon in March, probably a reflection of this migratory massing. However, this year’s peak was up to 60 times normal!

Oiling? Fishery bycatch? Red tides? Avian Flu? What might have been the cause of this year’s Rhino die-off? Like last year’s wreck of Common Murres and Brandt’s Cormorants, the Rhinos found had no fat stores and reduced musculature, both signs of starvation. Changes in the typical pattern of winter downwelling and the transition to spring upwelling may be a factor, but without more comprehensive information on the winter distribution of seabirds and their forage fish prey along our coastline, die-offs like this spring’s Rhino event will remain a mystery.

COASST Happenings

What a whirlwind of activity the COASST office has been this quarter. Since the last *Coast Line*, Julia, Jane, Kate, Melissa, Alynda, Amy, and Natalee have conducted training sessions in Camano Island, Bellingham, Whidbey Island, and the San Juan Islands recruiting more than 60 new COASSTers monitoring over 20 new beaches. *Here is what we’ve been up to so far this year:*

- The Camano Island training in January was organized by Alynda’s mom Alice Blandin, an active Beachwatcher.
- Also in January, Julia gave a presentation to the Olympic Coast Alliance at their Port Ludlow meeting on the COASST model of citizen science.
- At the beginning of February, Julia was the keynote speaker at the Island County Beachwatchers annual Sound Waters One Day University event. Coming the morning after a fierce windstorm, Julia had just finished her presentation when the lights went out for the rest of the conference!

Farewell to Todd

We are both sad (for us) and happy (for him) to let you know that Todd Hass is leaving COASST to pursue a full-time teaching career. Todd has been with COASST from the beginning—since 1998! Through all of his work in field guide and protocol design, volunteer training, and public outreach, Todd has helped to shape COASST into what it is today. As many of you know, Todd is a natural teacher—after all, if you can get people excited about dead birds, what can't you teach them?!

After four years of working on seabirds and salmon in the Columbia River, Julia is happy to be leaping back into training. Kate will be taking over as Program Coordinator and Jane is now the Volunteer Coordinator for the San Juans, Puget Sound, South Coast, and Oregon. Mary Sue remains the Volunteer Coordinator for the North Coast of Washington and Strait regions. As usual, all questions can still be directed to the COASST main office (206) 221-6893 or info@coasst.org.



Todd shows volunteers Dick Weisbrod and Judy Trieber how to navigate the *Beached Birds* wing table

COASST Happenings cont.

- Julia presented a special seminar on Beached Birds as Indicators at the annual Pacific Seabird Group meeting in Anchorage, AK, in February, followed by a meeting in Homer, AK with the Pribilof Islands Collaborative to discuss beached bird monitoring in the Bering Sea.
- In mid-February, COASST volunteer Sue Gabriel gave a talk on seabirds and COASST at the Oregon Coast Learning Institute. We're happy to supply volunteers with information and slides—let us know if you would like to give a presentation at an event in your area!
- The adventures continued in February as Jane and Amy were faced with two flat tires on their way to the Bellingham training at ReSources. Fellow COASSTer and North Sound Baykeeper Wendy Steffensen organized the training and had just finished her introduction as Jane and Amy scooted in only 20 minutes late despite the blowouts.
- Jane headed down to Ocean Shores for the Beachcombers FunFair in March where she had lots of fun chatting with folks about birds—dead and alive!
- Sandy Dubpernell, COASST volunteer and long-time Beachwatcher, organized a training on Whidbey Island in March. With two trainings in Whidbey in the last six months, we've gone from COASST coverage on only two beaches to more than 15!
- Julia gave a presentation about COASST and citizen science at the East Lake Washington Audubon monthly meeting in Kirkland, WA.
- In April, we continued to expand COASST collaboration with the Beachwatchers program. Julia and Amy braved the ferry lines to give a training on San Juan Island organized by Rowann Tallmon, the San Juan County Beachwatchers Coordinator.
- While Julia and Amy were in the San Juans, Jane headed down to Ocean Park, WA to present at the Shoalwater Birders Group meeting.
- And finally, in April, Julia gave an evening lecture to the Skagit and Snohomish County Beachwatchers group.

Whew! Stay tuned to the COASST Events page on our website for upcoming events in your area...

PhotoWorks.com Instructions

As you might recall from our last edition of the *Coasst Line*, we have recently teamed up with *PhotoWorks.com* to print all of COASST's digital photos! Early tests were very successful. This edition provides volunteers instructions for uploading survey photos directly onto the *PhotoWorks.com* website. All of the bold, italicized text below us directly copied from the *PhotoWorks.com* website.

Set-up

1. Name each photo file as outlined in the Spring/Summer 2005 *Coasst Line*. For example, a photo taken from Port Williams North on March 4, 2006 of a Common Murre tagged #15 would be labeled: PrtWllmsN20060304comu15.jpg.
2. Go to ***www.photoworks.com***.
3. At the top right hand corner of the screen, select ***Login as an Existing Member***. Under ***Already A Member***, type in the following information: ***e-mail address***: coasst@u.washington.edu, ***password***: murre, click ***Sign In***.
4. Click ***Add Photos to your account***
5. PhotoWorks now asks you to ***Please use PhotoStreamer***. You can either download this program or use your web browser to upload photos. We recommend using *PhotoStreamer*, especially for volunteers that have multiple photos to upload and are not using Internet Explorer. Instructions for each option are given below.

PhotoStreamer Instructions

To download *PhotoStreamer*, click on ***Download again*** located in the middle of the screen (PhotoWorks assumes you already have this program because COASST computers do). Once you have installed *PhotoStreamer*, simply open the program any time you would like to upload photos.

To upload photos:

1. Drag individual photos or a folder with multiple photos, into the *PhotoStreamer* screen.
2. Select ***upload photos*** (bottom left of the screen; bottom right for Mac users).
3. Select ***New album*** and name it with your beach name and survey date, and select ***Start Upload***. It is crucial that each survey has its own album—a folder containing the picture files for a given survey.
4. Clear the photos from *PhotoStreamer* once they have been uploaded to prevent them from being uploaded in future albums.

Web Browser Instructions

1. Click ***Upload using your web browser*** and select a ***New album*** and name with your beach name and survey date. Click ***Next Step***

If you use Internet Explorer as your web browser:

- you can drag individual photos or a folder of photos into the box that says "***Drag and drop your photos here.***" Depending on browser and computer, this box might not be labelled.

If you use a web browser other than Internet Explorer:

- you must upload photos individually. Click ***Choose File*** and then select the appropriate file.
2. Click ***Next Step*** and your upload is complete.

As with anything new, it might be a bit confusing on the first try. Don't hesitate to give us a call, we are happy to help you figure it out.

Interview with David Hyrenbach



David shows us what happens when you have bird on the brain

This year we've had a few encounters with albatross, including a juvenile Short-tailed Albatross found near Bandon, OR (one of only about 1800 worldwide). What's so special about albatross? Jane interviewed Dr. David Hyrenbach, a visiting scientist at the University of Washington from the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University, to find some answers:

Why study albatross? Why not Canada Geese, or Western Gulls? Anyone that sees an albatross for the first time can't help but fall in love with these majestic birds. They're also sensitive indicators of ocean health and human impacts—19 of the 21 albatross species are listed as threatened on the World Conservation Union (IUCN) red list.

Is there something we can do, as ordinary citizens, to help albatross? Individual choices can have a big impact. Albatross are surface feeders—we're starting to see albatross picking up all kinds of things—lighters, syringes, Styrofoam pellets. Obviously, we can't stop buying plastics, but we can limit our consumption. Be smart; reduce, reuse and recycle; and make sure trash ends up in the proper receptacle.

What are some of the questions you're interested in answering? I'm interested to know how albatross use the ocean—how do they decide where to go? How do features like submarine mountains, ocean currents, and large scale climatic events influence foraging? At some point, adult albatross stop returning to the colony with food for the chick. For a while, the chick fasts, and then it begins its first voyage alone. How do they figure out where to go?



Mindful of the sharp and powerful beak, a researcher holds a satellite-tagged Black-footed Albatross ready for release

Albatross are wide ranging—how far do they go? We satellite-tagged 18 Black-footed Albatross off the coast of California last year. Four birds (all males) traveled 7,000 km (over 4,000 miles) all the way to Japan. They're capable of flying upwards of 60 km/hr (37 miles/hr).

I hear you're pretty wide ranging yourself —where has your research taken you? I've worked near the Gulf of the Farallones (CA), the Outer Banks (NC), the Bering Sea (AK), and the Southern Indian Ocean.

So you've done research off both coasts... which is better, East or West Coast? The West Coast, definitely. Am I

allowed to go into politics at this point?

What are the biggest challenges to researching albatross (besides, of course trying to stay away from that hefty bill)? Albatross don't recognize boundaries —state, federal or international. To protect and understand these species, we need international collaboration.

How does COASST fit in? COASST is essential for researchers investigating long term patterns and long term changes in the marine environment. We know so little about where seabirds go, especially during the non-breeding season. Comprehensive data on beached birds gives us a window into seabird—and specifically albatross—migration.



A Black-footed Albatross taking a rest on the water



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POP QUIZ!!

Found: 01/02/2006

Pacific Beach

Pacific Beach, WA

Bill: 24mm

Wing: 13cm

Tarsus: 22mm



Found: 12/17/2005

Oregon Mile 196

Yachats, OR

Bill: 38mm

Wing: 24.5cm

Tarsus: 57mm

B. Johnstone



B. Watson

Answers: Right) A very small bird - and look closely - lobed feet! With white underparts and a dark smudge through the eye—it's a Red Phalarope, non-breeding plumage. Left) Webbed feet, dark plumage and patterned bill—looks like some kind of duck—and indeed, it's a male Surf Scoter.