

The Coasst Line



News for COASST Citizen Scientists

Winter 2008

Building the Avian Flu Network in Washington: COASSTers help test the health of wild birds

The COASST AI Network keeps growing—over 30 sites to date!

With continued support from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) select Washington volunteers are collecting carcasses this winter/spring for avian influenza (AI) testing. COASST volunteers are out patrolling beaches on a regular basis, so they're often the first to intercept carcasses or notice large-scale die-offs. Because we span so many coastal sites, COASST can act as an early warning network, helping wildlife and public health officials monitor for the disease. Altogether, COASST AI surveyors, Jane Dolliver in the main office, and Sara Paroulek at WDFW form a well-oiled network getting fresh carcasses from the beach to the Wildlife Health Center in Madison, WI in just about 3 days! What have we found so far?

Last year (October 06 -June 07), 16 birds were collected across 29 sites. But only 9 carcasses were submitted, because requirements for testing are *very strict*. Carcasses must be in pristine condition, and (as you all know) not many new finds look perfect: no smell, no blood and all of their body parts.

Two groups of birds—waterfowl and shorebirds—are particularly important because they have tested positive

for other forms of influenza in the past. Luckily—for us and the birds!—none of our submissions tested positive for the H5N1 form of avian influenza, or any other form of flu.

Although the virulent form of avian flu hasn't made it to the West Coast, some of you are no doubt wondering—should COASST volunteers take extra precautions? Nope. By following the COASST protocol (wear gloves don't touch your face when surveying, wash your hands after surveying) COASST volunteers adequately protect themselves. In the words of Beth Wolgemuth, COASST volunteer, "we are all aware that birds, dead and alive, have always been full of potentially harmful organisms and parasites." AI surveyors, in particular, are equipped with plenty of gloves and alcohol solution for post-survey sanitizing.

If you survey in Washington and would like to be part of this project by collecting 'mint condition' birds, please contact Jane in the COASST office for information on how to get started.



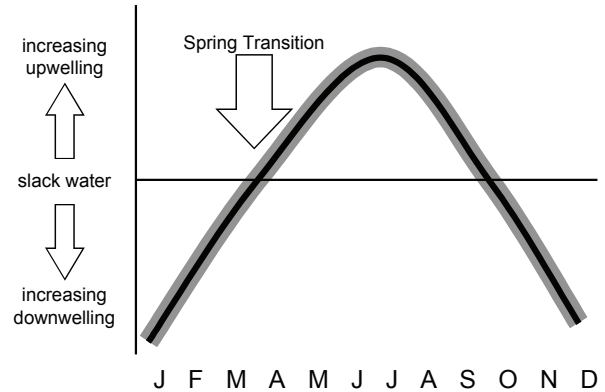
This Pelagic Cormorant, found by Art Ayres on Ediz Hook was sent to the lab in Madison, WI for AI testing—the results were negative.

Daily Survey Teams Update

Not wind, not rain, nor stinging sand will keep the Daily Survey teams from their appointed rounds! Because daily survey teams plan their monthly routines in advance, they don't have the luxury of waiting for a sunny day to start surveying. Through November, our teams were coordinating seven consecutive days on their beaches. But even COASST has its limits. We gave them a break, reducing surveys to just three days (!) from December through February. Actually, nature gave them a break. Want to know why?

In the Pacific Northwest, upwelling is a seasonal phenomenon. In spring and summer, the wind moves surface waters mostly offshore, in fall and winter, storms reverse that pattern. The transitions in October and April are especially important times of year we're aiming to capture. Although the 20 year average looks smooth, each year is noisy: a few days of upwelling, a few of downwelling, with a gradual change in the monthly average of each. So sharpen your pencils teams, in anticipation of the spring transition!

Most teams could still use alternates—if you have any flexibility in your schedule, and can get to the southern Washington or northern Oregon beaches, please call Rebecca at the COASST office.



Conditions on the coast shift from on-shore winter storms (downwelling) to nutrient-rich upwelling in March/April, marking the Spring Transition.

Funding Update

Another Year in Alaska

We're pleased to announce that COASST received another year of funding from the North Pacific Research Board to continue Alaska surveys. The \$100,000 grant will enable COASST to support current COASST Alaska volunteers, provide training sessions in current locations, expand coverage to new locations, verify Alaska data, get our new website up and running, and keep all of you in Alaska informed about the latest COASST trends and happenings.

Field Guide for Alaska and COASST in Bristol Bay

COASST received a \$58,000 grant from the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) to support the production of *Beached Birds: A COASST Field Guide for Alaska* and expand COASST into Bristol Bay. As our Alaska volunteers know already, there are some species common to Alaska (think Thick-billed Murre!) that aren't in the current edition of *Beached Birds*. The COASST Alaska guide will feature more than 80 species, a new wing key, maps of relative abundance, and native language translations. Look for it by Fall 2008.

A Fourth Year of Funding from NOAA Fisheries

A gold star to Kim Rivera and the Protected Resources Division of the NOAA Fisheries for long-term COASST support! This year, their \$18,000 grant allows us to focus on species sensitive to fisheries bycatch throughout the COASST range, as well as provide a portion of the graphic design and printing costs for the new Alaska field guide.

The Perfect COASST Photo

Photographs of each new COASST find have always played a crucial role in species verification. But a well-placed beached bird isn't enough; the perfect COASST photo also contains a COASST slate with your beach name, the date, and the cable tie number of the bird in the image. Long beach names can be abbreviated.

Thanks to Tom Hertzig—who creates and donates the slates—we now include a slate and chalk in each survey kit. If you never received a slate, misplaced yours, or are running low on Tom's special 'old fashioned' chalk, just let us know and we'll get you the goods.

Swamped with beached birds and wet weather, and looking for short cuts, Tom and wife Connie reduced their writing time by printing the beach name and the date on paper, which they tape to their slate prior to heading out to their beach. This way, only the cable tie number needs to be changed! Thanks for the tip, Tom!



T. Hertzig



S. Evens

Found: 1/15/2008, Salmon River, Oregon North
Bill: 109 mm Wing: 49 cm Tarsus: 83 mm



S. Oliveira

Found: 12/14/2007
PTMSC
Puget Sound, WA
Bill: 60mm
Wing: 30mm
Tarsus: 67mm

Answers: Top) Wow - that wing size classifies this bird as HUGE, so it's either an albatross or a Canada Goose. Pale plumage on the head and rump, completely dark upperwings, and light-colored feet point to a Laysan. Bottom) Pale, hooked bill with big black feet and dark wings. Not large enough to be another tubenose - besides, the Puget Sound isn't known for those - it's a Double-crested Cormorant.

Funding Update cont.

Continuing Avian Flu Surveillance

Following a successful first year of Avian Flu monitoring in Washington (see story on page one for more info), the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has provided another \$16,400 for Avian Flu monitoring in Washington.

A Third WDFW Aquatic Lands Enhancement Account (ALEA) Volunteer Cooperative Grant

COASST received a \$15,400 grant from the WDFW ALEA program to support and enhance COASST volunteer activities. Funding is going toward publication costs (including this COASSTLine!), as well as "COASST Socials" around the state.

Integration of COASST Data into the Pacific Coast Ocean Observing System (PaCOOS)

NOAA has contracted with COASST to facilitate the integration of COASST data into the PaCOOS database. This \$40,000 contract will allow us to coordinate data formats with the other west coast beached bird programs and put our data on a special GIS website that already maps ocean features, fish distribution, and other coastal biology.

COASST Interview with Joe Gaydos



Ready to spot the next Western Grebe or scoter that comes his way, Joe takes a break from the office.

COASST: You are currently regional director for the SeaDoc Society. What's SeaDoc all about?

Joe: SeaDoc is a program run by the Wildlife Health Center, a division of the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. SeaDoc's mission is to ensure the health of marine wildlife and their ecosystems through science and education. We focus our research and funding on projects investigating issues facing the Puget Sound–Georgia Basin as well as the Pacific Ocean from California to Baja, Mexico. A wide range of projects is conducted in the Puget Sound region, from studies on Bald Eagle predation to status reviews on Western Grebes.

COASST: It sounds like a really valuable program. How did you originally become involved with SeaDoc?

Joe: In the past, I've worked as a biologist and as a veterinarian, but my favorite approach has been combining the two. As I was finishing my PhD, I saw the SeaDoc society job posting. I knew about the UC Davis Wildlife Health Center's excellent track record in conservation medicine but I was looking for an opportunity to move to Washington. I quickly realized that this job would give me the opportunity to make a difference in the field of wildlife medicine, while living where I wanted. It was a perfect fit, a dream come true!

COASST: It seems that SeaDoc really is a great place for you. What's a typical day like for the regional director of SeaDoc?

Joe: Actually, one of the things that I love about my job is that it has so much variety. There really is no 'typical' schedule. On any given day we might be investigating a marine mammal mortality event, giving a presentation to the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission, putting satellite transmitters in scoters, or figuring out how to fund a critical science project that will improve how we manage marine wildlife.

COASST: Speaking of funding, SeaDoc actually funded COASST's expansion into the San Juans in 2001 (Thank you!).

Joe: With COASST's excellent reputation, funding the project was a no-brainer! We've also had an interest in marine bird declines for several years. We did a study in 2002 that identified 25 marine birds in the region that were listed as threatened, endangered or "of-concern," including scoters, Western Grebes, Rhinoceros Auklets, and Tufted Puffins. After holding a meeting to discuss this issue with regional experts we've been funding scientific research projects on these species, with a focus on revealing what factors are creating population decline.

COASST: Is there a particular species that you are most interested in?

Joe: I'm working with Dave Nysewander on a Washington status review for Western Grebes. COASST is providing us with important information on Western Grebe occurrence across Washington shorelines. These beautiful birds are highly specialized to spend their entire lives on water – to the point of building floating nests. They even carry their young on their backs to protect them from predatory fish. Sadly, the wintering population of Western Grebes in Puget Sound has declined dramatically over the last decade. It kills me to think we could lose this bird. What a poorer place Puget Sound would be!

COASST Happenings

AUGUST

After flying up to Kodiak Island, a short hop (as the Kittiwake flies!) to Unalaska found Jane at Camp Qungaayux. Organized annually by Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisor Reid Brewer, this six day event exposes children throughout the Aleutian Islands to Western science, traditional ecological knowledge and native culture. Jane wrapped things up by enlisting seven new COASST volunteers in Unalaska.

SEPTEMBER

Kate and Rebecca worked their way around the Kenai Peninsula, conducting trainings in Homer, Soldotna and Seldovia. Without breaking stride, Kate flew on over to Dillingham to set up our first Bristol Bay sites. The Port Townsend Marine Science Center hosted Rebecca and Jane for a COASST training—with the sun still high in the sky that day, everyone was ready to hit the beach ASAP.

OCTOBER

Jane headed down to Long Beach, WA for a quick field trip with Willapa Hills Audubon, while Julia packed 25 UW students into vans and headed down for the yearly Marine Biology beached bird weekend in Ocean Shores. Mary Sue and Barb also started the month with a recognition event featuring delicious Thai food and seabird scavenger hunt and followed up with a COASST training at the Fiero Marine Life Center in collaboration with Dave Freed and the Clallam County Beachwatchers.

NOVEMBER

After hundreds of Common Murres started washing ashore in the Puget Sound in late October, KOMO Television News 4 profiled Julia, COASST, and volunteer Rick Spaulding, reminding viewers about the importance of good baseline data. Kate, Jane and Rebecca toasted volunteers at COASST socials in Long Beach, WA and Manzanita, OR featuring seabird speakers Troy Guy and Rob Suryan. Though the weather was treacherous, a chance to chat with some of you made it well worth the drive.

DECEMBER

This month started off with a HUGE storm bringing 48 foot seas to the North Oregon Coast. Everyone in the office stayed put. COASST staff were kept busy finalizing and mailing out annual reports and our holiday card.

JANUARY

Julia headed to the Alaska Marine Science Symposium to give a talk on cool COASST data trends after the first two years of Alaska surveys. In Portland, Jane wowed fisheries observers with the COASST approach to IDing seabirds.

FEBRUARY

Jane and Rebecca just finished training the staff at Oregon's Westwind Outdoor Camp on the Salmon River making them our seventh Daily Survey team. Stay tuned for more news and events from February.



A bunch of faithful COASSTers were nearly swept away at Cape Disappointment State Park in early October.



Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team

University of Washington
School of Aquatic and Fishery Sciences
Box 355020
Seattle, WA 98195-5020

Upcoming Events

MARCH

Anacortes, WA—Training Session

Sunday, March 2, Anacortes Public Library,

12:30pm–4:00pm

Whidbey Island, WA—COASST Social

Saturday March 8, Camp Casey,

11:30am–2:00pm

Newport, OR—Training Session

Saturday, March 15, Hatfield Marine

Science Center, 12:00pm–4:00pm

Seward, AK—Training Session

Saturday, March 29, Alaska SeaLife Center,

10:00am–4:00pm

*Check our website for more details and updates
about future trainings and talks.*

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