

OLYMPIC COAST NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY

OLYMPIC COAST DISCOVERY CENTER



V O L U N T E E R N E W S L E T T E R - M A R C H 2 0 1 0

Coming events:

February 27 – “Bridging the Hemispheres: Challenges and opportunities for conserving highly migratory seabirds” by Dr. Peter Hodum at Feiro Marine Life Center 3:30-5:30pm.

March 5 – “Our Underwater Neighborhood: A Video Tour” with underwater videographer John F. Williams. Port Angeles Library, 7:00 pm. Free!

March 6-7 – Beachcombers Fun Fair at Ocean Shores Convention Center – displays, speakers, fun for all ages. Help staff the OCNMS booth and enjoy a walk on the beach.

March 17 – Potluck supper and game night in the OCDC classroom, beginning at 5:30. RSVP!!

March 20 – Feiro Marine Life Center presents echinoderm expert Phil Lambert of the Royal BC Museum. Details to follow.

March 25 – Brown bag lunch in the classroom, with presentation on Mussel Watch and summary of the contaminants found in local water.

March 31 – Pizza night in OCDC classroom with guest speaker Coke Smith, naturalist, photographer and world traveler.

Coke says, “Does travel to wild places to see wild creatures sound like your cup of tea? Does seeing some of the most charismatic and spectacular critters on this planet sound like a trip well spent? If you answered ‘yes’ to these questions then you will surely want to see this photo essay on wildlife adventure travel!” RSVP!!

April 8 – Volunteer training begins. Please help us spread the word to anyone you know who may be interested. All volunteers are welcome to attend any or all of the sessions.

April 17 – Washington Coastal Cleanup. To register go to www.coastsavers.org

May 18 – Brown bag lunch at noon in the OCDC classroom with a guest speaker from Puget Sound Pilots Association.



Welcome back, Heidi

Join me in welcoming Heidi Pedersen back to the Olympic Coast Discovery Center staff. Heidi is returning from maternity leave to fill in for Deborah Moriarty, who now works full time at Feiro Marine Life Center. Heidi will be working a rotating schedule with Rob and me when the OCDC is reopened for the summer. (Date for reopening hasn't been determined.)

Volunteers at the Seattle Aquarium

On the way home from the Seattle Aquarium someone asked how many volunteers they have. Karen Matsumoto gave us a quick estimate when I called her, but followed up with this quote from their annual report: “Last year 713 volunteers contributed over 71,500 hours, valued at \$1,291,445 which is a nearly 6% increase from 2008.” Volunteers are awesome!!

The Largest Mortality Event of Its Type in the World

Mary Sue Brancato, NOAA Resource Protection Specialist, spoke to OCDC volunteers recently about the seabird die-off that occurred on the Washington coast in the fall of 2009, calling it “the largest mortality event of its type in the world.” In addition to several volunteers, Carol Bernthal, Superintendent of Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary and Jacqueline Laverdure, Education Specialist attended.



According to Mary Sue White-winged and Surf Scoters were affected more than any other species of seabirds. The die-off was preceded by

a big storm in the middle of the September, and continued for a two week period; then occurred again in October, and November. The storms spawned high winds with record breaking wave heights. Only one other similar incident was reported in Monterey Bay in 2007, but not in the same magnitude.

The die off was unanticipated and generated more questions than answers. What scientists know is that the Akashiwo algae normally occurs and does not cause a problem. However as the cells age they break open and produce a protein that breaks down bird feather integrity. In this event the algae occurred and bloomed in unusually large numbers. Typically there are 10,000 cells of algae per liter of water. During the die off it increased to over 1,000,000 cells per liter.

Because the birds' feathers were compromised they died of hypothermia. It was noted that most of the dead Scoters were molting or malnourished adults, and especially vulnerable. None of the young were affected because they don't molt during their first year of life.

In October and November other species of birds also died. They included Grebes, Common Murres, Red-throated Loons, Pelagic Cormorants and Northern Fulmars. In October and November the die offs were in more southerly locations; some as far south as the northern Oregon coast. However, Cape Alava and LaPush had the greatest concentration of algae.

Scientists who worked on the beaches and surfers in the water reported a variety of respiratory problems and rashes during the algae bloom.

Volunteers contributed invaluable assistance walking miles of beaches recording the results

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of the die-off. Area agencies and organizations supplied resources. Carol Bernthal explained that because all organizations on the peninsula are small collaboration is the norm.

Mary Sue used a PowerPoint presentation so we could see first-hand what happened. Her use of commonly used language and her willingness to clarify information made her presentation both interesting and educational. Thank you, Janet, for arranging such an important training and thank you, Mary Sue, for the tremendous effort you gave to the seabird mortality project and for enlightening us. ~ reported by Carol Huard

1986, and analyzed the samples for more than 100 contaminants. I think you will be interested to hear what contaminants are in the local water, and seeing how trends change over time. OCNMS Resource Protection Specialist Liam Antrim has offered to sit in on the presentation, helping answer questions that go beyond what was covered at the training session.



Mussel Watch

When Mary Sue sent me to training for NOAA's Mussel Watch Program I could not imagine that it would be interesting, but I was very wrong. This is the longest continuous contaminant monitoring program in U.S. coastal waters. It has collected mussels and oysters biennially from 300 sites around the US (26 in Washington) since