



The Cackler

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Issue 2, Winter 2008/2009

Upcoming Events

◆ **Sunday, Jan. 25, 2009-** Garden and Tree Planting Day. Meet at Visitor Center at 9AM. Bring water, gloves and your passion for the refuge!

◆ **Sat., Jan. 31, 2009 –** Annual Youth Hunt will take place (see article Page 3).

◆ **Friday, Feb. 27-** First Friday Night at the Refuge talk by a local birding expert and Refuge Manager Eric Nelson.

◆ **Weekend of March 7 and 8, 2009-** Seventh annual Aleutian Goose Fly-Off and Family Fun Day at HBNWR. See website for complete details.

Our Mission is to support the Refuge and its staff in fulfilling the mission of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service by promoting community outreach, environmental education, interpretation and other activities related to wildlife and habitat conservation.



Special Announcement: A Fond Farewell



Humboldt Bay NWR Deputy Project Leader Shannon Smith has accepted a position as Refuge Manager at the Kauai NWR Complex on “The Green Isle” of Kauai. This means she will be in charge of Kilauea Point NWR, Hanalei NWR and Huleia NWR. She and her family will be reporting for duty in early 2009. We celebrate her exciting news and thank her for all she has done over the last 7 years for the benefit of the wildlife and visitors of Humboldt Bay NWR. In her time here Shannon has had tremendous involvement in all programs, especially Visitor Services. Among her many accomplishments are significant expansions of the volunteer, environmental education and interpretive programs. Some specific examples include a prominent role in establishment of the Friends group and YCC program, the recent Quest Workshop and resulting Humboldt Bay NWR Quest, streamlining the hunt program, and overseeing numerous other projects.



Humboldt Bay NWR Deputy Project Leader Shannon Smith

Refuge Photos of the Month: Otters by David F. Thomson





Habitat Management



Imagine an idyllic summer afternoon at Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Warm breezes hold off the chill of the approaching night in coastal California. As you stand on the boardwalk by the Richard J. Guadagno Headquarters and Visitor Center, thousands of swallows dart and dive in the air, chasing insects for their young in nests lining the eaves. As you look across the green and brown pastures to the south of the Visitor Center you see neat rows of hay bales stretching into the distance and hear the soft lowing of...cattle?

Many visitors wonder why we hay and have cattle grazing in our pastures during the summer. The answer is best seen now, as tens of thousands of Aleutian Cackling Geese fill these same pastures in a noisy celebration of the arrival on winter and the wonder of avian migration.

For many of the migrating Aleutian Cackling Geese (*Branta hutchinsii leucopareia*), we are not the first stop on their migration. Most geese

first travel to the great San Joaquin delta to feed on waste grains in the rich agricultural bottom lands. These grains provide the geese carbohydrates, used for fat stores and immediate energy. However, the geese need protein in their diet to build flight muscles for the long trip to the Aleutian Islands and to initiate egg production, which is where Humboldt County and Humboldt Bay NWR comes in. Grass that is maintained as “short grass” puts a great deal of energy into growing during the late winter and spring. These nutrients are drawn up from the roots of the plant and concentrate in the “apical meristem”, or growing tip of the plant. Hungry geese feed on these protein rich shoots.

At the refuge we use a combination of grazing, mowing and haying all summer and fall to maintain our pastures in a short grass stage, making them immediately available and attractive to arriving geese. This also helps alleviate some of the pressure of feeding geese from surrounding dairy and cattle farms, and provides visitors with an amazing spectacle of thousands of geese to enjoy!



South Pasture post haying in late summer as seen from split rail fence looking north toward Visitor Center.

Photo courtesy USFWS



In winter the Aleutian Cackling Geese arrive by the thousands to feed in the pastures of Humboldt County.

Photo courtesy USFWS



2008/2009 Waterfowl Season Youth and Junior Hunting Opportunities



Hunting is one of the National Wildlife Refuge System's "Big Six" forms of wildlife-dependant recreation encouraged at all refuges where the use is compatible. During each waterfowl season, in concurrence with California Department of Fish and Game regulations, we offer a special waterfowl hunt for youth hunters only on the Saturday following the close of regular waterfowl season. A youth hunter is defined as being age 15 years and under and possessing a valid junior hunting license with an attached Harvest Information Program stamp. Each year the pancake breakfast and gifts are donated by the local California Waterfowl Association chapter. Kids get a great opportunity to be the only ones hunting and enjoy a special day afield with family and friends.

All hunters under age 18 must be accompanied by a legally responsible adult. Knowledgeable volunteer hunting guides are available on request to take kids hunting who have non-hunting parents so kids can have a successful, educational and above all safe experience.

This year's Youth Hunt will take place on Saturday, January 31, 2009. All hunters must possess a Junior Hunting License and HIP stamp. The event is free for all participants. Please RSVP to Visitor Services Assistant Sean Brophy at Sean_Brophy@fws.gov or (707) 733-5406.



Father, dog and son enjoy the 2008 Youth Hunt. Regular hunting occurs every Tuesday and Saturday late October through late January.

Photo Credit: USFWS



Staff Corner



I'd like to welcome you to the second issue of "The Cackler"! This newsletter is intended to share what is going on here at the refuge throughout the year; including special events, refuge management, and wildlife news. Public uses at the refuge during winter include hunting, birdwatching and photography. All users have equal rights to enjoy the refuge and the wildlife-dependant recreation it provides.

We may have different viewpoints on recreation but we all share a common love of wild things and wild places. If you have any questions for us please come in to the Richard J. Guadagno Headquarters and Visitor Center or give us a call at (707) 733-5406. We are open 7 days a week from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, federal holidays excepted. *Sean Brophy, Visitor Services Assistant, HBNWR*
Email: Sean_Brophy@fws.gov



Recent Refuge Events



On a beautiful October day in northern California, Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge and ~150 visitors celebrated National Wildlife Refuges Week with the special event, "Come Explore Nature: A Family Fun Day." The event was held on Sunday, October 12, from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM at the Richard J. Guadagno Headquarters and Visitor Center. This annual special event was sponsored by the Friends of Humboldt Bay NWR. This year's event focused on introduction of two unique activities to the refuge: the newly created "Quest" and the unveiling of the seasonal "Children's Outdoor Exploration Area".

Quests are place-based "treasure" hunts in rhyme that can be undertaken by children and/or adults working together. The completion of the quest reveals a "treasure" box, containing a stamp unique and relevant to the quest, a sign-in book asking for participant's experiences, and other activities and games to use at the site. It is a way for communities to celebrate their rich natural and cultural history, stories and special places.

Questing is yet another way to encourage visitors from both near and far to utilize their senses to experience more of the special places we call home, and is a great addition to the "Connecting People with Nature" toolbox at Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

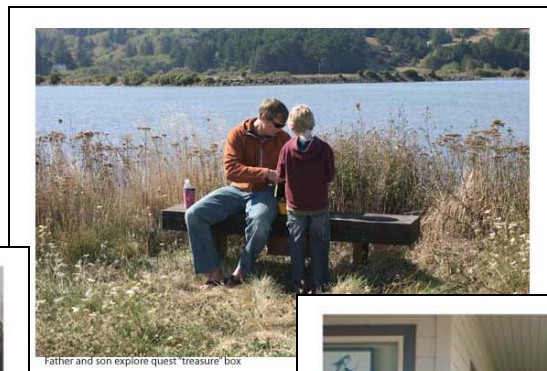
Many families enjoyed the quest as a team, with parents helping children work out clues, enabling each family to enjoy the refuge with a unique experience.

The Children's Outdoor Exploration Area is a special area where children can explore a seasonal wetland. Thick cattails stands, meandering trails through marsh vegetation and a small pond provide an area for children to experience nature on their own in an unstructured way. Members of the Friends of Humboldt Bay NWR provided insect catching kits, magnifying glasses and compasses to help children explore the area and gain new knowledge of the seasonal wetland ecosystem.

Humboldt Bay NWR's "Family Fun Day" also included activities during the day that are old favorites, such as leaf printing, birdhouse building and the always popular wildlife tattoos. The bake sale for the Friends of Humboldt Bay NWR was a big success, feeding hungry visitors and raising money for our wonderful Friends group. All who participated in the event enjoyed a day of wildlife education, beautiful fall weather and most importantly, fun!



Friends of Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge member Dick McWhorter helping at the tattoo and sticker parlor. (Photo Credit: USFWS)



Father and son explore quest "treasure" box



Friends of Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge member Steve Jackson helps K. Marie Magray build her birdhouse. (Photo Credit: USFWS)

Highlight Species List

For the Salmon Creek Unit/Shorebird Loop Trail, October/November 2008

- ◆ **Sharp Shinned Hawk-**
Sighted at Hookton Slough Unit November 6, 2008.

- ◆ **Ross's Goose-**
4 Sighted in South Pasture November 4, 2008.

- ◆ **Aleutian Cackling Geese-**
Starting to show up. About 2000 as of November 6, 2008 but many more will be arriving soon!

- ◆ **American Avocet-**
Seen in Long Pond area November 3.

- ◆ **Godwit-**
Numerous in Long Pond, Photoblind Pond and Teal Island dikes.

- ◆ **Peregrine Falcon-**
Sighted all through October hunting in Teal Island vicinity.



Classic Peregrine Falcon photo by Gary Kramer.



This Issue's "Refuge Tip"



As the holiday season approaches, the refuge will be closed for several Federal holidays including Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Years and Martin Luther King Jr. Day. During these days the Salmon Creek Unit, including the Visitor Center, Shorebird Loop Trail and the entrance road, are closed. However, the Hookton Slough Unit will remain open. The Hookton Slough Trail is approximately 3 miles out and back, and runs along Hookton Slough out to South Bay.

It is a great place to observe a wide variety of waterfowl and shorebirds. To get to the Hookton Slough Unit, take the Hookton Road exit (Exit 696) from Highway 101. Turn on to Hookton Slough Road and travel about a mile and a half. A sign for the Hookton Slough Unit is on the right side of the road. The parking lot has two bathrooms and there is also a public boat dock for non-motorized boats.



Safety Notice



When parking at the Hookton Slough parking lot to go boating or walking the trail, be sure to remove all valuables from your car. Car thieves target areas where they know people will be away from their cars for extended periods of time, including trail heads. We suggest removing all possible valuables from the vehicle at home and taking the remainder with you on the trail. If you do experience a break in please contact staff in the Visitor Center and let them know.

COMING SOON!

THE ALEUTIAN GOOSE FLY OFF AND FAMILY FUN DAY WILL BE HELD SATURDAY, MARCH 7 AND SUNDAY, MARCH 8 2009 AT THE SALMON CREEK UNIT. MORE INFORMATION WILL BE AVAILABLE SOON ON THE REFUGE WEBSITE AND IN THE VISITOR CENTER.

Friends of Humboldt Bay NWR Update

The *Cackler* is a collaborative effort by our Friends group and the Visitor Services office of Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Projects which the very dedicated members are involved in include the following:

Community:

- ◆ BirdWalks @ 9 am on every 1st and 3rd Wed. of the month led by Friends member and experienced birder Louise Bacon Ogden.
- ◆ Meeting and social the last Tuesday of every month at 5:30 PM (no December meeting).
- ◆ Representatives attend local festivals and events to provide information and outreach to the public about the refuge.

Education:

- ◆ Developed and funded the creation of a special place for children's activities in the Visitor's Center called "The Fledgling Fort" and a seasonal "Children's Outdoor Exploration Area." The Children's Outdoor Exploration Area provides an area of the refuge where kids can explore nature in an unstructured way using discovery tools such as a magnifying glass, compass or insect catching kit or just letting their imagination run wild!
- ◆ Assisted in creation of Humboldt Bay NWR's Quest "A Place In Between". The quest is a treasure hunt in rhyme for families to undertake together that's leads to understanding of "place" and deeper knowledge of the refuge.
- ◆ The Friends sponsor the annual "Aleutian Cackling Goose Fly-off and Family Fun Weekend the 7th and 8th of March, 2009. The Friends provide a bake sale for the public, birdhouse building, wildlife tattoos, guided walks and other activities throughout both days of the Fly-Off.
- ◆ Sponsor the annual National Wildlife Refuge Week festivities during the 2nd week of October, including many kids activities and guided walks.
- ◆ Sponsor the quarterly Friday Night at the Refuge speaker's series which have included presentations on the comeback of the Aleutian Cackling Geese, Amphibians of the Refuge and Gardening for Wildlife.

Wildlife:

- ◆ Support the development of the Native Plant Garden in front of the Visitor's Center at the Salmon Creek Unit.
- ◆ Support Bird Habitat Project in the Native Plant Garden

We welcome new members, and invite you to join one of the exciting projects described above.



***FRIENDS OF HUMBOLDT BAY
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
A 501(3)(c) Nonprofit Organization***

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Yes! I'd like to join the **Friends of Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge**

Please return this form with your membership information and annual dues to the address listed above.

Name _____ Address _____ City/State _____

Phone _____ email _____

Check your level of membership:

Student/Senior: \$10; Individual: \$20; Family:\$30; Supporter:\$50

Yes, I am interested in volunteering, please contact me.

*FOHBNWR Artwork by Ana Roberts



Image from the 2008 Fly-Off and Family Fun Day (Photo Credit: USFWS)