

National Elk Refuge News – May 20, 2009

Two Family Programs Offered During Elkfest



Refuge volunteer Betty Mulcahy hands a bighorn sheep skull to a young passerby who took turns handling the specimen with her brothers.

The Saturday before Memorial Day weekend always proves to be a busy one for the National Elk Refuge, when thousands of pounds of elk antlers collected from the refuge go up for public auction on Jackson's Town Square. The auction highlights the partnership between the National Elk Refuge and the Jackson District Boy Scouts, who provide hundreds of hours of volunteer support to collect and prepare the antlers for public sale.

The antler auction has now become part of a weekend of events collectively known as *Elkfest*, designed to celebrate nature, outdoor skills, and environmental education. In conjunction with

this year's *Elkfest* celebration, the National Elk Refuge held two free family-oriented activities on Saturday, May 16 to offer wildlife education to the public.

With the auctioneer's voice providing a rhythmic beat in the background, volunteer naturalists staffed an education table from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM in the center of the bustling Town Square. Visitors to the booth could use hands-on materials to learn the difference between antlers and horns, as well as estimate the weights of the samples, feel a variety of pelts, and learn about the role of the National Elk Refuge in management of the Jackson Elk Herd. The naturalists were accompanied by both a

National Wildlife Refuge System Blue Goose and an elk mascot who were escorted through the crowd during the auction. The mascot duo brought smiles from onlookers who welcomed the opportunity to be photographed with the pair:

Later that day, visitors had an opportunity to further enjoy wildlife-focused activities by attending a birding event held at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center. Entitled "*Flying in to Discover Birds*," the program was the next in a series of National Elk Refuge "Let's Go Outside" events, developed in response to a national initiative to encourage families to spend time together outdoors.

Participants checked in at a welcome station in the visitor center lobby and were given an overview of the activities available that afternoon. Attendees could practice using binoculars, learning how easiest to locate an object through the lens and focus the binoculars for maximum clarity and resolution. They also had access to a spotting scope, located on a viewing platform in an area abundant with waterfowl and migratory birds. There, naturalists assisted with bird identification.

Participants could also study bird coloration and markings at an arts and crafts station and test their speed and dexterity at a station that explored the relationship of beaks and bills to the food birds eat.

Each participant received a prize for attending the visitor center event.



Above: Refuge Volunteer Richard Eichinger stands by to assist mascots Kathy Eichinger (seated) and Stacey Sadler (standing behind) with removal of their costumes.

Below: Refuge Volunteer Elaine Hamm visits with a family on the use of a spotting scope.

