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NISQUALLY & GRAYS HARBOR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

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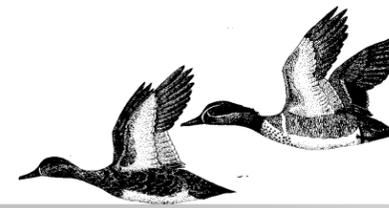
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The Nisqually River Delta, a biologically rich and diverse area at the southern end of Puget Sound, supports a variety of habitats that in turn support numerous migratory and resident wildlife species. **Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge** was established in 1974 to protect the delta and the surrounding area.

The muddy tideflats of Grays Harbor Estuary is one of four major staging areas for shorebirds in North America on their tremendous spring and fall migrations from tropical to Arctic areas and back. **Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge** was established in 1990 to protect this feeding and resting ground of international importance.



SPRING 2008

THE FLYWAY

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF NISQUALLY AND GRAYS HARBOR NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

AN UNCOMMON, COMMON RESIDENT: THE AMERICAN BITTERN AT NISQUALLY NWR

By Kristin Stewart

The American Bittern is a medium sized heron with a stout body and neck, relatively short legs, and a heavy bill. The sexes appear similar, although males are slightly larger. Their plumage varies little seasonally, and unlike most herons, American Bitterns rarely perch in trees.

In the past, these bitterns were found in freshwater marshes and estuarine wetlands throughout much of the U.S. Loss of wetland habitat throughout their range makes this secretive bird even harder to find these days.

American Bitterns inhabit wetlands with tall, emergent vegetation, also on a rare occasion found in open habitats such as fields or tideflats. They winter in moderate climates with maritime influences.

The American Bittern is a solitary hunter that relies on stealth rather than pursuit. Their coloration, especially the ventral stripes, provide excellent camouflage in vertical vegetation. Their camouflage seems designed for prey and

competitors, rather than to escape predators. To avoid becoming prey themselves, these birds assume the "bittern stance" when threatened by larger predators including humans: the bill pointed skyward, feathers flattened, and body compressed vertically while swaying in the breeze. Its food sources include insects, amphibians, small fish, mammals, and crayfish.

American Bittern calls are low, resonant, and audible long distances in vegetated marshes. The calls are usually three syllables, preceded by bill clicking/gulping sounds, and typically translated as "ooohnk a doonk". Common nicknames such as thunder pumper come from the distinct sound of their calls. These calls are uttered early in the breeding season, most frequently at dusk or during the night. American Bitterns are otherwise



Year-round residents at Nisqually NWR, American Bitterns can be seen along the trail to McAllister Creek, by the Ring Dike, and near the ponds outside the Visitor Center.

silent, except for an alarm call when flushed.

Their nests can be found among dense emergent vegetation, over water, and occasionally over dryer land. They usually consist of reeds, sedges, and cattails. After she builds the nest, the female lays 2-7 eggs and incubates them by herself, as well as doing all the brooding and feeding.

The American Bittern has been a USFWS Species of Concern since 1982, its decline due to habitat loss. Habitat degradation, damaged prey supplies from siltation, acid rain and human disturbance, have also contributed.

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Construction of the new Education Center set to begin early this spring. Expect to see construction equipment in or near parking lot.
- Weekend Interpretive Program season kicks off this April and will continue through September at Nisqually NWR. The Spring schedule of programs is included in this newsletter as an insert.

Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival

Celebrate the Spring Migration of Shorebirds in Grays Harbor County!

May 2 - 4, 2008

Hoquiam, Washington

The 13th Annual Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival promises you a great nature experience. Witness the migrating shorebirds at Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge. Take part in a variety of events including field trips, lectures, exhibitors, vendors, a banquet and auction.

Come be a part of the celebration!

1-800-303-8498

www.shorebirdfestival.com

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Save trees, think green

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NISQUALLY NWR RECOGNIZES VOLUNTEERS

Every year the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge honors the men and women who volunteer their time and talents with a special recognition and awards ceremony. 2007 was an especially big year for the volunteer program at the Refuge, with 103 volunteers contributing 17,600 hours of service. Volunteers assist staff with virtually every aspect of Refuge operations

including habitat maintenance, wildlife surveys, reception and Visitor Center desks, education and interpretive programs, special events, and library/archival projects.

Around 70 people attended the event. Every volunteer's contributions were recognized, and a few volunteers were singled

out for special acknowledgment. Merlin Wiese was awarded Volunteer of the Year for contributing 695 hours of service. Karen Yochem was honored as a Distinguished Volunteer for contributing an amazing 1,117 hours of service; volunteers who actually accrue top hours but have already received the Volunteer of the Year award twice



Merlin Wiese received the 2007 Volunteer of the Year Award.

are recognized as distinguished volunteers. Dennis Weeks, Art Pavey, Dennis Ellison, and Juni Greenough were also recognized for top hours of volunteer service in 2007.

EDUCATION CENTER CONSTRUCTION SET TO BEGIN!

Construction of the new Education Center at Nisqually NWR will start early this spring, so expect to see construction vehicles in the parking lot in the near future. Building a new environmental education center has been one of the top priorities for the Refuge since the Twin Barns Education Center became unusable from damage it sustained in the 2001 Nisqually Earthquake. The new education facility will be larger than its predecessor, since the Refuge hopes to expand the current Education program capacity from 5,000 students a year to that of 15,000. This 15-year goal was established as a high priority in the Refuge's Comprehensive

Conservation Plan. Funding for the building itself was secured in the 2007 fiscal year. Triton Marine Construction was selected as the contractor to both design and construct the new building. The Refuge's maintenance staff and WCC (WA Conservation Corps) crew will be doing ground preparation for the site.

All materials in the current "temporary" Education Center will be utilized in the new building. The Refuge is still working on acquiring funding for furnishings to complete the facility. In addition to indoor classrooms, a new outdoor classroom

space will be created for outside learning activities near the building.

With the construction of a new building, expect to see the education program itself undergo major changes, including the creation of a new and updated curriculum of activities for visiting education groups. The Education Center will continue to be available by reservation only for school groups, teacher workshops, and special events.



North and west views of the new Education Center to be located in the east side of the orchard between the parking lot and maintenance facilities

Ed Center Details:

- 4200 sq. ft.
- Includes two classrooms, orientation room, outdoor amphitheatre, offices, and bathrooms
- Operational in Fall 2008

FRIENDS SUPPORT REFUGES

Now in its tenth year, with 250 members, the Friends of Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge continues to play an important role in support of education, outreach, and habitat programs at Nisqually and Grays Harbor NWR's. The seven-member Board meets quarterly with John Keith as the 2008 President.

Revenue from memberships, donations, grants, and the Nature Shop continues to grow,

offering Friends new opportunities to expand its role. In 2007, Friends collected \$19,700 from the sales in the Nature Shop located in the Refuge Visitor Center; \$3,800 in donations; \$3,400 in membership dues; and a \$2,500 grant from the Weyerhaeuser Foundation for education programs at Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge.

Supporting the education programs has been the Friends' focus. In 2007, Friends donated \$6,600 and

\$5,000 to support the environmental education programs at Grays Harbor and Nisqually, respectively. This money paid for AmeriCorps volunteers at the two refuges. Friends also supported the Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival and the Nisqually Watershed Festival, as well as paying expenses for the new quarterly newsletter.

Thanks to all Friends members for their support!

Friends of Nisqually NWR is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization established in 1998 to promote conservation of the natural and cultural resources and fund education and outreach programs at Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

JOIN FRIENDS OF NISQUALLY NWR!

Your tax deductible contribution will help preserve the unique habitats, fish, and wildlife of the Nisqually Delta and the Grays Harbor Tideflats.

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email _____

Individual/Family Memberships

- \$15 Student/Senior
- \$25 Individual
- \$50 Family
- \$100 Supporting
- \$250 Partner

Corporate/Business Memberships

- \$250 Business Sponsor
- \$500 Community Partner
- \$1000 Sustaining Business
- \$2500 Corporate Patron
- \$5000+ Corporate Benefactor

Please send information on making Friends of Nisqually NWR a beneficiary of my estate.

Check here to receive an electronic version of *The Flyway* newsletter by email.

Please make checks payable to: Friends of Nisqually NWR, 100 Brown Farm Rd, Olympia, WA 98516

