



DUNGENESS RIVER CURRENT

Newsletter for the Dungeness River Audubon Center interpreting the natural history of the Olympic Peninsula in partnership with the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe, Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society, and Audubon Washington

Spring 2011

Celebrate the River Center's 10th Birthday – Providing Enrichment and Education Since 2001

Did you know that April is Volunteer Appreciation Month? The River Center could not function, and in fact would cease to exist, if it wasn't for the incredible volunteers who help keep the center and park operating. To the boards of directors, docents, greeters, educators, work parties, festival organizers, community outreachers, trail monitors, fundraisers, partner organizations, and everyone else who volunteers their time and efforts to keep Railroad Bridge Park and the Dungeness River Audubon Center a thriving resource for our community, we thank you from the bottom of our hearts.

The Sequim School District honored the River Center in January, giving the Center the school district's Community Service Award. This award recognizes the contributions made by the River Center to Sequim students, both for our outdoor field experiences for 5th through 8th graders and our in-class lessons (Bird of the Month and Mammal of the Month) for 2nd and 3rd graders. Again, these great opportunities for students would not be possible without a host of volunteers willing to donate their time and pass their wisdom to future generations. Now more than ever, sharing the natural world with young people is critical, particularly for our lovely north Olympic Peninsula.

The River Center opened to the public almost 10 years ago, on October 21, 2001. To celebrate the River Center's 10th anniversary, the River Center is beginning to plan events for the coming six months. Some of these, such as Spring Fling, are listed in this newsletter. Others will occur throughout the summer and during the Dungeness River Festival on September 23-24. Plan on being with us on October 21st. Come join the celebrations!



From Left to Right: Annette Nesse, Bob Boekelheide, Julie Jackson, and Powell Jones receive community service award from Sequim School District



Time To Get Ready for Spring Fling

River Center supporters are getting ready to celebrate spring by having fun, getting fit, and raising funds for the River Center. Our annual Dungeness Spring Fling event starts May 1. Simply pick an activity you enjoy, such as walking, gardening, biking, birding, or reading and do it for the River Center. To learn more about participating, contact Julie Jackson, 683-1355 or juliejackson@wavecable.com or Gretha Davis at 681-8013 or gretha.d@wavecable.com.

Dungeness River Audubon Center

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*Interpreting the natural history
of the Olympic Peninsula.*

Dragon Secrets

Powell Jones

As I help my son Win secure his jacket and boots, I can't help but wonder what adventure we will have. A walk in the woods is never just walk in the woods for Win, or probably any young child. For him, a walk on the trails around our property represents an adventure. Our adventures have covered the gamut of experiences that I would expect from tromping around the woods and some that I did not expect. Going for a walk so close to dusk always increases the chance for the unexpected.

Win pulls me out the front door and announces excitedly "lets go to Dragon Secrets." I think about the trip to Dragon Secrets and agree as long as I can choose part of our route. He agrees and we head out onto our trails and begin a long twisting descent to Dragon Secrets.

On our way, there are the temporary distractions of identifying the strange sounds of chirping birds, or throwing rocks in one of the many vernal pools, or a vigorous session of hide and seek. As always, there are the many questions about what is happening in our woods. In a steady stream, Win puzzles over where the snails have all gone, why we don't have to dodge stinging nettles in winter, why green fur grows on only one side of the trees, and any other question that might come to his mind through observation.

We round the last corner taking turns describing the shapes of trees in the fading light of the day. "That cedar looks like a really shaggy monster, but not a scary monster, a nice one that likes to help people, and likes to eat fruit snacks" Win declares enthusiastically. This is really how Dragon Secrets got its name.

Dragon Secrets is a Western Red Cedar that survived a rough start. It juts out of the earth with a diameter of 3-4 feet but it leans eastward at a 35-degree angle for its first 25 feet at which point it turns skyward. Don't get the idea that this is a weak tree, climbing it you can feel that it has stood the test of its time through wind, snow and soggy soils for a reason, it is burly. Off to the side might be the culprit of its deformity, a 5 foot in diameter stump, Douglas Fir by the look of the grooved bark, with springboard cuts clearly visible. I can only imagine that a young Dragon Secrets might have been damaged under the massive chaos of its neighbor being taken down.

In the lean of the tree, there are many spires that shoot up, looking for light, creating saddles or "Nooks" as Win calls them. In the belly of the tree, branches dangle towards the ground creating a labyrinth of arms to hold onto. In my humble opinion this might be the best tree I have been around to climb on.

Win blasts up through the tangle of branches for his favorite spot. It is one of the larger nooks, the last before the tree goes completely vertical. We have artistically trimmed the branches the best we can so we both fit comfortably. This is the place where we reasoned that dragons might come to tell their secrets, because they must have them. Sitting in this spot Win likes to hide from Moses, the dreaded "Spotted Wolf" (our black and white English Setter). I whistle three times and then we wait, whispering a last few ideas about not being found and watching for the "Spotted Wolf." Moses makes his way down the trails towards the tree, his collar jingling. He circles around tree looking for us but can't find us until the giggling starts; the game always ends with giggling.

Bad news and good news: The River Center did not receive a B-WET (Bay Watershed Education and Training) grant from NOAA for the current 2010-11 school year. A similar B-WET grant supported our education programs from 2008 to 2010, specifically our watershed field trips for 5th through 8th graders. However, the River Center board of directors felt these field trips are such an important part of Center programs that they insisted the field trips must go on, putting them in this year's budget. Your donations will help fill the gap and keep the school busses arriving in Railroad Bridge Park this school year.

Good news and bad news: Hooray! The River Center has received word that it will be a recipient of a NOAA B-WET grant for the upcoming school year, 2011-12. However, we have been told the entire B-WET program is contingent on the Federal budget, which you probably know is very contentious this year. So final news awaits deliberations in Congress.

Thanks to the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe and its woodcarvers, Railroad Bridge Park is receiving a new entrance sign. Jamestown Excavating moved the old entrance sign, in place since 2001, to the parking area by Railroad Bridge, and erected a new frame to hold the fancy new sign. Look for the new sign when you next enter the park on Hendrickson Road.

The "high water event" (AKA "flood") last December 12th will go down in the record books as the third highest flood on the Dungeness River in the last 10 years, and the tenth highest flood since records have been kept in 1923.

The Dec. 12 flood reached 5,820 cubic feet per second (cfs), not nearly as high the all-time high water of 7,610 cfs on Jan, 7, 2002, but still high enough to leave a big impression in Railroad Bridge Park.

The most noteworthy changes from the flood are the large amount of woody debris deposited upstream of the bridge's trestle and the recharging of several side channels, including some close to the park's picnic shelter. Downstream of the bridge, much of the river's flow is now directed into a large side channel near the park's loop trail, but a big pile of logs was also deposited at the entrance to this side channel as well, blocking some of the water. We're witnessing a great push and pull between logs and the river right now.

For the second year, the River Center is participating in the WA Dept. of Fish and Wildlife's "Salmon in the Classroom" program, thanks to Puget Sound Anglers and WDFW. On March 8, the River Center received several hundred coho salmon eggs from the Dungeness Hatchery, which are now residing comfortably in the Center's 55-gallon fish tank. The eggs will hatch by the end of March, then by early June the small salmon will be ready for planting in the river by 6th graders. Many thanks to Don Hatler of PSA and Dan Wiczak of WDFW for their support and encouragement with the program.

In August 2008, the Bureau of Indian Affairs placed a counter on Railroad Bridge to tally the number of people crossing the bridge. The counter worked great for two years, tallying an astonishing 242,566 crossings in that time. In September, however, the counter mysteriously died. In December we received a replacement from BIA, which is now back in operation on the bridge tallying park visitors.



Artist's rendition of new Railroad Bridge Park sign.

Visit Our Website: WWW.DungenessRiverCenter.Org

Several years ago the River Center employed Theres Fillmore as part of the AmeriCorps program. With Powell Jones and Bob Boekelheide, Theres offered classes about local birds to the teachers and children in the two Sequim elementary schools, Helen Haller and Greywolf.

In the winter of 2008, using Theres' original ideas, volunteers from the OPAS and River Center Education and Outreach Committee began an annual introduction to local birds in each of the eight second-grade classes in Sequim. At the end of the first year, the teachers and students liked it so much that they asked if we could offer similar lessons when the students became third graders. An introduction to local mammals seemed like a logical addition to the program.

These presentations, done by pairs of volunteers, have been part of an ongoing connection between OPAS, the Dungeness River Audubon Center, and Sequim Schools. This year, the second grade at Olympic Christian School also requested the bird presentations.

The time of year is late winter through spring, a special time in the school year. Once a month, February through May, pairs of volunteers visit each 2nd and 3rd grade in Sequim. We selected species with the advice of Powell and Bob, depending on the Center's available specimens and children's books. The second-grade birds include ducks, hawks and owls, hummingbirds, and woodpeckers. The third-grade mammal species are river otters, raccoons, coyotes and bobcats.

The way in which the species are presented depends upon the skills and interest of the volunteers. Often the presentation includes unique facts about the bird or mammal, a story, artwork, poetry, time to look closely at specimens, listening to sounds, or telling anecdotes connected with the species.



Laura Anderson gives 3rd graders a close look at a raccoon.

Laura Anderson, Shirley Anderson, Quenn Charrier, Joan Henry, Jodie Hoekstra, Sally Holm, Sheila Joyce, Angie Kummet, Sandy Major, Sharlene Miller, Cindy Moore, Lyn Muench, Bill Parker, and Jessica Ruby have each played a major role in making these programs successful.

What's next? I'd like to develop something special for kindergarten students, such as showing them tools that people use but whose structure and function are also found in animals and plants. For example, suction cups and plungers from sea stars, octopus, and squid; cameras from basic eye structures; pliers from bird bills; and fish hooks from talons.

First grade's topic might be four native trees, two evergreen and two deciduous. If second and third remain as they are with four local birds and four local mammals, fourth grade could be an insect or other arthropod that combines the tree, bird and mammal in a network. The fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth grades have field trips and class work led by Powell and Bob. The high school and college ages have independent work funded by the Homer Frazier fellowships. Imagine such a connection with OPAS, the Dungeness River Audubon Center and every child in Sequim.



Shirley Anderson shows a student a mammal skull

Schedule of Events

Olympic Peninsula BirdFest

Dates: Fri. to Sun., Apr. 8 to 10

Join us for the fifth annual Olympic Peninsula BirdFest, a great time to celebrate the birds and natural history of our unique area. Festival events include special field trips, presentations, a banquet, owl prowls, and lots of birdy activities. Please visit www.olympicbirdfest.org website for information and registration.

San Juan Island Three-day Cruise

Date: Sun. to Tue., Apr. 10 to 12

Join us, for a three-day, two-night birding cruise through the San Juan Archipelago. Relax at historic Roche Harbor Resort. Enjoy whale watching, northwest seabirds, and the spectacular scenery of the San Juan Islands. Details and registration forms for the San Juan cruise can be found at www.olybird.org

Birding by Ear Class.

Date: five-week class on Thursday mornings running from April 14 to May 12. First meeting at 9 a.m. at the River Center.

Learn to identify birds by their voices. Each week, the class explores different habitats in the Sequim area, focusing on bird songs of spring. Bob Boekelheide, director of the River Center, teaches this popular class to help birders recognize common and not-so-common bird songs of our area. Costs \$40 for River Center partner members, \$60 for non-members.

Spring Fling for the Dungeness River Audubon Center

Through the month of May

This annual event raises funds for the programs of the River Center and to maintain our beautiful park. Join us by walking for wildlife, swimming for salmon, or biking for birds during the fundraising dates, then come to the Frolic on Jun 5 to celebrate our success. See our website www.DungenessRiverCenter.org for more details.

Beginning Birds and Birding Class.

Date: six-week class runs on Tuesday evenings starting May 3 through June 7, from 7 to 9 p.m., at the River Center.

Dave Jackson, River Center volunteer and newspaper columnist, teaches this popular class to help residents learn the basics about birds of the north Olympic Peninsula and how to identify them. Class costs \$40 for River Center partner members, \$60 for non-members.

Birds and Habitats of Peru, a special presentation by Doris Valencia.

Wednesday, May 4, 2011, 7 p.m., at the River Center.

Doris Valencia is founder and director of Habitats Peru, an ecological travel company based in Cusco, Peru. A native of Peru, she is an expert on the jungles, wildlife, mountains, and culture of this fascinating country. \$5 donation requested to help support River Center programs.

Spring Birds of Railroad Bridge Park and Beyond

Date: Sat., May 7; Time: 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Time to warm up for our Spring Bird Count. Meet Bob Boekelheide at Railroad Bridge Park to hear breeding songbirds, then travel to Dungeness Landing Park at 11:30 a.m. to view shorebirds, gulls, and waterfowl.

Introduction to Estate Planning

Thursday, May 12

Sequim Attorney Alan Millet will present the third in a series of financial planning programs sponsored by the Dungeness River Audubon Center. Join him for an informative session on wills, trusts, durable powers of attorney, health care directives, and community property agreements. The free, one hour program will be offered at two times: 4:00-5:00 pm and 6:00-7:00 pm at the Dungeness River Audubon Center at Railroad Bridge Park, 2151 W. Hendrickson Road in Sequim. To register for either the afternoon or the evening session, contact Sue Chickman, (360) 477-4123 or organicallysue@olypen.com Pre-registration is advised.

International Migratory Bird Day/Clallam County Birdathon

Date: Sat., May 14; Time: Midnight to midnight

How many birds can we count in Clallam Co. in one 24-hour period? You can help by covering a special route, joining another group, or by just counting your neighborhood or backyard. Please contact the River Center to sign up for the count.

Recurring Events

Bird Walks

Date: Every Wed. morning; Time: 8:30 to 10:30 a.m.

Meet at the River Center for a lovely walk to see and hear the birds of the Dungeness riparian forest

Dungeness River Management Team

Time: Second Wed. of every month, 2 to 5 p.m.

Experts and informed public that oversee the management of the Dungeness River meet meeting.

Work Party

Date: Variable During Winter (contact center to be added to contact list)

Railroad Bridge Park and the River Center needs help to maintain their beauty. Please join us!

Natural Science Study Group

Dates: Second Mon. of the month, 10 a.m.

This adult discussion group focuses on interesting aspects of the natural world that affect the north Olympic Peninsula. Discussion topics vary with group interests.

OPAS Field Trips: Mar. 26. Contact

www.olympicpeninsulaudubon.org for more details.

DUNGENESS RIVER CURRENT

Dungeness River Audubon Center
PO Box 2450
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Wanted: Dungeness River Audubon Center Memberships Renewals/ Endowment Donations

Choose your category (ies): Renewal New Member Endowment

Any amount above your dues is a contribution to our operating cost.

Please contact our office regarding contributions to the River Center and Railroad Bridge Park Endowment Fund

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- Friend (\$50)
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- Check if you would like to receive the *River Current* newsletter online instead of in print.
- Check if you are interested in receiving information about Volunteer Opportunities for the Dungeness River Audubon Center

The friendship of those we serve is the foundation of our progress