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The Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge

The latest updates | March, 2023



Ridgefield Refuge Complex News & Events Gate times for both units: 7:30 am - 5:30 pm

The Carty Unit Oaks-to-Wetlands Trail, within the Oak Restoration area, may close occasionally for trail maintenance, watch for signs.

Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Administration Office is open Monday-Friday 8 am-4 pm.
General inquiries M-F, 8 to 4:30 can be answered at 360-887-4106.

NOTE: The Washington State Discover Pass is not valid on Federally managed public lands, including National Wildlife Refuges. Find out more about [fees & passes here](#).

Seasonal Trails close Sept 30th & re-open May 1st

Habitat Restoration Update



Visitors driving around the River S Unit in February likely heard a lot of commotion coming from behind the gates of the Kiwa Trail. Refuge staff and volunteers conducted an ash tree thinning/clearing operation to remove potential hazard trees and clear areas for understory plantings. Winter would not be the first choice for this type of operation, but as this is an area near the recent Sandhill Crane nesting sites, we wanted to complete both the tree work and the plantings before Crane mating season. Winter tree thinning also has the added benefit of not impacting active cavity nesters or seasonal trail hikers.

The Refuge removed around 30 smaller diameter trees from approximately 5 acres of riparian habitat generating around 20 cubic yards of woodchips. Visitors may have noticed folks hauling and spreading woodchips. The woodchips are used as weed control around recent tree/shrub plantings, reducing the amount of herbicide used on the Refuge. If you're thinking of using woodchips yourselves, the minimum depth is 4 inches for weed control, and you will want larger size chips to allow for good airflow. If you want some practice spreading chips feel free to [contact the Friends](#) for Springtime volunteer opportunities.



-Keith Rutz, Friends of Ridgefield NWR Habitat Restoration Coordinator

image 1: Volunteers take woodchips out to those that need some, by Keith Rutz

image 2: Staff and volunteers assess progress, standing by a large pile of wood chips

From the Contact Station

Star of the Winter



The star species for the last two months must be the Short-eared Owl (SEOW in banding lingo). Daily counts have ranged from one to 8 owls. Daily counts of visitors have ranged from what seems like a whole lot to too many on the best weather days. There has been a crowd. More on that later.

We don't get to see Short-eared Owls every year on the auto tour, though they are usually somewhere on the refuge in winter and down in Vancouver Lake Bottoms or Shillapoo

WMA. With the very long grasses in superabundance into the fall and over the winter, and probably some influence with the year's weather, the River S canals must have looked like a great place for an owl to hunker down these last couple of months.

SEOWs are an open country raptor and they like grasslands, prairies, sagebrush steppes, marshes, and tundra. Their diet is mainly small mammals, most especially meadow voles. Birds go where the food is and SEOWs follow the vole cycles. This fall and winter, there has hardly been a time I have been on the refuge that I don't see a vole being carried off in talon or beak. Makes me think our SEOW abundance is connected to the current abundance of voles.

SEOWs hunt much like the Northern Harrier's that often occupy the same territory. They hunt low

across the grasslands using both sound and sight to locate small rodents. They are very agile, making quick, twisting turns to land on prey. They can hover with their floppy flight or “kite” over a field when it is windy. Sometimes, SEOWs will tangle with the harriers to defend a territory. Many visitors have remarked about the owls flying out of their roost spot when a harrier flies nearby.

Roosts are usually communal, and roosts may be occupied by just a few birds up to many dozens if the area is big enough and has abundant prey. Mostly they roost on the ground, but if we have snow, they may move up into some bushes or low trees for a better rest. Observed to be nomadic, meaning they have irregular and highly variable movements not tied to a season, they follow prey outbreaks. SEOWs may nest near winter roosts or migrate long distances back to the arctic and subantarctic regions to nest. I had a hard time pinning down whether the SEOW might still be nesting here. It has been many years, but some staff recall nesting on the refuge, probably on Bachelor Island. However, most references show them in the area only in winter. A state Gap-Analysis said “In western Washington, this species has declined considerably. In 1953, Short-eared Owls could be found in suitable habitat throughout the lowlands of western Washington. They are apparently absent now, but were formerly known from the lowlands of Clark County...” The analysis was published by the state in 1997. Breeding in eastern Washington and Oregon is also scarce and declining. The species is now identified as a *Species of Greatest Conservation Need* (SGCN) under the Washington State Wildlife Action Plan.



Although it is not likely, it would be nice if our owls stayed to enjoy the vole bounty and raise a few young. Several visitors have reported they were nesting. However, it can be easy to confuse roosting with nesting since they look a lot alike for SEOWs. They roost on the ground and nest on the ground. Most owls don’t build nests. But the female SEOW will scrape out a shallow 10-inch bowl and line it with a bit of grass and a few feathers. They prefer a dry area with enough vegetation to provide protection from predators. They can lay 11 eggs, which hatch between 21 to 37 days. Male short-eared owls conduct aerial displays that include songs and acrobatics to attract a mate. So, that is something to look for to see if we have some breeding going on this year. Wouldn’t that be amazing?



Harassment of Wildlife. If you are a reader of this column, it is very likely you are aware of the Refuge rules for visitors and follow them. But maybe there is a reader out there who may not be aware, so I am going to go over a few. Basically, they mostly lead to this: *Don’t Harass the Wildlife*. But what does that mean? It is anything you might do that disturbs the natural behaviors of our animals as they forage for food, get romantically involved, become parents and raise young, escape from predators, enjoy a swim or a walk

in the woods. The rules are set up to avoid interactions that would deter wildlife from living their normal life.

The fancy term is to encourage *Wildlife Compatible Activities* by people. So, we walk on a designated trail slowly and quietly. We stay in the car at certain times of the year so that the visiting wildlife continues to feed and be ready for their return migrations to breed in other areas. We keep our pets in the car or leave them home to make sure we don’t bring unwanted diseases to a population of animals not protected or scare other animals with their desire to play. We keep a respectful distance from wildlife to have the pleasure of observing their behavior and assuring the next car that comes behind us might enjoy the scene too. We act in a way that does not grab the attention of the animal or startle it. This becomes particularly important for animals on day roosts or nests. With our Great Horned Owls in particular, our disturbing presence can keep them from bringing food to an incubating mate or new young.

Unfortunately, some less desirable behaviors have been on display because of all the excitement over the Short-eared Owls. We also saw it two years ago near the Great-horned Owl nest. It can be disturbing to people too. It is easy to get excited about seeing something as wonderful as an owlet or a previously unseen species like the Short-eared Owl. But our presence, especially in mass, can be disturbing too. It is also good form to share the experience. Getting a look or a photo and moving on is the right thing to do when the traffic gets deep. The huge crowds in such a small area can affect the roadbeds when people drive off the road onto the muddy edges. Keep alert to the number of people around you and only park where the road is wide enough to allow another car or truck to pass without going off the road.



An animal’s behavior can often be a good indicator that our actions are disturbing to them. Do they become focused on you? There is a reason for that. Do they move away? There is a reason for that. Sometimes we don’t realize our presence is making a difference in their hunt for food or rest. We need to be alert just as the animals are. It also makes us safer.

If you want more information on this topic, here is a link to the [Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife website](https://wdfw.wa.gov/wildlife-photography-practices-7e3ce6a65259) that has many good tips on being a photographer of wildlife, but it certainly applies broadly to any form of wildlife watching and outdoor activities: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/wildlife-photography-practices-7e3ce6a65259>. Also, on the [Friends of Ridgefield NWR website](https://www.friends-of-ridgefield-nwr.org/), you will find a link to Mindful Birding that is very useful.

Time for me to get off my soapbox and start thinking about next month’s topic. Good wildlife watching and Refuge enjoyment to you all.

Please don’t yell at people whom you believe to be breaking the rules. Whether they knew better or not, we should be kind to one another. Report negative sightings to the Refuge or volunteer on duty to follow up, and keep yourselves safe. -A note from your Staff

-Susan Setterberg, Contact Station Volunteer

image 1: Short-eared Owl by Jim Bradley

image 2: roosting Short-eared Owl by Angie Vogel

Birding Enthusiasts

**Ridgefield First
Saturdays
Arts Month Kickoff & Color**



Check out what species are being seen on the Refuge [here](#).

Run
March 4th, 2023

Kickoff Ridgefield Youth Arts Month with a 5K run or walk in Downtown Ridgefield! Youth Arts Month is a partnership between Ridgefield School District and the Ridgefield Art Association encouraging young people to take part in artistic endeavors including literary, visual, musical, and performing arts. Youth Arts Month happens throughout the month of March with events taking place at all four district schools as well as at community businesses and organizations.



[See the Full Schedule and more HERE](#)



2022/2023 Merch Updates

NEW Puzzles!, merch featuring contest winners, BirdFest & Bluegrass button images, Chinookan Steller's Jay art by Greg Robinson, and more!

Who loves a good jigsaw puzzle on a dark winter evening? Or maybe you know someone who does? Then we have the perfect gift for you!

We also have mugs, tote bags, photo cards, t-shirts and sweatshirts with previous photo contest winners, BirdFest logos and art, and the Chinookan Steller's Jay design by Greg A. Robinson. Get your friends and family (or yourself!) a gift that will remind them of nature's beauty and support a wonderful cause!



SHOP FOR PUZZLES!

Shop Here! (everything but puzzle link)

Become a Business Alliance Member!

As a member of the Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Business Alliance, you invest in one of our urban metropolitan area's most unique and diverse natural and cultural resources. [Click here to find out more](#)



Board Seeking New Members Or, Join a Committee

The Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge is a non-profit dedicated to promoting, protecting, and enhancing its wildlife habitat. We are currently seeking candidates to serve on our board of directors. We are recruiting candidates with diverse backgrounds and skills for several open board positions, in addition to candidates interested in serving on a committee (board membership not required).

Find out more, and [contact us here](#)

Friends Board Meetings

Join the Friends of Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge Board for their monthly meeting. Meetings start at 5 PM every second Monday of the month and will either be in-person at the Ridgefield NWR Administration Building (28908 NW Main AVE), or virtual, the plan is to switch off each month. [Contact us](#) to join in!

Board Meeting Dates for 2023:

- March 13th
 - April 10th (virtual)
 - May 8th
 - June 12th (virtual)
 - July 10th
 - August 14th (virtual)
 - September 11th
 - October 10th* (Virtual)
 - November 13th
 - December 11th (Virtual)
- (*moved due to federal holiday)



Support While You Shop



When you link your Fred Meyer Rewards Card to the Friends, you help us earn donations from Fred Meyer Community Rewards. It doesn't change your regular personal shopping and fuel rewards, but it does make a meaningful contribution to our work on the Refuge. It's easy to sign up. [Just click here.](#) You can search for us by our name, Friends of Ridgefield NWR, or by our non-profit number, PK822. Then, every time you shop and use your Rewards Card, you are helping earn a donation to support the Friends and Ridgefield NWR. If you do not have a Rewards Card, ask at the Customer Service desk of any FM store.

Would you like to enjoy a cup of coffee from Ridgefield's Seasons Coffee after a morning hike on the Refuge? Lunch in-between the River 'S' and Carty Units? Dinner and drinks at the Historic Sportsman's Restaurant and Lounge after a busy day of wildlife viewing (5% off a meal with member card!)? Or maybe you would like to get a discount on some supplies at Shovel & Thumb or Backyard Bird Shop? How about a night out at ilani?

[Find out more](#), [become a Friend](#), or [renew your membership](#) today and receive a member card with great discounts at these wonderful local businesses! Feel free to [contact us](#) for any questions or inquiries.

Benefits of Membership



The Friends of the Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge promote the enjoyment, understanding, and protection of native and endangered birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. We focus on our local community and the Pacific Northwest.

Sponsors

Business Alliance Members:

In-Kind Support:



BirdFest & Bluegrass:



Granting Organizations & Partners:



Header Photo Credit: Sandra Michaelis, 2018, 2nd place Plant Category, Refuge Photo Contest



[Contact Us](#) | [Website](#)

Want regular updates on Refuge events and happenings? Follow the Friends on your favorite social media by clicking the logos below to stay connected even when you are off the Refuge.

