



Photo by Joe Liebezeit

Volunteer citizen scientists

“Volunteers that participate in our projects get to see a part of the Oregon Coast that most people miss in their everyday lives,” O’Connor says. “Each of our projects gives a detailed look into the wild parts of our coast.”

One volunteer says bird monitoring for Audubon Society of Portland is “one of the most personally fulfilling volunteer agencies it has been my pleasure in which to participate,” says Karen Driscoll, who has been monitoring black oystercatchers since 2015. A novice in the beginning, she has built her skillset by attending Audubon’s yearly trainings and continuing to volunteer each year. Last year, she monitored five nesting sites and documented a previously unknown nesting site. “I thoroughly enjoy” the time spent observing the birds, she adds.

Coastal bird monitoring

Pacific brown pelicans are majestic birds reminiscent of pterodactyls that skim the tops of ocean waves looking for fish. When feeding, they appear to stop in midair and plunge beak-first into the ocean, gulping up fish in their huge beaks. In recent years, the birds have suffered massive nest failures at their breeding grounds off southern and Baja California that are thought to be related to declines in the populations of their fish food source, which is mostly anchovies.

Other citizen science opportunities in our area

- COASST (Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team), a program of the University of Washington, manages citizen science projects focused on marine debris and beached birds. Periodic trainings are held in Astoria and other North Coast locations. See depts.washington.edu/coasst/ for more information.
- Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition manages citizen science programs to track sea star wasting disease, beached marine

animals, invasive species, and marine debris, as well as a King Tides photography project. For more information, see oregonshores.org/coastwatch/citizen-science-projects

- Haystack Rock Awareness Program manages surveys of birds, sea stars, and marine debris. Find out more at www.ci.cannon-beach.or.us/hrap/page/citizen-science
- More: See Oregon State University’s Citizen Science webpage for a list of many other opportunities to contribute to citizen science: hmsc.oregonstate.edu/marine-science-central/citizen-science

Portland Audubon’s community science project is part of a West Coast-wide biannual brown pelican survey with partners Audubon California, Audubon Washington and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This spring’s survey takes place on May 18, including at Cape Falcon Marine Reserve’s rocky island pelican-roosting sites between Manzanita and Cannon Beach.

Training to help

The goal of the Seabird Monitoring project is to assess seabird nesting success rates and predator activity over multiple years in colonies adjacent to Oregon’s Marine Reserves and Marine Protected Areas. Vol-

unteers attend a training session and then meet up weekly throughout the summer to count nests, eggs and babies on cliffs and rocks. This year’s training takes place at 10 a.m.-noon Saturday, June 8, at Cannon Beach City Hall.

Cormorants are sleek black birds that dive into the ocean and swim to catch fish. They can be seen in the Columbia River as well as along the coast, and they make nests on rocky cliffs above the ocean waves. Portland Audubon’s Seabird Monitoring project focuses on two species of cormorants, Pelagic and Brandt’s cormorants.

Black oystercatchers are eye-catching black birds with long orange beaks and

long pink legs that nest in gravelly and rocky areas just above the high tide line. For example, there is a pair at Haystack Rock in Cannon Beach that nests just past the signs warning visitors not to enter the National Wildlife Refuge there. Volunteers cover an area of the coast and count the oystercatchers they see two or three times during mid-to-late May.

Western snowy plovers are small, fluffy birds that nest on beaches. They have been listed as federally threatened since 1993, with populations severely declined due to loss of coastal dunes habitat from invasive grasses, human and pet disturbance from beach use, and predation. Recovery of plovers on Oregon’s North Coast is key to providing connectivity between the southern Oregon and Washington plover populations, which are faring better. In a promising sign, in 2018 the birds were seen at Clastop Spit for the first time in decades.

Portland Audubon and Oregon State Parks partner to run snowy plover patrol each summer. After an annual training session, volunteers conduct monitoring surveys of designated Western snowy plover nesting areas throughout the summer.

For information on how to participate in any of these citizen science projects, contact Joe Liebezeit at jliebezeit@audubon-portland.org, or visit audubonportland.org/issues/community-science. 