

Willapa Nature Notes – Spectacular Shorebirds

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April 2021

Most shorebirds, or “waders,” arrive only twice a year – in the spring and fall at Willapa National Wildlife Refuge. They migrate through quickly in spring, arriving in late April and early May as they travel to their arctic nesting grounds from the winter grounds in Central and South America.

Willapa Bay and Long Beach Peninsula is a veritable six-lane highway of shorebird migration. Designated by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network as a Site of International Importance for Short-billed Dowitcher, Red Knot, and Dunlin. In addition to holding 10% or more of these populations, it is believed that at least 200,000-300,000 shorebirds migrate through the bay during spring migration.

Shorebirds undertake some of nature’s longest migrations. Their ability to travel thousands of miles depends upon a network of critical sites along the way, where they can rest and refuel. Willapa Bay’s tidal mudflats, along with adjacent salt marshes, pastures, and outer beaches, provide large concentrations of shorebirds with diverse habitats that are critical for feeding and roosting.

At least 43 species of shorebirds have been recorded including Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plovers, Sanderling, Western and Least Sandpipers, Marbled Godwit, Greater Yellowlegs, Killdeer and Whimbrel.

Western Snowy Plovers, a threatened species, can be found year round at Leadbetter Point however entry into the upper beach and dune areas during the nesting season (March 15-September 30) when nests and young are most vulnerable is prohibited.