

Over the Fourth of July weekend I was returning from a mediocre surf session at the South Jetty when I noticed the signs to the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife refuge. Even though I ~~had~~ lived here for 24 years I'd never visited the Refuge. Recently some friends showed their pictures of the Refuge and raved about it: so that morning I decided to drive in and see what there was to see. The sun was just breaking through the fog and the luscious green marshlands and surrounding hills were almost too verdant to describe. I went into the office and found the people at the desk happy to share their knowledge of the flora and fauna—which was extensive and impressive. Exhibits were informative and handsomely displayed. I called my wife and suggested we do our daily hike around the refuge rather than our usual headwaters trail. She got excited and told me to get home so we could do just that. So we walked and looked—occasionally through binoculars— and we were mightily impressed.

The naturalist at the desk cautioned us that this is not the time of year to see an abundance of birds. For one example: migratory birds like the Aleutian cackling geese come each spring; over 20,000 visit from late January through early April.

Nevertheless, we saw plenty to ~~make~~ whet our appetite. For examples: There was an abundance of those ~~great~~ big white egrets. The contrast between the green marsh and their snow white plumage provides a feast for the eyes—especially at their rookery at the top of nearby trees. Then there were The Great Herons: who look like close cousins to the Egrets only more grey... equally large and lumbering as they flew overhead. I didn't expect a serenade, but a little sparrow was chirping his heart out and we could not ignore his melody from the nearby bushes. There were game birds aplenty: <sup>including</sup> hawks and while we did not see any bald eagles, I noticed on the board that someone had seen one a few days earlier.

I've rarely slowed down long enough to pay much attention to birds, but I've noticed that the more attention I pay, the more beautiful and intricate are the <sup>exhibits</sup> design of these lovely winged creatures.

Then, there was the colors. We were awe struck by the abundance of yellow blossoms and contrasting red colors found in certain areas of the marsh. The whole display was more ~~colorful~~ <sup>than a mariachi band</sup>—and just as melodic.

Finally, <sup>we</sup> ~~there~~ saw the plaque dedicating the Wildlife Refuge to Richard Guadagno—a naturalist who had worked at the Humboldt Bay National Wildlife Refuge until the age of 38 when, returning from his native New Jersey where he and family had celebrated his grandmother's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, he boarded flight 93 that was hijacked by terrorists and went down over Shanksville, Pennsylvania (rather than somewhere in Washington DC we think). He sounded like a vibrant and interesting man, who is believed to have been one of several people aboard flight 93 who took action against the hijackers during the attacks. The Refuge is thus aptly named in his memory.

This is Dan Price for Community comment