Last summer, Steve and Linda Henry relocated to Gig Harbor as founding residents of Heron’s Key. By the end of their first week, the Henry’s had gotten their feet wet by taking a Waterfront Walking Tour, becoming Steward Club members at Harbor WildWatch, and Steve signed up as an exhibiting photographer in the Skansie House. Over the last year, the Henry’s have attended many Cocktails & Fishtales and Steve and Linda have both volunteered as photographers as well as completing their volunteer training a few weeks ago. I have thoroughly enjoyed getting to know Steve and Linda. They have traveled the world, taking photographs and providing volunteer medical services. If you get a chance to visit with the Henry’s, it will be time well spent. They have so many great stories and experiences. Over lunch, I asked them a few questions about their involvement with Harbor WildWatch.

HWW: How did you discover Harbor WildWatch?

Steve: We were on the Saturday Waterfront Walking Tour and learned about Harbor WildWatch and the Harbor History Museum.

Linda: We didn’t even know to look for something like Harbor WildWatch! I recommend that all new residents take the walking tour to learn more about Gig Harbor. After the walking tour, we visited the touch tanks in the park and I was so impressed by how many children were engaged with the touch tanks and the volunteers.

HWW: What is your favorite intertidal animal?

Linda: I love the mosaic of colors found in the sea stars.

Steve: I like to find the shore crabs that hide under the rocks (see Steve’s picture on the back page).

Linda: I also think that sea cucumbers are prehistorically grand!

HWW: You often attend Cocktails & Fishtales (thank you!). What have your impressions been of this event?

Linda: I think it is an excellent education for everyone who lives in the Puget Sound. I particularly liked the presentation about storm water runoff from the Washington Department of Ecology.

Steve: May’s presentation about the Derelict Vessel Prevention Program by Citizen’s for a Healthy Bay was a lot of fun and made me want to go out and photograph the derelict boats.

HWW: We were thrilled that you could attend last year’s Make Waves fundraiser, just a few months after moving here. Did you enjoy it?

Linda: I found it delightful. The group of people there were so approachable, inviting and inclusive. It made me feel like I wanted to be a part of this group and volunteer.

HWW: We are so glad that it was a fun event for you. I hope that all our members know that our fundraiser is as much fun as our beach walks and touch tanks. We would love for all our Steward Club members and their friends to attend!
What annoys an oyster? A noisy noise, annoys an oyster.
I must say, this quip is one of my favorite beach "pick-up lines." Not only does it sound funny, but it sparks an interesting conversation, too. While oysters don't technically have ears, researchers have been studying how oysters may use sound cues to choose where they settle on the beach.1 Let me remind you that sound travels a lot faster in water than it does in air. With all the whale calls, boats, and fish farms, the Puget Sound is a noisy place! We also now know that sound travels a lot farther in water, which is why interesting work is being done to determine safe sound regulations for marine mammals.2

While it is clear that sound impacts the charismatic megafauna of the Puget Sound, for now we will focus on those annoyed oysters.

An oyster begins its life journey as a free-swimming larva, drifting through the sea. If you harvest oysters, you are aware of Washington rules which require you to shuck oysters on the beach. This is because the shell provides habitat for future generations of oysters.1 Here in the Puget Sound, those future generations include the non-native Pacific and the native Olympia oysters. Unfortunately, overharvesting, habitat loss, and pollution have resulted in dwindling oyster numbers. Olympia oysters have a rich history here in the Pacific Northwest, but now, less than 5% of historic, core populations of Olympia oyster remain.3 Leaving shells on the beach is one way to help rebuild Olympia oyster populations and restore native oyster habitat. It seems that existing oyster beds provide a cue to swimming larvae that, "hey, this is a great place to be an oyster!" What I did not realize, is that the cue may be sound.

While I think it is cute to imagine adult oysters calling out to the little ones, oysters themselves are rather quiet critters. The shrimp and other bottom-dwelling species issue, is the invasive Japanese Drill snail, Green Shore crab and the Pacific oyster. However there is a way to put them to "sleep" and that's by flipping them over. This method works if you want to tell what gender it is or study it closely. To tell red rock crabs apart from closely related species, look at their pincers—they should be black at the tips, if not, it's probably not a rock crab. And that's why I like the red rock crab!

HELP THE OYSTERS

Here are some ways to help oysters in the Puget Sound:

• Reduce polluted runoff and keep Puget Sound water clean. You can keep the water clean by washing your car at a car wash, monitor your car for any leaks, picking up dog waste and not using pesticides and herbicides in your garden.
• Sharpen a local oyster: Eating local shellfish removes nitrogen from the system.
• Participate in oyster related Citizen Science projects such as Beach Monitoring with Harbor WildWatch or Olympia Oyster restoration with the Puget Sound Restoration Fund.

The Japanese Drill snail is an invasive species that gained a foothold in Puget Sound around 1924.4 Despite efforts to prevent the snail’s spread, it arrived on our shores attached to shells from commercial oyster shipments from Asia. The Japanese Drill snail is a concern because it may be hampering the recovery efforts of the native Olympia oyster, which was overharvested in the early 20th century.5 The egg capsules are bright yellow clusters, a little larger than a rice grain, and are laid April-July with a 3-week development period. They like to seek out vertical structures to lay their eggs, so some shellfish growers stage cinderblocks to "catch" the snails and their eggs before they hatch.1 The Drill snail does not like low salinity water and prefers warm water temperatures. Both factors have helped prevent the snail’s spread. Young snails like eat barnacles and older snails can consume up to one oyster every three days. In lab tests, the Japanese Drill did prefer the non-native Pacific oyster to the Olympia oyster 7:1, but the Olympia oyster is a smaller snail which makes it more susceptible to predation.6

HELP THE OYSTERS

What Am I Answer: This is a shore crab using its camouflage to hide amongst the shells and rocks.

HELP THE OYSTERS

Learn more and purchase tickets at Harborwildwatch.org

References for Science with Stena and Creature Feature available upon request.