



The 111th Annual Christmas Bird Count

Volume 44 #4 December 2010

From December 14 through January 5 tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists go out on an annual mission - often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the holiday season.

Each of the citizen scientists who annually braves snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count makes an enormous contribution to conservation. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations and to help guide conservation action. This year's count will also help help scientists understand the impact of the Gulf oil spill on vulnerable species.

From feeder watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds and the excitement of friendly competition and with the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

The long-term perspective made possible by the Christmas Bird Count is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well. For example, local trends in bird populations can indicate habitat fragmentation or signal an immediate environmental threat, such as groundwater contamination or poisoning from improper use of pesticides.

Local Compilers and Christmas Bird Counts listed by date:

December 14, Bridgeport, Meredith Spencer
merdave@homenetnw.net, (509) 686-7551

The Bridgeport CBC will meet in Brewster, at Lindsey's, on the corner of 5th and Main at 7:00 a.m. It is across the street from the Health Beat Fitness Center.

December 15, Leavenworth, Karen Haire
karenhaire@nwi.net, (509) 433-6402.

Birding parties will be determined before the count day. The group will convene at the Barn Beach Reserve Sunroom in the evening.

December 16, Twisp, R. Victor Glick and Libby Schreiner
libbyvictor@yahoo.com, (509) 996-2701

There will be a potluck following the count.

December 21, Grand Coulee, David St George
dstgeorge@TNC.ORG, (509)667-7472

Meet at 7:00am at Flo's Café, 316 Spokane Way, Grand Coulee.

December 30, Chelan, Steve Easley
seasley@wenva.com, (509) 682-2318

Meet at the Apple Cup Cafe at 7:00 am

January 2, Wenatchee, Dan Stephens

DStephens@wvc.edu, (509) 682-6752 or (509) 782-4890

Birding parties will be determined before the count day. Both group leaders and birders of all skill levels are needed. Contact Dan about 2 weeks before the count.

January 2, Omak/Okanogan, Heather Findlay

heather@eaglesun.net, (509) 846-0475

Meet at Todd & Heather's house at 6:45 am.



Daniel S. Kilby

Outside, on the feeder snags, two Northern Flickers are engaging in some behavior I don't understand.

They seem to be posturing to each other, stretching out their necks and watching each other closely. It seems awfully early for setting up territories and thinking about breeding so I can't imagine what is going through their bird brains. Any thoughts on this?

Winter and its cold weather and snow are here in full force, early this year, before Thanksgiving. A boon for skiers and skaters, a possible hardship for our feathered friends. Bald Eagles cruise the rivers in search of dead fish or injured ducks. Magpies and Ravens by the side of the road indicate a possible carcass in a snow bank. Northern Shrikes and Northern Pygmy Owls watch over bird feeders in hopes of picking off an unsuspecting finch or chickadee.

Kim Bondi sent me this photo of a Spruce Grouse that came to visit her chickens at the Basecamp near Mazama! What a treat to have such a friendly and unusual visitor. Many folks struggle to see this pretty chicken-like bird for their 'life list' and here it is, sauntering up to get to know another kind of chicken!



Have you noticed wintering hummingbirds around our region? A lady from East Wenatchee was quite concerned when an Anna's showed up during the recent very cold spell and wondered how to keep the feeder from freezing. Do you have any suggestions? This seems to happen more and more often.

The mission of North Central Washington Audubon is "to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and their habitats, for the benefit of people and the biological diversity of North Central Washington."

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**North Central Washington Audubon Society
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 (Renewals - Please renew your National Audubon Membership by filling out the forms sent to you by National and sending directly to NAS, thank you)

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Shareholders in NCWAS

by Mark Oswood

Donations are the vital force of nearly all nonprofits and NGO's. Grants from foundations and agencies are few (especially in our low-velocity economy) and the pockets of even Angel Donors are not nearly deep enough to cover needs. Drafts from the checkbooks of the generous unwealthy carry sustaining oxygen into charities of all purposes.

I think of our donors as buyers of shares in NCWAS. There is a small slice of your donation check in the binoculars hoisted by classrooms of school kids and by older life-

learners. Sometimes an everyday bird, seen for the first time, can bend the future.

So far, we've received 93 donations this "Audubon year" (starts in September) from our once-a-year donation request. Please know that you have our glad and respectful thanks; you are part of our community.

Below, we list folks who have made donations through mid-November. As always, we'll list donations received after mid-November in a late spring issue of the Phlox.

Leon Alden	Douglas Head	Frank & Margaret Ping
Bill Ansert	Neal Hedges +	John & Candy Plant
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E Richard Hart	Mark & Judith Oswood +	Rufus Woods
	Teri Pieper +	

Fourteen donors made donations no less appreciated for being anonymous.

The symbols denote donations of special generosity:

+ = \$100 ("Great Blue Heron")

++ = \$200 ("Greater White-fronted Goose")

+++ = \$500 ("Magnificent Frigatebird")

If, perhaps, your NCWAS donation slip was on the kitchen table, next to some homework and naturally, the dog ate the homework and the donation slip as well and, of course your dog felt badly about this slipup, we have provided a replacement slip below.

Here is my/our donation of \$_____

Please make checks payable to NCW Audubon.

Thank You!

Name _____

Address _____

Donors will be acknowledged (name but not address) in a future issue of the Phlox. If you do not wish to be acknowledged in the Phlox, please check here

Winter Field Trips

by Teri J Pieper

On December 12, Dan Stephens will lead a winter waterfowl field trip starting in Wenatchee, going up the Columbia on the Chelan County side, then across to Bridgeport and down river on the Douglas County Side. This will be a great warm-up for the Christmas Bird Count Season. Leave from the Easy Street Park and Ride

lot at 8:00 am and return by 4:00 pm. Folks from Okanogan County can join the field trip in progress at Pateros at 10:15. The group will leave from the Sweet River Bakery at 10:30. The annual Waterville Plateau field trip will be Saturday February 5. This is a great opportunity to see winter visitors from the north country

including Snow Buntings, Snowy Owls, and Gyrfalcons. Also, there may be a chance to see year-round residents like Sharp-tailed or Sage Grouse. Leave from the Easy Street Park Ride lot at 8:00 am and return by 4:00 pm. To RSVP for either of these field trips, contact Dan at DStephens@wvc.edu, or (509) 682-6752 or (509) 782-4890

Adaptable Within Limits How Birds Cope with Weather Extremes

by Rich Stallcup

reprinted with permission from
PRBO Conservation Science.

Birds have evolved physical and behavioral strategies for dealing with ordinary weather within their range. They are waterproof (well, at least water-resistant), they know when and how to seek shelter, and because they are feathered they can thermoregulate (stay warm in cold and cool in heat). Migratory kinds are able to depart high latitudes before the cold of winter sets in. Many desert species do not need much (if any) water, as they derive enough fluid from animal prey like insects, lizards, and kangaroo rats.

In addition to evolved physiologies and behaviors, most birds are able to adapt to change in the short run by selecting secondary food sources when primary ones are unavailable.

Tree Swallows (like all swallows) are aerial insectivores but, when hit with freezing weather upon early return to northerly latitudes in the eastern U.S., will switch to eating bayberries until warming trends allow insects to emerge.

Acorn Woodpeckers depend upon caches of acorns to sustain them through winter, but unseasonal early-fall rains that wash the pollen off of oaks can result in acorn crop failures. Then, in this socially colonial species, individual woodpeckers leave or are driven from the tribe. Without access to granaries, they may turn to foraging strategies such as flycatching, eating seeds or suet at feeders, and probing sapsucker excavations, and they are even known to eat lizards and smaller birds' eggs.

Some birds, when caught in abnormal extremes of hot or cold, die of temperature trauma, but many others have back-up systems that allow them to survive. When too warm, birds have methods for cooling off that include the obvious, like going to shade or water, and also particular behaviors. Warm-water seabirds pant and flutter their gular pouches to fan their innards. Some landbirds pant and partially spread their wings to release excess heat. These behaviors are common in birds that summer at high latitudes then winter in the tropics.

For many birds—animals with high metabolisms—it is much harder to recover body heat than to cool down. Small birds keep their hot bodies hot by fueling up constantly with food. Groups of birds that specialize and are unable to switch diets on-demand may become vulnerable during extreme cold.

Bark gleaners like woodpeckers, nuthatches, creepers, and even Black-and-white Warblers forage successfully in extreme cold, because arachnid and insect eggs and larvae remain abundant in the relatively warm nooks and crannies. Seed eaters (sparrows, juncos, finches) usually survive cold snaps, even long ones, by gobbling seeds and other vegetation all day. It's not as great as bark-gleaning, because the diet lacks fat and protein, but in many cases the food supply is endless.

Active insectivores often fail completely. Vireos, kinglets, and wood warblers seek aerial or otherwise active insects. Harshly adverse cold kills this prey base and soon the birds. Without fat reserves, the birds cannot just pick up and go. After one ten-day freeze at Point Reyes, we found virtually no kinglets or warblers and just a few Hutton's Vireos (which may have turned to bark-gleaning). There were thrushes, because there were toyon, mistletoe, and huckleberries, and the regular bark-gleaners and seed-eaters made it through the freeze.

Most bird species have evolved through time to cope with some degree of "abnormal" weather. Extremes that come too hard and fast, though, or exceed normal limits for too long, may test the abilities of these highly adaptive creatures to survive.

PRBO Conservation Science (PRBO) is a non-profit organization founded in 1965 as Point Reyes Bird Observatory. PRBO does bird ecology research, creates management tools, leads field science training programs, and develops and delivers bird science education programs to advance biodiversity conservation in the west on land and at sea. Rich Stallcup is PRBO's naturalist

Notes from Mazama

by Bob Spiwak

Thanksgiving morning, 2010. Almost 9:00, eleven degrees. Two nights ago we were forecast for a low of 25 below zero yet it only reached minus 12. Just goes to show you how erroneous weather forecasts can be.

The sun broke through just a few moments ago. Two hours earlier there were desultory snowflakes falling, and we assumed this to be the advance guard of a week-long snow period beginning, according to the current forecast, in about an hour from now.

The sun has brought forth the usual conglomeration of birds to the earlier-filled feeders. The species include chickadees (Black-capped and Mountain) nuthatches, Stellers Jays, several woodpecker species and a Northern Flicker whose aim in life is to eat our house.

We are fortunate to have ground water coming into our pond. Regardless of temperature, even 12 below, there are two areas that remain ice free. One of them has a fallen birch trunk whose top begins on shore and the base resides, rotting, at the bottom of the pond. Many

birds bathe here but it seems to be the jays that are most fastidious about their grooming. Granted, I have not seen any splashing around since we entered a period of single digit temperatures, but even below freezing, they have been excited about the open water.

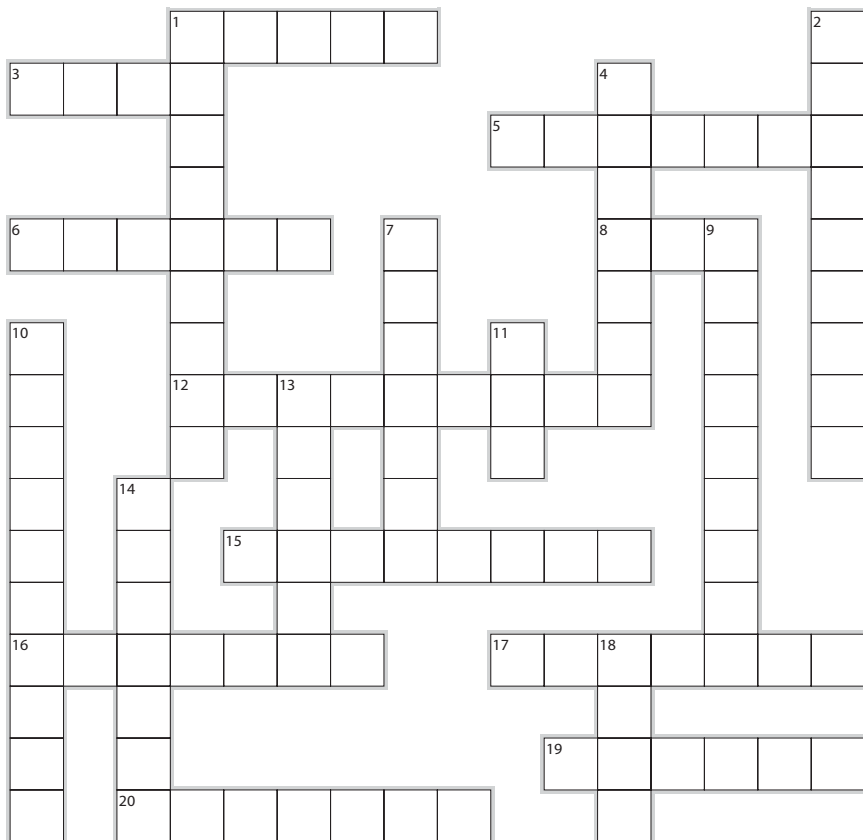
The chipmunks have been out of sight now for weeks. We earlier had a lot more of them than squirrels this year, and there seems now to be only one of the latter, cleaning up the seeds the jays have scattered on the deck as well as making efforts, some successful, some not, to get into the feeders. We keep a couple of feeders within its easy range, hoping to take the pressure off the others. Regardless, like a Seinfeld family episode, an argument always erupts between the squirrel(s) and the jays.

No sign of other wild mammals other than tracks of a few deer and a lone coyote across the highway yesterday. There are less than three inches of snow on the ground and no doubt as it gets deeper, there will be cougar sign.

That's it from almost the end of the road.

December Bird Puzzle

by Mark Oswood



Across

1. using bill to clean, oil, and rearrange feathers
3. lobe-footed, duck-like bird of wetlands; not all are an old _____
5. ant-eating woodpecker
6. this loon isn't very _____
8. annual holiday census of US birds (abbreviation)
12. a bird you don't want around your neck
15. cliff, bank, and tree _____
16. lays eggs in nests of other birds
17. The _____ Laboratory of Ornithology
19. park bench birder's delight
20. vesper _____

Down

1. feather-legged birds turn white in winter
2. fish-eating bird with wettable feathers
4. In the Galapagos, Darwin's _____
7. smallest falcon
9. bird calls its name
10. Clark's _____ caches pine seeds
11. American Ornithological Union
13. friend of Audubon; gave name to sparrow and blackbird
14. bird interstates for migration
18. secretive marsh birds; "thin as a _____"

Water is Key to Complete Backyard Wildlife Habitat

from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife's Crossing Paths News Notes

Water is often a limiting factor in a backyard wildlife habitat. While most species need to consume water regularly, either directly or through their food, some also require it for cleanliness and fitness. Many birds need water for bathing and post-bath preening to keep their feathers in shape to provide “all weather” protection.

The provision of water, including through fall and winter freezes, can turn an average wildlife habitat into an extraordinary one. Those fortunate enough to have a natural waterway running through their property already have that “extraordinary” status. But most of us need to create sources of water, either building ponds, ditches, landscape swales, or rain gardens, or setting up birdbaths. The trick with maintaining a birdbath through the winter months in many parts of Washington, of course, is keeping the water thawed.

Birds need to drink and bathe even on the coldest days, and although they can use snow and melting ice, open water may be more attractive. Keeping water just above freezing between dawn and dusk, when birds are active, is key. You can keep a birdbath free of ice by regularly pouring water into the bowl, but that quickly becomes tedious during extreme cold when water freezes rapidly. A stick of wood left in the water during cold snaps can help you pop out the ice so you can add fresh water. When the water freezes, the stick will also help prevent the birdbath from cracking. Providing water next to a reflective window can also help keep it open.

Birdbaths equipped with submersible, thermostatically controlled heaters will save time and maybe the birdbath itself. Small heaters designed to operate at a depth of one to

three inches, many with automatic shut-off features when water levels drop or evaporate, are available through garden and hardware stores that cater to bird-feeding enthusiasts, and catalogues or on-line businesses.

Be careful about the source of electricity needed to run a birdbath heater. Outdoor outlets should be on a circuit or outlet protected by a ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI), which will cut off the flow of electricity in the event of a short. Most outlets in newer homes are GFCI-protected, but if you're not sure about yours, have outlets checked by an electrician.

Providing water for birds and other wildlife comes with the responsibility to keep the water clean to prevent diseases from spreading. This is especially important during warm months, but periodic thaws during cool months can be deadly, too. Scrub the birdbath a few times each month or briskly hose it out to remove algae and bacteria. Change the water frequently; locating the birdbath near a hose bib is a good idea. Never add chemicals to clean or keep water from freezing because you may poison wildlife.

If providing open water consistently through winter is difficult for you, consider other ways you can help your backyard birds and other wildlife.

Drinking water is obtained by some animals through fleshy fruits, berries and other plants they eat in your landscape. Some birds bathe in dust, rather than water, sifting and shaking soft, dry soil through their feathers to clean them for thermal regulation. Wrens, sparrows, quail, grouse, pheasants and hawks will enjoy vigorous dust baths in a tilled garden space or specially-dug area with a mixture of loose sand, loamy soil, and wood ashes.

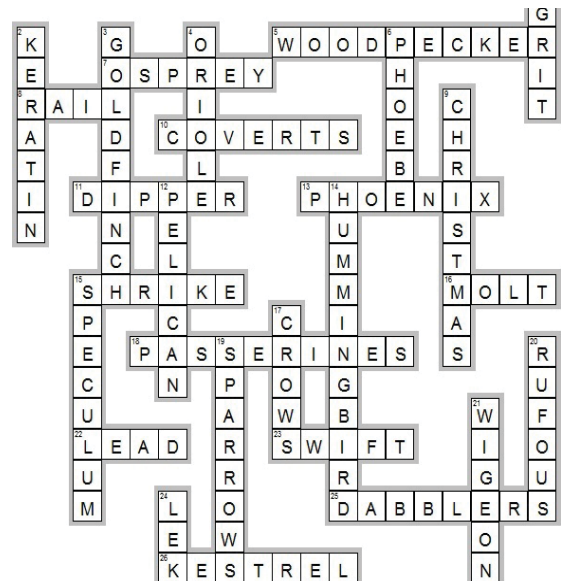
Another Way to Support NCWAS

If you are a NCWAS Member, you will receive a free set of “Bino-Straps” with your optics purchase from Wild Birds Unlimited in Gig Harbor. And for EVERY purchase made by a NCW Audubon Society Member, our Chapter will receive, as a donation, 5% of the sale! So visit the friendly experts at Wild Birds Unlimited, in person or online, for your birding and optic needs and let them know you are a member of North Central Washington Audubon Society!



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Answers to the November Crossword Puzzle



North Cascades Basecamp Winter Ecology Programs

Lots of Learning Opportunities in Mazama this Winter

by Kim Bondi

December 9 - February 24

Thursday Night Presentation and Soup Night Series at the North Cascades Basecamp. Seasonal vegetarian soup dinner begins at 5:30pm - \$5.00.

Free presentations begin at 6:00pm

December 9: **North Cascades**

Wilderness with Wolverines with John Rohrer, USFS Wildlife Biologist and Wolverine Researcher.

December 16: **Wetland Restoration and Beaver Relocation**, with Steve Bondi, Wildlife Ecologist and Basecamp Proprietor.

December 23: **Owl Prowl "Round the Basecamp"** with Ken Bevis, Habitat Biologist, WDFW

January 6: **Wolves of the Cascades** with Scott Fitkin, WDFW Regional Wildlife Biologist.

January 13: **Howlin and Growlin** with Dr. Bill Gaines, USFS Carnivore Biologist from Wenatchee.

January 27: **The Life of a Salmon in the Methow River** with John Crandall, Aquatic Ecologist, Wild Fish Conservancy.

February 3: **The Amazing World of Bats** with Kent Woodruff, USFS Wildlife Biologist and bat expert.

February 17: **Winter Botany in the Methow** with Dana Visalli, Methow Naturalist and Botanist.

December 25 - February 24
Nature of Winter Naturalist Snowshoe Tours. Naturalist-guided two hour snowshoe tours. Free & open to the public. Tours start at 11am at the Basecamp Lodge in Mazama. Call for reservations. Methow Valley Sports Trails (MVSTA) Pass required.

February 24: **The Ecology of Cougars** with Dr. Hugh Robinson, Carnivore Biologist and researcher, University of Montana.

January 7th & January 8th
Reading Signatures in the Snow: Winter Ecology & Wildlife Tracking with Expert Tracker, Naturalist and Educator, Bruce Thompson
Hosted jointly by the North Cascades Basecamp and the Methow Conservancy.

January 7th, 7pm - 8:30pm, program, Mazama Community Center, free, donations to the Methow Conservancy appreciated.
Jan 8th, 8:30am - 4pm, Field-based Workshop on Snowshoes, North Cascades Basecamp, Mazama
Limited to 12 people, Cost: \$75.00, hot lunch provided

For more information on any of these events, please call (509) 996-2334, or email info@orthCascadesBasecamp.com

Learn about Lichens with the Native Plant Society

By Don Schaechtel, Board member, Wenatchee Chapter, WNPS

The Wenatchee Chapter of the WA Native Plant Society invites the public to their January meeting on Thursday, January 20, 2011, 7 pm, at the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center. This month's program is a Lichen Identification Workshop by Don Schaechtel of Leavenworth.

In this hands-on workshop, you will create your own lichen ID chart using local specimens. You will also discover that there are lichens all around you. Winter is a great time to see them too, as wind and snow knock them out of trees and there are fewer leaves to hide them in trees and shrubs. You may even find that a single branch has five or more species. With your chart you will get better acquainted with them and you will learn what to look for when using lichen identification guides.

Lichens play an important part forest and shrub steppe ecosystems. At least 45 North American birds use lichens in their nesting materials and you may have seen *Parmelia* (waxpaper lichen) decorating hummingbird nests. *Bryoria*

(horsehair lichen) is a nesting material favored by flying squirrels and is one of their winter food sources. Recent research interest in lichens has focused on their role in fixing nitrogen and returning it to the soil.

Humans have also found ways to use lichens. Native Americans made a cake from *Bryoria* and many lichens, including the common chartreuse wolf lichen, have been used to make dyes (you will learn how).

Don Schaechtel has been exploring the Cascade Mountains for the last 25 years as a climber, cross country skier, and natural history enthusiast.

The Washington Native Plant Society (WNPS) is a forum for individuals who share a common interest in Washington's unique and diverse plant life. For more than 30 years WNPS has been a great source for native plant information and action. Visit the Wenatchee Chapter website at www.wnps.org/chapter_info/chapter_programs.html#wenatchee.

December Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Calendar

December 14 - January 2	Christmas Bird Counts all over North Central WA	See page one for details
December 7	Emperor Penguins in Twisp presented by Torre Stockard	NCWAS joins with the Methow Conservancy for the December First Tuesday program. 7:00 pm at the Twisp River Pub. See last month's Phlox for details
December 12	Columbia River Waterfowl Field Trip	with Dan Stephens. See page 4 for details
January 7 & 9	Reading Signatures in the Snow: Winter Ecology & Wildlife Tracking	Co-sponsored by the Methow Conservancy and North Cascades Basecamp. See page 7 for details
January 20	Learn about Lichens with the Native Plant Society	See page 7 for details
February 5	Waterville Plateau Field Trip	with Dan Stephens. See page 4 for details



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Visit the NCW Audubon Society website for updates on these and other events
www.ncwaudubon.org