



Christmas Bird Count Season

How Many Counts Will You Do This Year?

Volume 49 #4 December 2015

from National Audubon Society

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is a long-standing program of the National Audubon Society, with over 100 years of citizen science involvement. It is an early-winter bird census, where thousands of volunteers across the US, Canada and many

countries in the Western Hemisphere, go out over a 24-hour period on one calendar day to count birds. All CBC's are conducted between December 14 and January 5 each year.

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, people engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt": They would choose sides and go afield with their guns; whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Conservation was in its beginning stages in that era, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then nascent Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition – a "Christmas Bird Census" – that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.

So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Chapman and the enthusiasm of twenty-seven dedicated birders, twenty-five Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied around 90 species on all the counts combined.

The data collected by observers over the past century allows Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife

Local Christmas Bird Counts at a Glance

December 18: Bridgeport CBC - Meredith Spencer, merdave@homenetnw.net
December 20: Leavenworth CBC - Gretchen Rohde, design@thedesigntax.com, 393-0088
December 20: Twisp CBC - Carmen Vanbianchi, cvanbianchi@gmail.com, 423-202-0829
December 28: Chelan CBC - Steve Easley, seasley@nwi.net, 682-2318
January 2: Okanogan and Omak CBC - Heather Findlay, heather@eaglesun.net
January 2: Wenatchee CBC - Dan Stephens, dstephens@wvc.edu
For more information on these counts, see story on page 6.
And for other counts in Washington please see www.wos.org

agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys, such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years. The long-term perspective is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.

There is a specific methodology to the CBC, and all participants must make arrangements to participate in advance with the count compiler within an established circle, but anyone can participate. Each count takes place in an established 15-mile wide diameter circle, and is organized by a count compiler. Count volunteers follow specified routes counting every bird they see or hear all day. It's not just a species tally; all birds are counted all day, giving an indication of the total number of birds in the circle that day. If you are a beginning birder, you will be able to join a group that includes at least one experienced birdwatcher.

If your home is within the boundaries of a CBC circle, then you can stay at home and report the birds that visit your feeder on count day as long as you have made prior arrangement with the count compiler.

The mission of the
North Central Washington Audubon Society
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."

North Central Washington Audubon Society

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Dan Stephens | dstephens@wvc.edu

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North Central Washington Audubon Society is on Facebook too

All phone numbers in the Wild Phlox are area code 509 unless otherwise indicated.

January Field Trip

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

Join leader Mark Johnston on Saturday, January 9 for a field trip to explore the Waterville Plateau, Bridgeport Bar and Columbia River areas. Meet at 8:00 am at 208 West Nixon Street in Chelan.

This trip is limited to nine birders. Spend the day birding a variety of habitats where we can expect to find a nice mix of resident and migrant species that winter in our area. Please bring a lunch, snacks, liquids, and dress for the weather. Carpool cost: \$30 per vehicle to be shared equally by riders. Return to Chelan by 4 pm. To sign up, please call Mark at 548-5766 or 253-297-0705 or email at s697striata@frontier.com.

And the Annual February Field Trip to the Waterville Plateau

Dan Stephens will lead the annual Waterville Plateau and Bridgeport field trip on February 6th. Meet at 8:00 am at the Easy Street Park and Ride lot at Olds Station. For more info contact Dan at 682-6752 or 679-4706 or dstephens@wvc.edu. This trip has often seen Snowy Owls, Gyrfalcons, Snow Buntings and other winter specialties!

North Central Washington Audubon Society Wild Phlox Subscription Form

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I prefer to get the Wild Phlox electronically (email address required below)

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Donation: I would like to support NCW Audubon's programs of education and conservation. Enclosed is my additional donation of \$_____

Please do NOT acknowledge my donation in the Wild Phlox

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Please mail check and form to Post Office Box 2934 Wenatchee, WA 98807-2934.

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Planned Giving: Please consider giving a planned gift to NCW Audubon to support our education and conservation programs for generations to come. Your charitable gift will be tax deductible. It could go to an endowment fund or to a specific program or as a gift to our general operating fund. Remember, your gift to North Central Washington Audubon will go to fund programs in North Central Washington!

To join the National Audubon Society which also includes a subscription to the Wild Phlox, please see their website at www.audubon.org or drop us a note and we will send you a form for a special rate introductory membership.

I sat down to breakfast last week and was surprised to find this ferocious-looking little owl right outside on the deck railing. I think it was contemplating its breakfast menu from the various choices of finches that were also enjoying their breakfasts of niger and sunflower seeds at the just-filled feeders. These tiny raptors are less than seven inches long with a twelve inch wingspan and weigh just two and a half ounces! The owl stayed there until the dogs walked around the deck and one of them spied the bird and began to bark. I also saw a Northern Pygmy-owl the next day in the heavy wet snow; presumably it was the same one. I wonder if it is the same owl that visited last year. Do they have site fidelity?

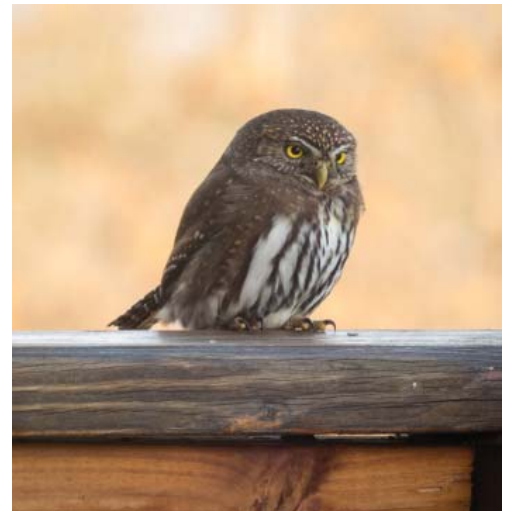
Just yesterday, November 22, I saw five Wild Turkeys next to a county road pecking on pumpkins put out for autumn decorations. Who knew that turkeys liked pumpkin? I think they are both native to North America, even though the turkeys were introduced in our region, so maybe it's a traditional food for them.



Bald Eagles have returned in large numbers. My husband saw one carrying a hen Mallard the other day. They also are eating spawned out salmon and road-killed deer.

With winter coming or already here for some of us, remember to include water if you are feeding the birds. With below freezing temperatures, water can be hard to come by for our feathered friends. Even with a heated water dish in place, I often observe the goldfinches getting drips when snow is melting off of our roof.

There are lots of great winter birding opportunities this year starting with Christmas Bird Counts and Raptor Routes. Don't forget the Okanogan County Great Bird Race and the Great Backyard Bird Count. And two terrific winter field trips from our own Mark Johnston and Dan Stephens. Dress warm and get outside!



NCW Recent Bird Sightings

Trumpeter and Tundra Swans have been reported on lakes around the Methow valley including Little and Big Twin, Buck and Biddle Lakes. I have also seen them flying above the river. At Beebe Springs there have been several interesting sightings including a late House Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Snow Geese and a Great-horned Owl. A single Snow Goose was seen in the Methow with a small flock of Canada Geese. A Surf Scoter was reported on Fish Lake in Chelan County and also at Twin Lakes in Okanogan County. The town of Chelan has large numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches, perhaps as a result of this summer's fires. A Northern Pygmy-owl was reported at the Leavenworth Fish Hatchery. I saw two or three flocks of Gray (Hungarian) Partridges and a Golden Eagle from Bear Creek Road above Pearrygin Lake. Golden Eagles were also reported at the Chelan Falls gorge and in the Lost River area above Mazama and in the Beaver Creek area near Twisp. Partridges are also being seen in the lower Rendezvous area above Winthrop. Grasses are returning nicely to the 2014 burned area of Beaver Creek. Species reported there include Northern Harrier, Stellar's Jay, Clark's Nutcracker and Pileated Woodpecker. The Great Egret south of Twisp was seen up until the snow fell last week. Some people are reporting fewer Mountain Chickadees in the Methow. And an interesting report from out of our four-county region is a Snowy Owl on San Juan Island!

compiled from the ncwabird email list
and Tweepers by Teri J Pieper



Great Egret on the county road
south of Twisp
photo by Teri J Pieper

Fodder From the Feeder

My feeders are definitely less active these days - mostly House Finches and American Goldfinches. The nuthatches are still around but they come less often to their shower/birdbath setup. Most mornings it is frozen and they peck their beaks at it in dismay. Why they don't enjoy the pond and waterfall in the back yard I'll never know.....

There are lots of interesting birds still around though. Since we live in the Twin Lakes area I thought I would look at Trumpeter and Tundra Swans as there have been several of them hanging out on Little Twin Lake. The Trumpeters are the heaviest flying bird in North America; males can weigh up to 26 or more pounds and stretch to six feet long. They are the biggest native waterfowl, up to twice as large as the Tundra. What the Tundra lacks in size it makes up for



Trumpeter Swan on Little Twin Lake
photo by Libby Schreiner, Winthrop

in abundance though. It is the most numerous swan species in North America, with the western population estimated somewhere between 60,000 and 110,000, and the eastern estimated at 100,000. There is even an annual regulated hunting season for Tundra Swans in some states.

In stark contrast, it is illegal to hunt Trumpeters as they were almost hunted to extinction from 1600 to the late 1800's. They were prized for their feathers for hats and writing quills, and swan skins were even used for powder puffs! By 1935, the count was just 69 known individuals, although there were most likely more in isolated pockets in Alaska and Canada. The overhunting of muskrats and beavers may have contributed to their drastic decline, as Trumpeters build their nests on these rodents' dens and dams. As their numbers recovered, so did the swans. They were recently estimated to be about 35,000!

Perhaps some of you find it easy to identify these guys but

to me, from a distance they look pretty darn similar. Sure, Tundras are supposed to have that yellow spot at the base of their bill but not all of them do. And yes, they are smaller than the Trumpeters, but still pretty big. The bill of both birds is what distinguishes them, so you have to have good optics or be close. The Tundra has a rounded border on its black bill between its eyes, and a more curved edge at its gape (where the beak joins at its base). The Trumpeter has a pointed border between its eyes and a straighter edge along its gape. Its bill is longer and straighter than the Tundra. The call of the Tundra differs from the Trumpeter as well in that it has a more whistling quality and Lewis (of Lewis and Clark) first called it a whistling swan, a nickname that sticks to this day.

Swans in general are often associated with romance. It doesn't hurt that they are gorgeous, elegant creatures. But the Tundra truly does establish pair bonds for life at about two to three years of age, and they roost together year round. One of the oldest documented birds was a female aged 23 years, 7 months, banded in the North West Territories, and found in North Carolina. I hate to burst your bubble, but the Trumpeters do not all mate for life. They do form pair bonds and stay together for that first year at least.

So, with the advent of colder weather and fewer birds, it is fun to search beyond the feeder. And whenever you see a Trumpeter, be thankful for all the conservation efforts. Without those efforts, we might not have seen them at all in our lifetimes.

editor's note: there is a good description of the differences in the two swans at www.trumpeterswansociety.org/head-bill.html. David Sibley also has a good article on the differences at www.sibleyguides.com/2006/02/distinguishing-trumpeter-and-tundra-swans/

Whitebark Pine Ecology Native Plant Society Monthly Program

Join the Native Plant Society on January 14 at 7:00 pm at the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center for a program on the native whitebark pine. Whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) is an iconic high elevation conifer. In the United States, about 70% of whitebark pine habitat is in designated wilderness. In 2011, the US Fish & Wildlife Service declared that whitebark pine warranted protection under the Endangered Species Act because of five threats:

by Don Schaechtel, Wenatchee

white pine blister rust (an introduced disease), increased mortality from the native mountain pine beetle, changes in fire regime, climate change, and inadequate regulatory mechanisms. Chapter board member Connie Mehmel has been surveying whitebark pine habitat since 2005. She will tell us about its ecology and condition in NCW and things you can do to help in the efforts to save whitebark pine.

Intentions

by Mark Oswood, Wenatchee

Even though we are an all-volunteer organization, we have some costs that have to be paid with money, rather than with time and sweat. So, your donations to our annual donation appeal are essential, like good food and clean water. But your donations are also important to us because you cared enough to make a donation.

“A gift consists not in what is done or given, but in the intention of the giver or doer.” Seneca

As always, please know that your generous intentions have our deep gratitude.

Below, we list the people who said “yes” to our annual donation request, through mid-November. We’ll list donors after mid-November in the summer 2016 issue of the Phlox.

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Heather Findlay *	Jess Mills *	Darlene Schoenwald	

We get mail

Dear NCWAS:

I was about to make my donation to NCWAS when I had an idea for a story, so I used the back of my donation slip. I wrote a cautionary tale about a birder playing bird songs on their smart phone to call in birds, causing an angry male bird to attack the phone, but the bird glanced off the phone and flew up their nose and got stuck, so they had to go to the ER. My story went viral and my donation slip is on display at the Ornithological Writing Library (OWL). What can I do?

Slipless in Tonasket

Dear Slipless:

We're delighted that our donation slip was the start of your famous story, Aviectomy. You will find a replacement donation slip on the right.

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

Local Christmas Bird Count Details

compiled by Teri J Pieper,
Methow Valley

The Bridgeport CBC is December 18. Counters will meet at 7:00 am at the Subway shop in the Brewster Marketplace at 907 US highway 97. There will be a dinner following at a location TBD. Contact Meredith Spencer for more information merdave@homenetnw.net

The 15th Annual Leavenworth Christmas Bird Count will be Sunday, December 20. Groups will meet on their own before the count, then gather to compile lists at 4:30 pm in the Sunroom in the large house at Wenatchee River Institute at Barn Beach Reserve, 347 Division Street in Leavenworth. There will be snacks and prizes for Best Bird, Most American Dippers and more. Contact Gretchen Rohde for your group selection before December 15 at design@thedesignranch.com, 393-0088

The Twisp CBC will meet and participants will sign up for their routes beginning at 6:30 am on December 20 at the Cinnamon Twisp Bakery, 116 North Glover Street in Twisp. Baked goods, coffee, and tea will be available for purchase. Bring binoculars, warm clothes, a lunch, and field guides. Optionally, bring snowshoes, skis, and spotting scopes. A potluck dinner and tally of the day's count will follow at Art Campbell and Michelle Dewey's at 5:30. Bring a dish to share. For more information, contact Carmen Vanbianchi at 423-202-0829

The 27th Chelan CBC will take place on Monday, December 28. Meet at 7:00 am at the Apple Cup Cafe in Chelan for breakfast and to be assigned to one of the seven groups that will be formed. At the end of the day, meet at about 4:15 pm at the Lake Chelan Methodist Church for

a hot meal and to report species counts. Last year there were sixteen participants who found 70 species, below the average of 78 species. The count of individual birds was 7052, considerably below the average of 10,373. And not a single Red-breasted Nuthatch! They also reached new low counts of Ring-necked Ducks and Dark-eyed Juncos. With more eyes searching, they are bound to do better this year! So please contact Steve Easley at 682-2318 or seasley@nwi.net by December 10. If you honestly are not yet sure if you can attend, Steve would appreciate a 'definite maybe'.

The Okanogan-Omak CBC will be held on Saturday January 2. Meet at Heather Findlay's house at 2050 James Avenue, Okanogan at 6:30 am and meet back there for the end of day count and chili feed. Bring binoculars, lunch and warm clothes. Car pooling will be arranged at 6:45 am for a departure at 7 am, sharp to find birds. Partial day participants are welcome. Gordon Kent has moved to the Seattle area and Julia O'Connor has agreed to be the new CBC compiler. She will provide maps and checklists. For more information, contact heather@eaglesun.net.

The Wenatchee count is also January 2. Participants can meet at Smitty's Pancake House on North Wenatchee Avenue at 7:30 am or contact Dan Stephens ahead of time at 682-6752 or 679-4706 or dstephens@wvc.edu.

Traveling this holiday season? There are CBC's all around the state. Find out more at www.wos.org. Or search the National Audubon website, www.audubon.org for sites all over North and Central America.

Register now for Winter Waterbirds Course A Partnership Between NCWAS and WVC Continuing Education

by Susan Ballinger,
Wenatchee

Would you like to learn how to identify some of the ducks and other water birds that winter along the Columbia River? North Central Washington Audubon Society's Jenny Graevell and Wenatchee Naturalist Susan Ballinger have co-designed this course to increase your observation skills in a collaborative setting. This hands-on course will use field guides, bird study skins, presentations, apps, and optics. Loaner binoculars will be available, courtesy of NCWAS. A Waterfowl ID booklet is included for each student. The Saturday half-day field trip will be along the Columbia River where participants will practice birding skills under the supportive guidance of the instructors. This combined classroom and field course can launch you on your way to becoming a better bird watcher alongside a group of other enthusiasts. The course is designed for people with some birding experience, but beginners are also welcome. Tuition scholarships are available at www.ncwaudubon.org/. Course dates: January 25, 27, and 30 (1/2-day field trip, 9-noon). Register at Wenatchee Valley College Continuing Education <http://wenatchee.augusoft.net/index.cfm?fuseaction=1010>



Red-necked Grebe on the Columbia at Wenatchee
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

An Invitation to Become a Citizen Scientist

by Virginia Palumbo, Chelan

Citizen Science first began with the 1900 National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count and 21st Century technology has triggered its recent rapid growth as an important data-collection tool. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology has a working definition of citizen science: 'projects in which volunteers partner with scientists to answer real-world questions'. In North Central Washington, a variety of citizen science projects are on-going efforts by NCWAS. They range from our Christmas Bird Counts, to the Audubon/WDFW Sagebrush Songbird Survey, to the newly planned winter raptor driving surveys in Douglas and Okanogan County. Individually, many local chapter members in our area participate as Project FeederWatch citizen scientists between November and April. All result in personal learning, collaboration with scientists, and are fun outings with great folks. To find out more about these, and an array of Citizen Science Projects, visit www.birds.cornell.edu/citscitoolkit/projects/find/find or www.ebird.org/content/nw/citizen-science-projects/

This is an invitation to get started as a citizen scientist while also honing your own bird identification skills with a group of bird watching enthusiasts in the field. Two local Audubon chapter members have projects which can accommodate more participants, so contact either coordinator if you'd like to learn more.

WDFW Beebe Spring eBird survey. Virginia Palumbo has been doing monthly eBird counts at Beebe Springs Natural Area for four years. Beginning this year, she is conducting twice-monthly eBird counts at Beebe Springs, using a protocol adapted from the Chelan Douglas Land Trust bird surveys. This data is then shared with Ron Fox, the WDFW wildlife biologist for Beebe Springs. This is an interesting and important time to contribute to the knowledge of bird populations at Beebe Springs, given the burns that occurred on surrounding hillsides this summer, the recent completion of a new fishing pond, and the newly "permanent" beaver pond with its resultant wetlands. Email Virginia to learn more: palumbov@nwi.net

Walla Walla Park and Horan Natural Area eBird survey project. Beginning in 2011, Susan Ballinger has led twice-monthly bird monitoring walks on the second and fourth Wednesdays and records species at two point count stations and along a one-mile loop in the Horan area. A protocol is followed and data is entered into eBird. One question the project seeks to answer is: How has the de-watering of open water ponds in Horan Nature Area changed the observed use by bird species, especially shorebirds and waterfowl? Email Susan to learn more: skylinebal@gmail.com

Grouse and Spouse

A Presentation by the Okanogan Highlands Alliance

by Julie Ashmore, Okanogan Highlands

The Highland Wonders educational series kicks off the new year with an opportunity to learn about the world of grouse breeding behavior, with an inside perspective on grouse mating systems from a couple who have worked in this field both together and independently. Mike Schroeder (aka

grouse) has a Ph.D. in wildlife biology and is the upland bird research scientist for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW). Leslie Robb (aka spouse) earned a master's degree in zoology. Leslie and Mike have conducted research on several species of grouse in North America.

"No two species illustrate the variation in grouse mating systems more than Willow Ptarmigan and Greater Sage-grouse," Schroeder says. "Male Willow Ptarmigan follow their paired

females attentively throughout the breeding season while male sage-grouse attempt to mate with every female they see." This talk will explore a variety of mating systems, ranging from monogamy to extreme polygamy, and some of the breeding behavior of grouse species in Washington.

Dr. Schroeder is a Certified Wildlife Biologist who has pursued research and management of grouse since 1981. He joined the WDFW in 1992 and has continued to focus most of his activities on the biology and management of grouse. Mike is

also developing a monitoring and evaluation program for WDFW wildlife areas. He has worked with graduate students from Washington State University, University of Idaho, and Eastern Washington University to address specific management issues related to grouse. For more information on his work, please visit http://wdfw.wa.gov/conservation/research/staff/schroeder_michael.html

Leslie Robb received her Bachelor of Science degree from Acadia

University in Nova Scotia and her Master of Science degree in Zoology from the University of Alberta. She has done fieldwork on greater prairie-chickens and white-tailed ptarmigan and has numerous publications on many species of grouse. She has been involved in the 'grouse world' for almost 30 years.

At a Glance:
When: January 8, at 6:30 pm. (Dinner benefiting the Community Cultural Center at 5:15 pm, followed by the presentation with tea, coffee and desserts.)
Cost: Presentation is free; dinner is \$7.50 for CCC members and \$8.50 for non-members (benefit for the CCC).
Where: Community Cultural Center, 411 S Western Ave, Tonasket
Questions? www.okanoganhighlands.org/education/hw, julie@okanoganhighlands.org, or 476-2432.

December Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Calendar
 Items in bold text are sponsored or co-sponsored by NCWAS

December 18 - January 2	Christmas Bird Counts	See stories on page 1 and 6
December-February	Winter Raptor Surveys	In Douglas and Okanogan Counties. See www.ncwaudubon.org/ for details.
January 8	Grouse and Spouse	Learn about grouse in Tonasket with OHA. See page 7
January 9	Winter Birding	Bird the Waterville Plateau and Columbia River. See page 2
January 14	Learn about Whitebark Pine Trees	With the Native Plant Society. See page 4
January 16-18	The Great NCW Bird Race	Birding for fun and to support wildfire-affected economies of NCW. See last month's Phlox or www.wos.org for details.
January 25, 27 & 30	Learn about Winter Water Birds	At WVC and on the river. See page 6.
February 6	Bird the Waterville Plateau	Dan Stephens' annual field trip to search for wintering specialties. See page 2 for details.
February 12-15	Great Backyard Bird Count	See www. http://gbbc.birdcount.org/



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