



The Wild Phlox

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Connecting People with Nature since 1966



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How Many Christmas Bird Counts Will You Be Doing?

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters 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 27 dedicated birders, 25 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 allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife 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.

from the National Audubon Society
There is a specific methodology to the CBC, and all participants must make arrangements to participate in advance with the circle 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 through a designated circle, 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 if you have made prior arrangement with the count compiler.

Christmas Bird Counts and their compilers in our region:

December 17. Leavenworth - Joe Veverka joe_everka@yahoo.com. Contact Joe ahead of time to determine teams and routes. A post-count meeting is planned.

December 21. Bridgeport - Meredith Spencer merdave@homenetnw.net. Meet at Brewster McDonald’s at 7:30 am. There will be a baked potato dinner following the count. Bring Christmas treats to share. And don’t forget, there is always a great door prize!

December 28. Wenatchee - Dan Stephens dstephens@wvc.edu or 679-4706

December 29. Twisp - Julie Hovis jahovis711@gmail.com or 803-236-1268. Meet at Cinnamon Twisp at 8 am. Potluck to follow at Julie’s house at 5 pm.

December 29. Omak/Okanogan - Julia O’Conner ilikebirds.joc@gmail.com. Meet at Heather Findlay’s house at 7 am and return for chile after the count. Call Heather for the address - 429-8167

January 4. Chelan - Steve Easley seasley@nwi.net or 682-2318. Meet at the Apple Cup Café at 7 am and then at the Chelan Methodist Church at 4:15 pm for hot chili and to share the results.

The mission of the North Central Washington Audubon Society is to:
 “Enhance, protect and restore healthy natural ecosystems and native biodiversity using science, advocacy, education and on-the-ground conservation to promote the welfare of birds in North Central Washington”

February Field Trip with Mark Johnston

Join us for a birding trip on February 8 to the Waterville Plateau, Bridgeport Bar, and Columbia River. We will spend the day birding a variety of habitats where we 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: \$25 per vehicle to be shared equally by riders. Meet at 8:00 am at 208 West Nixon Street in Chelan. Back by 5:00 pm. To sign up, please email Mark at s697striata@frontier.com or call 253-297-0705. Limited to eleven birders.



Horned Grebe
 photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

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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.

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Subscribe to NCW Audubon Wild Phlox One Year, Nine Issues - \$15 Suggested donation

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

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To join the National Audubon Society which also includes a subscription to the Wild Phlox, please see their website at www.audubon.org



I recently returned from a road trip through Oregon to California and back. I did some birding, but late October and early November did not seem all that birdy. Through central Oregon I did notice quite a few Rough-legged Hawks on the utility poles. The day before I left home, I had seen my first of the season Rough-legged Hawk. Camped on the John Day River, I noted the complete absence of raptors and corvids and I am still puzzled by that. I did enjoy flocks of Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and a Canyon Wren. Along the Oregon coast, three times while walking on a beach, I saw a mixed pair of shorebirds – a Whimbrel and a Marbled Godwit! Sometimes they were accompanied by a gull. It was an interesting pair – one with a downturned bill and the other with a slightly upturn. They fed and moved along through the edge of the surf together.

A disturbing thing I saw in two state parks along the coast was the appearance of feral cats. I saw at least six of them one evening. No doubt, these cats are having an effect on small birds and mammals. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, feral cat colonies are a major part of the cat problem: feral or unowned cats are responsible for an estimated 69% of all cat-killed birds in the U.S. Cornell has studied 'trap, neuter, vaccinate and return' (TNR) programs for feral cats. They found that this doesn't necessarily reduce the feral cats population and may increase it when people release additional cat to established feral cat colonies.



Greater Yellowlegs
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

Also feral cats spread disease, including rabies and toxoplasmosis among themselves and to other species. For more information about cats and birds see the Cornell site at <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/faq-outdoor-cats-and-their-effects-on-birds/> or the American Bird Conservancy site at <https://abcbirds.org/program/cats-indoors/cats-and-birds/>

Christmas Bird Count season is upon us. We have lots of counts in our region and they need lots of birders to cover the circles. How many counts can you do? I plan on doing two but maybe could squeeze in a third one if I really try.

Also, there is no Wild Phlox in January.



Steller's Jay
photo by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley



Cinnamon Teal
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

NCW Recent Bird Sightings

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

Chelan: A Rough-legged Hawk was reported above Chelan Butte on November 1. A Dunlin was seen at Walla Walla Park. Wood Ducks were reported at Riverfront Park. A California Scrub Jay was seen off of Horselake Road. Trumpeter Swans were seen on Lake Wenatchee. A Black-backed Woodpecker was seen near Leavenworth. A Lesser Goldfinch was seen in Monitor.

Douglas: Hundreds of Snow Geese continued at Atkins Lake including at least one blue phase. A Gyrfalcon, a Lapland Longspur and Dunlin were also seen at Atkins Lake. At Stilt Sandpiper was seen at Roads C and 18 and a Northern Goshawk was seen on Dyer Hill. A Blue Jay has

been in Bridgeport for quite a while. A late Say's Phoebe was reported on November 7.

Ferry: A Black-backed Woodpecker was seen at the Kettle River Campground. A Pacific Wren was seen at Haag Cove Campground. A Northern Shrike was seen at French Johns Lake. A Golden Eagle was seen at Swawilla Basin.

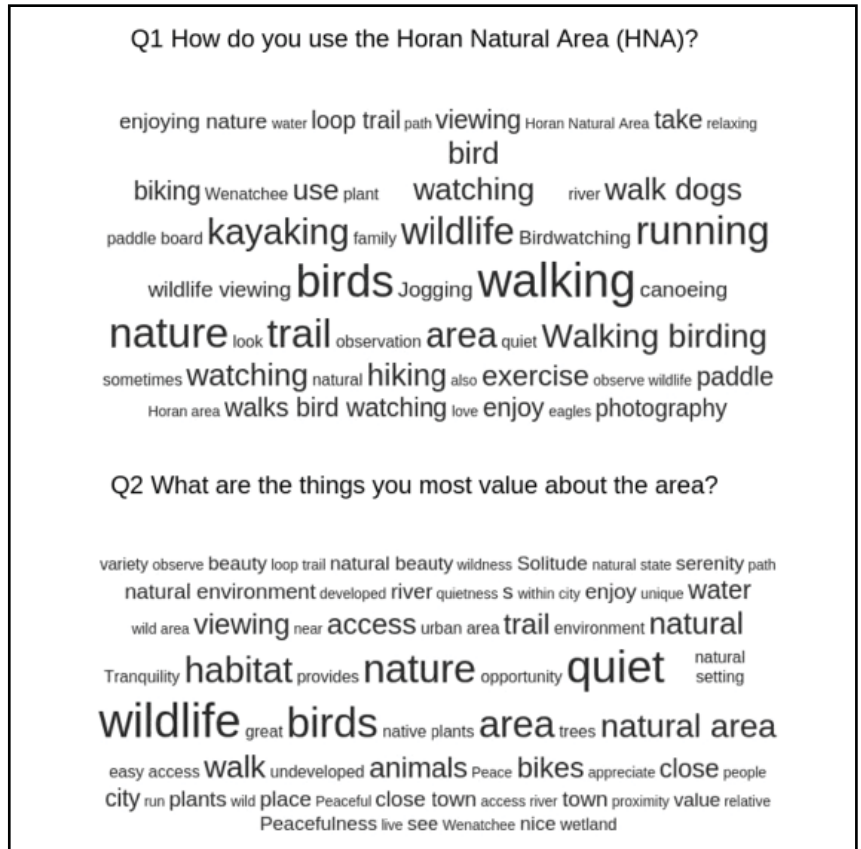
Okanogan: A Northern Shrike and a Pacific Wren were seen at Mazama. A Merlin was seen in Okanogan. A Bewick's Wren was seen at Whitestone Lake. An Anna's Hummingbird continues in Okanogan. Trumpeter Swans were seen at Twin Lakes, near Winthrop.

Horan Natural Area - Feedback to the Agencies

by Bruce McCammon, Wenatchee

The Chelan County PUD on November 6, 2019 held two public workshops to gather input on the use and future of the Horan Natural Area. Over one hundred people attended the afternoon and evening workshops. The workshops consisted of several stations where people could ask questions or provide input. Personnel from the PUD, Washington State Parks, and the City of Wenatchee were available to listen and provide answers to questions about many topics including water in the area, recreational use, land ownership, and the City of Wenatchee's proposed Confluence Parkway project.

The PUD has posted preliminary results on their website: www.chelanpud.org/horan. They provide two graphics to show the topics that were submitted through the online survey. In these graphics, words that were used most frequently are shown in bigger fonts. Words used less frequently use successively smaller fonts.



Alaska's Public Lands Under Threat

Last month, the administration rushed to open more of Alaska's public lands to development before the end of the year.

Tongass National Forest

In October, the US Forest Service released the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) on the proposed exemption of the Tongass National Forest from the federal Roadless Rule, which would allow roadbuilding and clearcutting on over half of the nearly 17-million acre forest. The Tongass is part of the largest remaining temperate rainforest on Earth and hosts exceptional birds, some of which rely on its old-growth woods. If you haven't already, you can send public comments opposing this plan until December 17. See https://act.audubon.org/onlineactions/Rsb0t1RmRk6WLBfuemLdOg2?ms=policy-adv-web-website_nas-engagementcard-20191018_tongass_roadless_alert. Meanwhile, legislation to make the Roadless Rule permanent and continue to protect areas like the

Tongass has been introduced in both chambers of Congress. Audubon advocates keeping the current Roadless Rule protections on the Tongass intact.

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

The administration will soon start the process for oil companies to drill on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge by issuing what is known as a "call for nominations." This move comes as the Interior Department finalizes a deeply flawed environmental analysis, blatantly ignoring scientific review and flouting legal requirements in its rushed process to open one of the nation's most delicate landscapes to oil drilling. Development would create a spider web of drilling rigs, oil pipelines, and roads - permanently altering this wild landscape for millions of birds, resident polar bears, and hundreds of thousands of caribou. An opportunity to submit public comment will be available once the call for nominations is issued.

from the National Audubon Society

National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A)

In the coming weeks, the Bureau of Land Management may be releasing the DEIS for the proposed revisions to the NPR-A land management plan. The revisions would open even more acres in the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area to allow for more leasing. The globally Important Bird Area provides vital habitat for tens of thousands of molting geese and about half a million nesting shorebirds, along with tens of thousands of caribou. The vast majority of our nation's largest public land is already available for drilling and BLM already plans to hold an oil and gas lease sale for 3.98 million total acres in December. Meanwhile, the region is experiencing dramatic climate change, which is causing coastal erosion and vegetation change. More resources and planning are needed to combat the effects of climate change, not more oil drilling.

Kahler Creek Protected

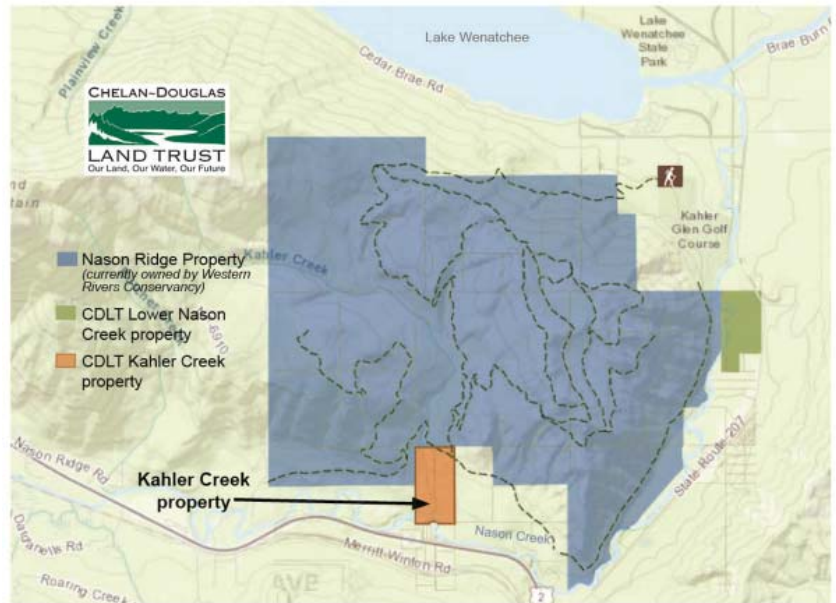
Curt Soper, executive director CDLT

I am delighted to announce that the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust (CDLT) is now the proud owner of a one-mile stretch of Kahler Creek as it flows into Nason Creek. This property adjoins the recently conserved 3,714-acre Nason Ridge property.

Part of the popular and widely used Nason Ridge trail system crosses the Land Trust's new preserve and Kahler Creek has both excellent salmon rearing and spawning habitat. It has been acquired in coordination with the Western Rivers Conservancy. Funding for this purchase was provided by the Priest Rapids Coordinating Committee through Grant County PUD's habitat funds and the Washington State Salmon Recovery Funding Board.

The Chelan County Natural Resources Department hosted a public meeting to update the greater community on creating a Nason Ridge community forest on November 16. The meeting was very well attended. Chelan County presented a draft of the Nason Ridge Community Forest Plan, which will be delivered to the Washington State Legislature on December 1, as they requested. The plan focuses on managing the property in accordance with the values identified by the local community, the most prominent of which are sustainable timber harvest, access to outdoor recreation, and preservation and enhancement of vital salmon habitat. You may see this draft plan at www.co.chelan.wa.us/files/natural-resources/documents/DRAFT%20Nason%20Ridge%20Community%20Forest%20Plan_2019%201114.pdf

The Chelan Douglas Land Trust truly appreciates all your support. These kinds of projects are simply not possible without public input. You have made it clear how important Nason Ridge is for the community. Thank you!



Elderberries

by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

When I was growing up my mother used to make elderberry jam. I also think we had elderberry pie once, though my memory's a bit vague on that score. Since leaving home I haven't tasted a prepared elderberry dish. Once, about a decade ago, I tried eating some wild, ripe elderberries. Yuck. I was not a fan.

Until this year. I came to appreciate the delicacy, not for myself, but for the birds it attracts. In an hour or two of observation we photographed five species eating the berries. First gourmand, a charming juvenile Cedar Waxwing flew in, not quite grown into its sinister-bandit look. Then the White-crowned Sparrows descended, migrating through in good numbers typical for this time of year. They appeared to squeeze the juice, and perhaps the pulp out before discarding the skin - a bit like some of us ate concord grapes as children. Where there's birds and food, a finch can't be far behind. A particularly rosy looking House Finch posed for a few minutes in the elderberry bush. Also moving through, the Yellow-rumped Warblers readied themselves for a long journey to Central America. Are they eating elderberries or the bugs the berries attract?

The real prize from our point of view was a visit by a Golden-crowned Sparrow. We'd never seen one in Washington before, although that apparently says more about us than the bird, which is not rare here. Pretty looking fella for a sparrow, I think. One bigger bird horned in on the fun, a colorful favorite of ours: Steller's Jay.

If you are thinking about creating a bird friendly yard, I can highly recommend planting elderberry bushes!

School Yard Science Goes Birding

by Sarah Brooks, Methow Conservancy

Big kudos to the volunteers from Audubon of North Central Washington who joined our School Yard Science program this month. Janet and Peter Bauer and Julie Hovis led our two classes of 4th graders on a birding walk in the school yard. Armed with binoculars, every student had a chance to search for and then identify 12 wooden birds that were "hidden" in various habitats around the schoolyard. The students had keen eyes and tons of enthusiasm, and this year we all even found that elusive ruby crowned kinglet out there! It is really awesome to share experiences like working with real world experts to use binoculars and thinking about bird identification with our students. We're so inspired, that we're already thinking about fundraising to purchase our own wooden bird set. It's pretty fun!

2019 Methow Wildlife Area Nest Box Results

From a report compiled by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

The 2019 survey included five nest box routes on the Methow Wildlife Area: Bear Creek, Cottonwood, Geetsman, Gunn Ranch, and Rendezvous, an increase from the 2018 survey which only included the Bear Creek route. Eighty-seven nest boxes were cleaned out, repaired, installed, and/or moved to more suitable locations by a team of Methow Wildlife Area and Methow Conservancy volunteers. Methow Wildlife Area volunteers monitored 79 nest boxes (75 songbird and 4 waterfowl) for nesting activity between 25 April and 8 August 2019. One songbird box and 7 owl/kestrel boxes were not monitored because they were too high to access without a ladder.

Ninety-six nest attempts were documented and there was at least 1 nest attempt in 71 (90%) of the 79 monitored boxes. Forty-six boxes had 1 attempt and 25 songbird boxes had 2 attempts. Six songbird species nested in the boxes. Tree Swallows, House Wrens, and Western Bluebirds had the most attempts, whereas Black-capped Chickadees, Mountain Bluebirds, and Violet-green Swallows had the fewest. Only attempts where the final disposition of the nest was known were used to determine nesting success. Combining all routes, Tree Swallows had a nesting success rate of 64% and fledged an average of 2.9 young per nest, and Western Bluebirds

had a nesting success rate of 54% and fledged an average of 2.6 young per nest. Only 7 of the 29 House Wren nest attempts had known outcomes. Data on House Wren nesting success was very difficult to obtain in songbird boxes because the design prohibited viewing the box contents once a House Wren nest was complete.

All species and routes combined, 34 (47%) of the 72 known outcome nest attempts failed. Dead young, unhatched eggs, incomplete nests, and missing young accounted for 91% of the failures. Two Black-capped Chickadee nests were destroyed by House Wrens, and 11 Tree Swallow and 3 Western Bluebird nest failures were suspected to be caused by House Wrens. The House Wren is an aggressive species that will destroy and/or remove nests, eggs, and young of other cavity nesting birds.

Nest boxes on the Methow Wildlife Area provide a valuable resource for cavity-nesting birds. Ninety percent of the boxes monitored in 2019 supported at least 1 nest attempt, which suggests the availability of natural cavities is limited. Therefore, I believe it is important to maintain the nest boxes on the Methow Wildlife Area by cleaning and repairing them each year before the start of the nesting season. Because it has worked well in the past, volunteers may be the best way to accomplish this task.

Given the amount of time involved, I do not believe annual monitoring of the nest boxes to collect detailed nesting information is needed. Two years of monitoring data (the Bear Creek route in 2018 and all 5 routes in 2019) have provided a baseline dataset and shown that little can be done to improve nesting success once the boxes are cleaned out and repaired. House Wrens appear to be the biggest problem, but because they are protected by federal law it is illegal to remove their nests, eggs, or young from a nest box. The best defense against House Wrens is to move boxes away from their preferred shrubby habitat into more open areas, which was done prior to the 2019 nesting season.

I thank the Methow Wildlife Area for providing nest boxes for cavity-nesting birds and the Methow Wildlife Area and Methow Conservancy for recruiting volunteers to participate in this project. I also thank all the volunteers who helped clean out and repair nest boxes in 2018 and 2019. I am especially grateful for the following volunteers who donated their time to monitor nest boxes during the 2019 nesting season: Janet Bauer, Nicholas Brasier, David Clement, Mary Kiesau, Jacques Peschon, Barbara Schneider, Scott Stluka, Torre Stockard, Betsy Weiss, Jeanette Wood, and Steve Wood.

Where to Bird in Washington

When you travel in Washington do you ever wonder where you might spend some quality time birding? Need a break from a meeting or a visit with relatives or just a break from the car during a road trip? Did you know the entire 600 plus page book - A Birder's Guide to Washington Second Edition - is now available online? The Washington Ornithological Society (WOS) and the American Birding Association teamed up to make this resource available to all. Additionally, they hope that birders will submit comments about birding sites that have changed or been

altered since the book was published in 2015. Perhaps there was a fire or flood, or a road was closed, or changes were made to the habitat to make it less (or more) friendly to birds and birders. The guide can be found at <https://wabirdguide.org/>. Printed copies of the book continue to be available for sale.

WOS also has a good listing of birding resources including maps to popular birding areas throughout (well, mostly in western Washington) the state. You can find it at <http://wos.org/birding-locations/>.

by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley

Lead a Winter Nature Walk in Leavenworth

By Katie Churchwell, WRI

If introducing people to the joys of being outside sounds worth your time, consider leading a snowshoe tour with Wenatchee River Institute at the Leavenworth National Fish Hatchery!

Various non-profit and government organizations have been running educational snowshoe programs at the hatchery for the better part of two decades. This winter, Wenatchee River Institute (WRI) is excited to be taking over the program! We are looking for volunteers to lead tours in January on Fridays at 1 pm and Saturdays at 10 am and 1 pm. Volunteer guides lead groups of ten to twelve people around a one-mile snowshoe trail along Icicle Creek for about two hours, with a total commitment of three hours of your time to accommodate for setup and cleanup.

Along the trail, guides point out interesting nature and ecology, based on their own areas of interest. Volunteers have the option of leading their own snowshoe tours, or assisting another leader if they would prefer. There will be a snowshoe guide training at the fish hatchery on Thursday, December 12 with a potential weekend date tbd. This will cover both wildlife and ecology that you are likely to see along the trail, as well as logistics for guiding groups through the snow. The fish hatchery provides all equipment and gear, so even if you've never snowshoed before, you are more than welcome to join this fun program! All you need is an enthusiasm for sharing the wonders of nature and the outdoors with others.

If interested, please reach out to Katie Churchwell at AmeriCorps@wenatcheeriverinstitute.org.



Icicle Creek Winter Wonderland
photo provided by USFWS

Supercharge Your Plant ID Skills with the Native Plant Society

by Ann Fink, Wenatchee

Have you ever been on a trail and wondered what flower you were seeing, but were overwhelmed by all the possibilities? The online Washington Native Plant Society (WNPS) plant lists can come to your rescue. With over 700 plant lists in the WNPS library, including 47 in Chelan County, you can narrow your prospects and quickly zero in on the species you want to identify. At this chapter meeting on January 9, Don Schaechtel will demonstrate how to use the lists to their maximum advantage and how they complement field guides and online identification tools. He will also show how you can contribute to the plant list library by adding species or by creating a new list. With what you learn you will be ready to hit the trails in spring to try out your new skills.

This event will be at Wenatchee Museum and Cultural Center, 127 South Mission Street on January 9 from 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm. For more information, contact Ann Fink at northfork@nwi.net.

The Big History, in Tonasket

by Jen Weddle, Okanogan Highlands Alliance

Okanogan Highlands Alliance (OHA) is excited to announce the next Highland Wonders educational event, featuring renowned naturalist Dana Visalli! On January 3 at the Community Cultural Center of Tonasket, Dana will carry out a seemingly impossible task: describing the evolution of life on Earth in ONE HOUR. Dana has shared his deep understanding and enthusiasm for nature at previous Highland Wonders events, teaching our community about wildflowers, plant identification, and leading a “walk through time” hike in the Okanogan Highlands. He is a professional botanist, naturalist, writer, publisher and educator. He is interested in all aspects of life on our planet and has devoted years to understanding the interconnectedness of species. The topic for this January’s presentation, however, is especially fascinating to Dana, who shares, “Big History is the most interesting, compelling and meaningful subject area I have ever encountered.” We hope that you will join us in the new year as we continue to learn about and gain appreciation for the natural history of our world.

Highland Wonder presentations feature the natural history of the Okanogan Highlands and surrounding areas. OHA provides these presentations on the first Friday of the month from January through April. The presentation, which starts at 6:30 pm, is free to the public (donations are welcome), and clock hours are available for educators. The event takes place at the Tonasket Community Cultural Center, and dinner (menu and price TBD) will be available before the presentation.

OHA is a non-profit organization that works to educate the public on watershed issues. OHA’s Education Program is designed to build the community’s capacity for environmental stewardship by increasing understanding of local natural history through a variety of free public learning opportunities. For more info, visit: okanoganhighlands.org/education/highland-wonders, or contact jen@okanoganhighlands.org (429-4399).

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 17	Christmas Bird Count	In Leavenworth. See page 1.
December 21	Christmas Bird Count	In Bridgeport. See page 1.
December 28	Christmas Bird Count	In Wenatchee. See page 1.
December 29	Christmas Bird Counts	Twisp and Omak/Okanoga. See page 1.
January 4	Christmas Bird Count	In Chelan. See page 1.
January 3	The Big History	Learn about the evolution of life on Earth with Dana Visalia and the Okanogan Highlands Alliance. See page 7
January 9	Supercharge your Plan ID Skills	With the Native Plant Society. See page 7
February 8	Go birding with Mark Johnston	Winter Field trip in Douglas County. See page 2.
December 14 - January 5	Christmas Bird Counts	For more CBC dates in Washington, see http://wos.org/cbc/



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The beautiful photos are even nicer in color.



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