NORTH CENTRAL WASHINGTON AUDUBON SOCIETY

THE WILD PHLOX



Volume 49 #5 February 2016

The Great Backyard Bird Count

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online citizenscience project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real-time. Since then, more than 100,000 people of all ages and walks of life have joined the four-day count each February to create an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds.

You are invited to participate! Simply tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count, February 12-15. You can count from any location, anywhere in the world!

If you're new to the count, first register online at http://gbbc. birdcount.org/ then enter your checklist. If you have already participated in another Cornell Lab citizen-science project, you can use your existing login.

In 2015, Great Backyard Bird Count participants in more than 100 countries counted 5,090 species of birds on more than 147,000 checklists! You can see the full summary at the Great Backyard Bird Count website - http://gbbc.birdcount.org/.

During the count, you can explore what others are seeing in your area or around the world. Share your bird photos by entering the photo contest, or enjoy images pouring in from across the globe. Help make this the most successful count ever by participating this year!

Then keep counting throughout the year with eBird, http://ebird.org/content/ebird/ which uses the same system as the Great Backyard Bird Count to collect, store, and display data any time, all the time.



Dark-eyed Junco photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

Why count birds?

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to document and understand the complex distribution and movements of so many species in such a short time. Scientists use information from the

from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology and The National Audubon Society

Great Backyard Bird Count, along with observations from other citizenscience projects, such as the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and eBird, to get the "big picture" about what is happening to bird populations. The longer these data are collected, the more meaningful they become in helping scientists investigate farreaching questions, like these:

- How will the weather and climate change influence bird populations?
 - Some birds, such as winter finches, appear in large numbers during some years but not others. Where are these species from year to year, and what can we learn from these patterns?
 - How will the timing of birds' migrations compare with past years?
 - How are bird diseases, such as West Nile virus, affecting birds in different regions?
- What kinds of differences in bird diversity are apparent in cities versus suburban, rural, and natural areas?

The Great Backyard Bird Count is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with Bird Studies Canada and many international partners. The Great Backyard Bird Count is powered by eBird. The count is made possible in part by founding sponsor Wild Birds Unlimited. 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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All phone numbers in the Wild Phlox are area code 509 unless otherwise indicated.

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!



Black-capped Chickadee photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

North Central Washington Audubon Society Wild Phlox Subscription Form Subscribe to NCW Audubon Wild Phlox One Year, Nine Issues \$15 I prefer to get the Wild Phlox electronically (email address required below) Separate subscription to Phlox NOT needed for NAS members in good standing 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 Memorial in the name of ______ Please mail check and form to Post Office Box 2934 Wenatchee, WA 98807-2934. Name ______ Address _____ City _____ State ____ Zip Code _____ Phone number _____ Email _____ 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

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.

Audubon will go to fund programs in North Central Washington!

What a month. First armed thugs took over Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in SE Oregon. How could that be? They talk crazy talk. And no one can make them leave. The

Editor's Notes

Refuge is now closed to the public while these people destroy federal resources. It's been three weeks now and they want to 'negotiate'. I'd like to think that by the time you have this newsletter in your hands that the situation has been resolved and this is old news. I hate to think that when the flocks of migrating birds return to rest or the Sandhill Cranes start courtship and build nests that those thugs will still be in control of this protected refuge that birders, hunters, anglers and farmers have visited and used for generations.

And then, closer to home, in our own region, a Northern Hawk-Owl was killed. (See the article on page 7) Is there any way we can possibly use this sad incident to educate the public, including birders, about the importance of protecting

wildlife and habitat?

Here at home, my days seem filled with moving snow. There was over three feet on the ground but the warm weather this week has compressed it and made it heavy with water we will be thankful for in a few months. Still, it has to be moved. And we are running out of places to move it.

Birds at our feeders have been interesting and fun to watch. There is a large flock of Common Redpolls – up to 100 when the weather is at its worst. We also see a few Red Crossbills, American Goldfinches, Pine Siskins, House Finches and as many as fifteen Northern Flickers! And then there are the raptors – a Northern Pygmy-Owl, an American Kestrel and a Northern Goshawk have all visited our feeders recently. We started out the holidays with at least a dozen Mourning Doves. Now I only see one or two. On New Year's Eve I observed the kestrel chase a dove into a window and then she proceeded to kill the stunned bird right in front of me. When the dogs got too close to the window, the kestrel flew away, not very far, with the dove and ate it. I looked up their weights and the two birds each weigh about four ounces. Can you imagine being able to fly while carrying something that weighs the same amount that you do? Today I saw the tiny pygmy owl with a tinier redpoll in its talons. It's a bird-eat-bird world out there.



Northern Flicker and Northern Pygmy-Owl photo by Teri J Pieper

NCW Recent Bird Sightings

Sharp-tailed Grouse are being seen near Conconully and also on Bridgeport Hill Road. Bohemian Waxwings have been spotted in Chelan and Cashmere. Also in Cashmere there are Lesser Goldfinches! Chukars were reported at Beebe Springs; Gray Partridges along highway 97 near Wells Dam and a pair of Trumpeter Swans were seen on the Columbia. Two Brown-headed Cowbirds that forgot to migrate were seen near Conconully. Near Mansfield there is at least one young Snowy Owl and someone saw a Gyrfalcon in that area. A Peregrine Falcon was seen flying down the Columbia. White-winged and Red Crossbills have been seen in Conconully. A White-headed Woodpecker and Snow Buntings were seen from Cameron Lake Road. A Northern Saw-whet Owl continues to be seen at Chief Joseph State Park. In Bridgeport there were three kinds of sparrows at one feeder at one time - Chipping, American Tree, and Savannah. In Twisp at another feeder, there was a Harris and a Golden-crowned Sparrow. Common Redpolls are common this winter, being reported at feeders from Bridgeport to Chesaw to Twisp. In Republic, there were Pine Grosbeaks, Red Crossbills, Bohemian Waxwings and Wild Turkeys. Long-tailed Ducks continue to be seen on the Columbia near Bridgeport.

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



Common Redpoll photo by Teri J Pieper

Go Birding with NCW Audubon!

One of the greatest benefits an Audubon chapter offers its members is the chance to get into the field with like-minded people to enjoy and learn about birds and nature. North Central Washington's richly diverse landscapes and habitats present exceptional opportunities for birding in wonderful settings. NCWAS's Field Trips Program is designed to take full advantage of our proximity to this by providing numerous opportunities to experience and gain a greater understanding of birds and how nature works in our region.

On our most recent field trip, we spent a full day exploring the Waterville Plateau, Bridgeport Bar, and Columbia River. In addition to some of the more typical species that spend the winter with us, we also had excellent views of some harder to find ones including Northern Saw-Whet Owl, Great Horned Owl, Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike, Snow Bunting, Gray Partridge, and more.

Next up is a two-day trip (February 27 and 28) jointly planned and led by NWCAS and Seattle Audubon that will explore the Okanogan Highlands and Waterville Plateau. Sign-ups are on a first come, first served basis and we expect high demand, so those interested in participating should sign up early. See below for details.

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

Going forward, watch the Wild Phlox for announcements of our upcoming spring trips. The Field Trips Committee is currently planning several outings for spring that will provide a wide variety of opportunities to make the most of this birdiest of seasons.

We look forward to seeing you in the field!



Northern Saw-whet Owl seen on a recent field trip. photo by David Hillestad

Okanogan and Douglas County Field Trip

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

The Okanogan Highlands in winter provide wonderful opportunities to see arctic visitors, altitudinal migrants, and hard-to-see residents. We will start birding from Omak on Saturday, February 27, at first light, hoping to see Sharp-tailed Grouse feeding in water birches in the Scotch Creek area. From there, we'll head up to the town of Conconully to look for forest birds (nuthatches, Pine Grosbeaks, Clark's Nutcrackers, and maybe a Northern Goshawk). We'll then cross the Okanogan River eastwards and explore the highland wooded areas and clearings seeking Snow Buntings, Gray-crowned Rosy-finches, and Northern Pygmy-Owls. If we are lucky, we may see White-winged Crossbills and even luckier, Great Gray Owl at dusk at the end of our first day.

On Sunday, the 28th we'll bird the orchards and islands near Brewster seeking Bohemian Waxwings, American Tree Sparrows, and winter ducks. Then we'll explore the open fields of the Waterville Plateau looking for Snowy Owls, Rough-legged Hawks, Gray

Partridges, and possibly a Long-eared Owl or even a Gyrfalcon. We'll finish birding by afternoon so participants can drive home Sunday eventing.

Logistics: Participants will need to arrange their own overnight accommodations for one or two nights (depending upon preference) in Omak. We will need two snow-capable vehicles in addition to the leader's Subaru (AWD is ideal) for carpooling on the birding trips from Omak (there is not enough parking at every stop to accommodate more than three cars). Each carpool car will need a Discover Pass. Bring warm clothes appropriate for freezing temperatures and wind, appropriate footwear for slippery snow and ice, and enough food/drink to carry in the car all day. Scopes will be helpful. Most of the birding will involve short walks from the cars, with some walks up to a mile. Participants need to get to and from Omak on their own, although it may be possible to share rides with other participants. Carpool costs: \$25/day shared equally by riders in each car. We will finish Sunday afternoon.

To sign up, contact Allisa at allisamae@gmail.com or 206-697-3919.



Northern Shrike photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

Lost Lake - Inside the Gem Okanogan Highlands Alliance Highland Wonders

The Lost Lake wetland supports an astonishing degree of biodiversity, with several wetland types and a complex web of life. From aquatic insect-eating plants to Northern Harriers swooping through the air in search of prey, the wetland is a hub of activity. More Common Loon chicks have been hatched at Lost Lake than at any other lake in Washington, using the wetland fringe for nesting. Throughout the site, various kinds of wetlands foster the growth of rare plants and rich wildlife, as the mix of land and water transitions from forested seepage wetland to shrub swamp to calcareous fen. The latter has plant associations that are typically found in rich

to extremely rich fens, and is one of the rarest wetland types in the United States.

"The wetlands within the Lost Lake Preserve are of high conservation value due to the rare plants and plant communities which occur there," says Joe Rocchio, Vegetation Ecologist with the WA Natural Heritage Program. He adds, "The site retains excellent ecological integrity despite numerous human stressors in the

surrounding landscape. The Lost Lake Wetland Preserve harbors some significant pieces of Washington's natural heritage. The long-term protection of this wetland complex contributes to the conservation of these biodiversity treasures within Washington State." On February 5th, local botanist George Thornton, along with a panel of speakers, will share an inside view of this incredible biological resource.

Botanist George Thornton has nurtured a personal interest in native plants of the Okanogan Highlands for many years, observing some of our most special wetlands over time. He has led two native plant hikes at Lost Lake as part of OHA's outdoor Highland Wonders series, and has helped with countless other educational events. George will provide a close-up look at the rare plants that grow in the wetland.

Habitat enhancement is another important component of the Preserve, and local community member Lee Johnson will speak about the nesting boxes and habitat piles that have been added to the site, along with some of the results.

The Lost Lake wetland is being used as a research site to expand our understanding of the intricate relationships between organisms, land, and water. To this end, two post-doctoral researchers from the department of Biology at UW in Seattle, Chloé Lahondère and Clément Vinauger, have been studying the pollination of a rare orchid by mosquitoes, at the Lost Lake Preserve and in the surrounding area. Chloé and

Clément will join us on February 5th, to share about their work in analyzing the scent of the native orchids. By identifying the various chemicals emitted by the plants and measuring the response of the mosquitoes to the orchids' odors, this research will help establish to which compounds mosquitoes are attracted. This is one component of the UW research into mosquitoes' behavior, physiology and ecology, and just one example of unique research

February 5 at the Community Cultural Center (CCC), 411 South Western Avenue, Tonasket.

Dinner at 5:15 benefitting the CCC; \$7.50 for CCC members, \$8.50 for non-members. Presentation is FREE.

The Highland Wonders educational series features the natural history of the Okanogan Highlands and surrounding areas. OHA's Education Program, which is offered free of charge, is designed to build the capacity of the community to steward natural habitats and resources by helping increase awareness of local natural history. Donations are always welcome.

Ouestions? www.okanoganhighlands.org/education/bw

Questions? www.okanoganhighlands.org/education/hw, julie@okanoganhighlands.org, or 476-2432.

opportunities that may be possible the Lost Lake Preserve.

OHA recognizes the educational value of the Preserve, and Julie Ashmore will share ways Lost Lake is being used to raise awareness about wetland and forest ecology.

Lost Lake is a gem in many ways. Since the wetland is too sensitive to accommodate hiking groups, OHA will bring you "inside the gem" through the lens of the plants, pollinators, and wildlife of the Preserve. Come and learn about how OHA is preserving the Lost Lake wetland, making the site available to researchers, and teaching youth about the value and function of wetlands, using Lost Lake as an example. Delve with us into the depths of this gem, and take a look at the array of botanical wonders that thrive at the Preserve.

Prowl for Owls

Owls have long held a special place in the human imagination, appearing as everything from wise old souls to harbingers of doom. Come along on this one-hour owl-themed hike where we will learn the truth about these important members of our local food chain. (Hint: they're not as wise as you think, but they do have other special abilities!)

On February 12 from 6 til 7 pm, the Chelan Douglas Land Trust will host an Owl Prowl on their Dry Gulch Preserve in by Hilary Schwirtlich, Wenatchee

Wenatchee. The walk will last for about one hour and cover about one mile, staying on the main Dry Gulch Road. You don't need any special equipment. People of any age are invited to join. Susan Ballinger will lead the walk.

This event is free but RSVPs are required. Participants will be emailed the week of the trip with more details. Sign up online at cdlandtrust.org or contact Hillary at hillary@cdlandtrust.org or 667-9708, if you have questions.

Fodder From the Feeder

The Clark's Nutcrackers and Northern Flickers have taken over my feeders. The Red-breasted Nuthatches and Mountain Chickadees bravely wait their turn, as do the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, but the big guys win out. I swear, I am singlehandedly keeping the Twin Lakes neighborhood nutcracker and flicker populations thriving. When the suet feeders are emptied, the flickers attack the seed feeders - luckily the nutcrackers can't access them so they wait patiently for the suet to be replenished.

It was quite wonderful to get out for our first Winter Raptor Survey road trip. And what a trip it was! There was no lack of enthusiasm in the Methow Valley - we actually had two carloads and could have had more. Logistics dictated against this, however. We started out at 8:30 and headed into the hills up the Rendezvous, as we locals like to say. It was a brilliantly clear, sunny, cold 20°F morning and the raptors were hiding. We spotted some Snow Buntings on our way up the Rendezvous, and finally, a Northern Shrike on a wire on our way back down. Where were all the other raptors?

Closer to 10:00 we saw our first Bald Eagle. I am sure they wait till it warms up and they can enjoy the sun. As you might imagine, we saw many more eagles that day, as well as Red-tailed Hawks. A Golden Eagle was spotted, and there perhaps were more circling a kill high up on a ridge. A scope would have come in quite handy at that point. A highlight for all of us was spotting a diminutive Northern Pygmy-Owl on a ponderosa pine off the West Chewuch road. It was a first for one of our participants and always a thrill for any of us. All in all we saw 22 Bald Eagles, two Red-Tailed Hawks, one Golden Eagle, one Northern Shrike and the pygmy owl. Songbird highlights, besides the buntings, included a small

flock of Gray Partridges, and several flocks of California Quail. It was a great birding day. We drove 63 miles through the valley over about five hours.

by Karen Mulcahy, Winthrop

You might ask why we did this. Well, we have Devon Comstock to thank for planting the seed. She has been doing raptor surveys for many years in other areas and put out a call for participants in the Chelan and Waterville plateau area via the online NCWAS yahoo group that regularly exchanges emails of bird sightings. We were very interested in participating. Then, my husband Rick Rottman, got it in his head that we should do our own survey in the Methow. And why not? We had already been seeing many red tails and eagles. So truly, my hat goes off to him for his hard work in developing the first Winter Raptor Survey for the Methow Valley. This involved many visits to the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) website, emails to HMANA survey experts and local bird experts in the valley, and the both of us driving the valley to perfect the route. Our Winter Raptor Survey on December 16, 2015 was a lot of fun and a wonderful way to contribute valuable data for our area as citizen scientists. We hope to do one a month till

With much gratitude to the participants in our first Winter Raptor Survey: Rick Rottman, Betsy and David Weiss, Kurt Snover, Juliet Rhodes, and Patti Nordby

winter's end.

For more information about Winter Raptor Surveys please see the HMANA website at www.hmana.org. They also have a handy two-page guide to Hawks Seen in North America at www.hmana.org/wpcontent/uploads/2013/08/HMANA_Hawks_Guide_09.pdf

Native Plant Society Programs

by Don Schaechtel, Wenatchee

Alpine Plants of the Pasayten Wilderness February 11, 6:00 to 8:00 pm Social and Slideshow with Therese Ohlson, Retired Botanist, US Forest Service. At the 59er Diner – 200 Apple Annie Ave, Cashmere

The annual social of the Wenatchee Chapter of the Washington Native Plant Society features dinner at a fun restaurant, a seed ID quiz with prizes for participants, and a great slideshow by Therese Ohlson. This event is open to the public and a great chance to visit with WNPS members.

Lichens: More than Meets the Eye March 10, 7:00 to 8:30 pm with Richard Droker, photographer and Lichenologist. At the Wenatchee Museum and Cultural Center 127 South Mission Street Often overlooked, lichens are beautiful, fascinating, diverse and important components of the Earth's terrestrial ecosystems. Each lichen incorporates representatives of two and sometimes three of life's kingdoms. An illustrated overview of lichens including their biology and relationships with plants, wildlife and people will be presented.

Basecamp Winter Programs

by Kim Bondi, Mazama

The North Cascades Basecamp is hosting their Winter Community Soup and Presentation Series again in 2016. You can join them in Mazama at 5:30 pm for homemade soup and bread at the lodge, and 6 pm for a natural history presentation in the Ecology Center Classroom. For more information see www.northcascadesbasecamp.com or call 996-2334. Cost: \$7 per person. The Basecamp is also hosting Kids Nature and Art Workshops on Saturdays from 10 am-12 pm. Indoor and outdoor nature exploration and educational art projects for kids ages 5-12 and up. Preregister or potential walk-in. Cost: \$15/student.

February 4, Loons of Eastern Washington, by Jeff Heinlen, WDFW

February 6, Kids Nature and Art Workshop Super Species: Tracking and Adaptations

February 11, Wolves' Predation in Livestock Occupied Areas of Washington, research by Gabe Spence.

Northern Hawk-Owl Killed in Okanogan County

During the holiday season, birders flocked to Cassimer Bar near the mouth of the Okanogan River to observe a Northern Hawk-Owl that was reported on eBird and Tweeters. Northern Hawk-Owls are unusual in Washington and many birders long to add them to their life lists or year lists. Generally they are found in Canada but they have occasionally been known to breed in the North Cascades. In the winter they are sometimes seen in Okanogan and Douglas Counties. This migratory owl species hunts during the day and will stay in an area if the hunting is good making it easy to spot once someone has seen it and reported it.

Birders arrived from all across the state to see this lovely owl. The bird was easily observed from a county road perched in trees near a house on Colville Tribal land. Reportedly a person who lived there was unhappy with the attention this owl was bringing to his place and he warned birders to stay off of his property and he told them not to photograph the owl in the tree. Some birders said they thought that someone was recording their license plates as they parked on the public road and watched the owl. According to an article by Rich Landers in the Spokesman Review, the bird was observed at 12:30 pm on

by Teri J Pleper, Methow Valley

January 9 and at 2:30 pm that day it was hanging lifeless in the tree. Observers had eaten lunch by the Columbia River about half a mile away and said they heard a gunshot.

According to Rich Landers' article, birders contacted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service about the dead bird, since the Northern Hawk-Owl is protected under the federal Migratory Bird Act. The case has been turned over to Colville tribal authorities because the incident occurred on the Colville Indian Reservation and the property owner is a tribal member, officials said. The bird is being sent to a diagnostic lab to determine the cause of death, said Henry Hix, the tribe's Chief of Natural Resource Enforcement.

Did birders, indirectly, cause the death of this desirable bird? It is a sad situation that may cause people to think twice before reporting a rare bird sighting. How would you feel if someone saw something interesting in your yard and there was a constant stream of people with binoculars, scopes and telephoto lenses watching it from the road in front of your house? Certainly most people would not react by shooting the bird in question. And some property owners are eager to share a rare species with birders and other naturalists.

Homemade Bird Feeders

photo and article by Chris and Marilyn Strickwerda, Chelan

We are currently participating in the 2015-2016 Project FeederWatch for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. A large pinecone covered with yummy fat and seeds has been a big success for attracting many birds during our snowy weather. Chris prepared the mixture for the pinecone like this: Mix together drippings from one pound of bacon and two TBs peanut butter. Add wild bird seed to mixture and stir until thickened (like oatmeal). It is best to add the mixture to the pinecone and let it cool to set up and harden; it's now ready to hang on the tree. There is enough suet mixture for two pine-cones plus a little left for the feeder dish.





Trumpeter Swans all in a row on Patterson Lake in November photo by Kurt Snover, Winthrop

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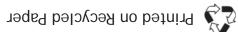
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Visit the NCW Audubon Society website for updates on these and other events www.ncwaudubon.org