



The Wild Phlox

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NCW Christmas Bird Count Reports

compiled by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley

The North Central Washington Christmas Bird Count season has come to an end. Joe Veverka reports from Leavenworth: Mark Johnston and Rich Scranton spotted a Virginia Rail up Eagle Creek. Ken Muir and I had an American Pipit at Rodeo Hole along the Wenatchee River. Both the rail and pipit are firsts for the Leavenworth CBC. The total number of American Dippers recorded this year was 28, up from 27 last year. We are famous for our dippers. We also counted 32 Bald Eagles making it the second highest count in Leavenworth CBC history. We had 33 in 2011. Our most abundant species was again the Dark-eyed Junco with 807 individuals (19% of our total birds). Last year we counted 1,401 juncos (21% of our total birds). We only had 36 Varied Thrush compared to the whopping record setting 301 we had last year. As a CBC we counted and identified 4,212 individuals of 59 species down from 6,464 individual birds of 60 species in 2018. We had 30 participants in 2019 up from 23 participants in 2018. We do have room for more people if you are interested in joining the 2020 CBC. Thanks to all who participated and made it a successful count.

From Twisp, Julie Hovis sent this report: The 32nd annual Twisp Christmas Bird Count was held on an overcast day with relatively mild temperatures and no wind, rain, or snow. A total of 73 species was observed, and although this was not a record, the count did produce some noteworthy results. All twelve routes were covered for the first time in recent years, and it was a record year for number of participants (56) and number of birds observed (5,615). In addition, 23 species were record-high counts and one species, Northern Shoveler, was observed for the first time. The most numerous species were California Quail (975 individuals), Wild Turkey (465), and Common Raven (314). Other species with notably high numbers were Black-capped Chickadee (310), Bald Eagle (112), and Northern Flicker (129). Somewhat surprisingly, no Sharp-shinned Hawks were observed for the first time since 1998. As this year's compiler, I would like to

thank everyone who participated in the count - your efforts are most appreciated! I also would like to thank Katie Bristol for allowing us to convene at the Cinnamon Twisp Bakery to start the day and Don Ashford at KTRT Radio for helping us spread the word about the count. If you would like a copy of this year's count summary report, please email Julie Hovis at jahovis711@gmail.com. The 33rd annual Twisp Christmas Bird Count will be on 3 January 2021.

Mike Schroeder reports from Bridgeport: We observed 86 species with an estimated count of 28,981 birds. This was more than 5,000 above our long-term average and more than 11,000 above the previous year's count. Notable increases included Red-winged Blackbird, Pied-billed Grebe, Greater Scaup, Hooded Merganser, Ruddy Duck, American Kestrel, Eurasian Collared Dove, Pygmy Nuthatch, and White-crowned Sparrow. Two birds that declined were Golden-crowned Kinglet and American Tree Sparrow. Forty-five species have been observed every year and 156 species have been observed at least once on the count day (not counting species only observed during the

count week). Thank you again for helping to make Bridgeport a great location to go bird watching. We hope to see you next year for the 25th anniversary!

From Chelan, Steve Easley has this to say: Our grateful thanks to all of you who have helped count and to those of you who have expressed an interest in the results.

The species count of 75 is just under the average of 77, but the individual count of 6042 is the lowest since 1996 and

compares poorly to the 31-year average of 9903. I think two main factors contributed to the low count: a windy morning, and very little snow cover which allowed the birds to disperse over the fields and hillsides. The good news is that we had our first Anna's Hummingbirds (4), and that the invasive Eurasian Collared-doves have finally dropped, to 77 versus last year's 232. Sparrows, finches (except Purple), and juncos are all significantly below the averages.



Northern Shoveler
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

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.



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

What was your favorite scene from this season's Christmas Bird Counts? For me it might have been seeing murmurations of Red-winged Blackbirds on the Bridgeport count. There were 1000-2000 birds by our estimate, and they kept making beautiful patterns like shorebirds do, flying in unison. It was a sight to see. My group also saw a big flock of blackbirds on the Twisp count in an unharvested corn field. It must have been my year of the blackbird. And why were corn fields left unharvested last year? I know of two in the Methow Valley. No doubt, the birds are loving it. Another highlight was helping a birder see her first Red Crossbills. We had stopped at my house to check out the feeder birds and the crossbills were so cooperative, first on a distant pine tree and then coming straight to the feeders near the house! It was an exciting moment.

During the count and up until recently, there were a lot of Red-tailed Hawks around. I'd often see three or even four on my morning dog walk. A little more than a week ago, they all disappeared from my hill. At the Twisp CBC, someone mentioned that they prey on Sharp-shinned Hawks and none of the little accipiters were found on the Twisp count. Since the red tails disappeared from my hill, I have seen a sharpie. My January monthly raptor route also showed a decrease in Red-tailed Hawks.

Have you seen the Raptor ID group on Facebook? It is for help in identifying raptors and that's all it's for. I joined thinking there would be many posts about confusing accipiters and was surprised that most of the posts are about Red-tailed Hawks! They show so many different plumages and I know even after years of looking at them, that they are confusing, especially to new birders. But how to tell the difference between a large Sharp-shinned Hawk and a small Cooper's Hawk? I am learning more as I follow the group and maybe someday it will come easier for me. This photo of the sharpie watching over our feeders is a good example. I felt like it was a sharpie but wasn't sure why. I posted it to the group and the reasons it's a sharpie include – even length of the tail feathers, shape of the head (rounded), body shape and skinny toes.



Sharp-shinned Hawk
photo by Teri J Pieper,
Methow Valley



Eurasian Wigeon
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

NCW Recent Bird Sightings

Chelan County: At Walla Walla Park there were Barrow's Goldeneye, Eurasian Wigeon, 17 Snow Geese, three Greater White-fronted Geese and Trumpeter Swans. A Ross's Goose was seen from the Horan Natural Area. Pine Grosbeaks were seen at the Leavenworth Hatchery. A Golden Eagle and a Northern Shrike were seen near Cashmere. A Northern Goshawk was seen outside of Leavenworth.

Douglas County: Sharp-tailed Grouse were seen near Bridgeport. American Tree Sparrows and Evening Grosbeaks were seen on the Bridgeport Bar. A Barred Owl was seen in Mansfield. American Tree Sparrows were seen on Heritage Road. A Peregrine Falcon was seen near Highway 2 and H Road. A Red-necked Grebe was seen from the loop trail near the sewage treatment plant. Snow Geese were also seen from the loop trail. Pygmy Nuthatches were seen in Central Ferry Canyon.



Northern Goshawk
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

Ferry County: Trumpeter Swans were seen on the Columbia just north of the Highway 395 bridge. A Rusty Blackbird was seen at the Kettle River Campground. A Northern Shrike was seen on the Kettle River near Foster's Bend.

Okanogan County: Trumpeter Swans were seen on Big Twin Lake near Winthrop. Northern Saw-whet Owls and a Barred Owl have been seen in Bridgeport State Park. A Pine Grosbeak, 300 Snow Buntings, Northern Pygmy Owls, Clark's Nutcrackers, Rough-legged Hawks and Golden Eagles were seen in the Okanogan Highlands. On Cameron Lake Road, there were American Tree Sparrows, a Prairie Falcon, Northern Shrike and Snow Buntings. A Northern Goshawk was seen at Washburn Island. A Barred Owl has been seen several times between Twisp and Winthrop. A Northern Goshawk was seen near Winthrop.

At home in the Landscapes of North Central Washington

by Mark Oswood, Wenatchee

NCWAS members are rooted in our landscapes and communities. They show up, when help is needed. Sometimes they get up early, get dirty, get cold, for a good cause. Often, they are creating some beauty, with others or alone. Nearly all are learners, all the time. And many are donors, to NCWAS and to other organizations at home and across our only planet. Please know that you are much appreciated and wholly necessary.

“To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul.”

Simone Weil



Our once-a-year donation request fedges in late summer. Below, we list folks making donations through early January 2020. We'll list donors after early January in the September 2020 Phlox. Larry and Penny Tobiska are “first responders” for donations received. The list of donors is derived from their data.

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* = \$100 (Great Blue Heron)
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HEADS UP!!

2nd Annual Four-county Count Date Set

by Art Campbell, Winthrop

Last year, NCWAS held the inaugural Four-county Count covering Chelan, Douglas, Ferry, and Okanogan counties. Our first four-county count held on June 1, 2019 was a tremendous success, with 63 participants collectively counting a total of 11,334 birds in 180 species. All our participants had a great time on the count, and we collected lots of data that we can build on to learn more about birds in North Central Washington. So, we've decided to make this count an annual event held every June.

Regardless of whether you participated in last year's four-county count, we invite your involvement this year whatever your birdwatching experience. So, if you would like to participate this year:

Mark Your Calendars for Saturday, June 6, 2020.

In the coming months, we'll be refining our counting and data compilation processes. This April/May, look for more information here in the Phlox and also on the NCWAS website (www.ncwaudubon.org/) about the June 6 count and how to sign up to participate.

Survey for Short-eared Owls

by Joe Buchanan, WDFW

We are again conducting a survey to assess the abundance, distribution and habitat use of Short-eared Owls in eight western states. In Washington, we have fifty established survey locations, all in the Columbia Basin, and we need your help! The survey is road-based and consists of routes with 9 – 11 stations visited once during each of two survey windows: 1 – 21 March and 22 March – 15 April. Each survey has a specific start time (according to date and specific location) and takes no more than 90 minutes to complete (evening/dusk). Survey stations are situated at 0.5-mile intervals and are in landscapes that contain cover types used by Short-eared Owls: grasslands, marsh, riparian, and agricultural areas. Volunteer participants will conduct surveys by stopping at stations to watch for Short-eared Owls from the roadside, followed by a short assessment

of vegetation cover types at the station. Volunteers will need to provide their own transportation, and be able to identify Short-eared Owls, follow the survey protocol, register for a survey location online, and enter survey data online. Please visit our website for training videos, project reports and other materials that provide background about Short-eared Owls and the project (<http://avianknowledgenorthwest.net/citizen-science/short-eared-owls>). Until then, if you are interested in the project, and have not contacted me previously about your interest in the 2020 effort, please contact me by email and I will notify you when the online registration site has been activated. I am available to answer questions about the project. Joseph. Buchanan@dfw.wa.gov

Survey for Nightjars

by Laura Duval, Program Coordinator
The US Nightjar Survey Network

The U.S. Nightjar Survey Network (NSN) is a community-based science-driven research group that over the past eleven years has worked to collect long-term occupancy data for this unusual group of birds. North American nightjars, or goatsuckers, include nine nocturnal (active at night) and crepuscular (more active at dawn and dusk) species. Nightjars migrate from their wintering grounds as far as South America arriving in late March to breed and forage in North American deciduous and pine forests, often bordered by shrubby or agriculture fields and bodies of water. Research suggests that nightjar numbers are rapidly declining due to habitat degradation, human disturbance, and climate change. Little is known about the specifics of their ecology, but through the NSN we can tap into a broader view

of their population trends over time with your help. Their nocturnal tendencies have made them challenging to study and simply hard to detect by researchers and the millions of citizen scientists that participate in volunteer data portals such as eBird. The Center for Conservation Biology at the College of William and Mary in Virginia established the network in 2007 in an attempt to fill gaps in knowledge for these species. Since its initiation, over 3,000 surveys have been conducted nationwide.

We are hopeful that we can tap into a core group of local participants that would be willing to donate a few hours of their time once a year to this cause. A passion for scientific contribution, a willingness to work on a gorgeous moonlit night, and a vehicle is all it takes to become a surveyor. You can sign up for a route

during the 2020 season by visiting www.nightjars.org/. To create a user account once on the webpage click "Become a participant" at the right top corner of the home page. You will be prompted to create a user name and password. From there you can browse the website to view historical nightjar data for each state, study up on your nightjar calls, view dates for past and upcoming survey periods, and choose or create a survey under the "PARTICIPATE" button. If there is not a route available near you, or if you would be interested in establishing a route in an area of interest you can do so by following the directions under "Adding a new route" in the survey instructions. Feel free to contact us anytime with your questions concerning signing up, creating routes, or entering data at nightjars@nightjars.org.

Birdwatching for Beginners

Are you curious about becoming a birder, America's fastest growing avocation? Join NCW Audubon Society's Joe Veverka and Wenatchee Naturalist Susan Ballinger as they introduce beginners to the fundamentals of birdwatching in a collaborative setting. This hands-on course will use a variety of field guides, web-based tools, bird models and several types of optics to better understand birdwatching. Loaner binoculars will be

by Susan Ballinger, Wenatchee

available, courtesy of the Audubon Society. We will practice ID skills on the half-day Saturday field trip to local birding hotspots. The instructors' goal is to launch a student on a path of life-long learning and appreciation of birds. Cost is \$69. Dates: March 23, 25, 28, 2020 on Monday and Wednesday, 6-8 pm & Saturday 9 am-noon. Register with Wenatchee Valley College Continuing Education at or call the office (682-6900).

2020 NCW Audubon Photo Contest

The North Central Washington Audubon Society is pleased to offer our third annual bird photography contest. The contest will showcase the wide variety of birds in our four-county area and allow photographers to present their work to a broad audience.

Anyone can enter the contest for free. You may enter up to three photos. Photos must be taken in Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan or Ferry counties and prominently show at least one bird that can be found in those counties. County bird lists can be found here: www.wabirder.com/county_map.html. The NCW Audubon Society adheres to the Audubon Society's code of ethical bird photography ([www.audubon.org/get-outside/audubons-guide-](http://www.audubon.org/get-outside/audubons-guide-ethical-bird-photography)

by Bruce McCammon, Wenatchee

[ethical-bird-photography](http://www.audubon.org/get-outside/audubons-guide-ethical-bird-photography)). The contest opens for submission of images on January 6. Photo entries will not be accepted after April 20, 2020. Winning photos will be announced on the NCW Audubon website www.ncwaudubon.org by April 30. Email high quality JPG photo files to ncwaudubon@gmail.com. Your JPG files should be a minimum of 1200x1500 pixels. Ideal size of your submitted images is 4000x5000 pixels at 300 ppi. Image files that are 5-20 mb in size can be emailed as attachments and are suitable for making high quality prints. For the complete rules and how to enter please see our website, www.ncwaudubon.org. Please send any questions about the contest to ncwaudubon@gmail.com.

Conservation Issues Update

Our conservation program is actively engaged on a number of issues that directly affect birds in our region. Because birds rely on a wide array of healthy ecosystems and habitats that provide the essentials of what they need to survive, our work takes an equally broad view. In some cases this means addressing very local issues, such as our work to promote a healthy set of lakes and ponds at the city of Rock Island once gravel mining operations there have ceased. Most of our efforts, however, involve issues that impact birds on much wider scales. A good example here is our work to combat climate disruption, which has been identified by National Audubon Society as the issue posing the greatest long-term threat to birds.

Taken as a whole, we're engaged on a wide range of issues that directly impact the welfare of our region's birds. Below is an overview of just two of the many we're working on.

NCWAS's Northern Spotted Owl Petition to the Washington Forest Practices Board: In August 2019, NCWAS submitted a petition to the Washington Forest Practices Board (FPB) questioning the rules applying to Spotted Owl Special Emphasis Areas (SOSEAs – essentially Spotted Owl circles) east of the Cascades. SOSEAs represent a core strategy of state law aimed at stemming the decline of the Northern Spotted Owl in Washington. Our petition raised significant concerns with how the law is currently being implemented, and requested a moratorium be placed on granting logging permits within SOSEA's east of the Cascades pending reconsideration of the rules currently governing them. At its meeting last November, the Forest Practices Board passed a resolution declining our

by Mark Johnston, NCWAS Conservation Chair, Leavenworth

request for a moratorium, saying they don't have the authority to impose one, but also stating that the concerns our petition raised are valid. The resolution also instructs the FPB to conduct additional research to develop recommendations for potential remedies, and then discuss again at their next meeting in February.

Climate Disruption: In October 2019, National Audubon issued its "Survival by Degrees" report which covers in detail the threats climate disruption poses to North American birds. It paints a daunting picture, indicating that more than half the species now inhabiting our continent face possible extinction if we and the rest of the world fail to avert this impending crisis.

This year, Audubon Washington (AW) launched its "Natural Climate Solutions for Washington State" project. Under it, AW, NCWAS and other chapters are promoting policies that will protect and enhance Washington's farms, fields, forests, and coastal habitats in ways that will help sequester carbon emissions. The centerpiece of this effort is our support for SB 5947 (The Sustainable Farm and Fields Grant Program) which would promote investments in carbon sequestration while also supporting habitat for birds and other wildlife. In addition to our push for Natural Climate Solutions, we're also backing HB 1110 (The Clean Fuels Standard), SB 5811 (The Zero Emissions Vehicle Program), and the responsible siting of wind and solar projects.

For more detailed information on the issues above, and others we're addressing, please visit the Conservation page on our website at <http://www.ncwaudubon.org/conservation.html>.

Big Bird Day - 2019

by Bruce McCammon, Wenatchee

Most birders start a bird year list on January 1. My friend, Gerry, starts his year list on his birthday, December 25, one of the shortest days of the year. Several years ago, Gerry's wife, Jenn, asked what he would like to do on his birthday. Since they are both extremely accomplished birders – dedicated to the task with weekly birding – Gerry quickly replied, “I'd like to see 100 species in one day”. To non-birders, that may not see like a big deal. Anyone who goes to bird in Oregon or Washington knows that a count that high in one day will be challenging. The first year they found 99 species. I got a text from Gerry about 7:00 PM, long after sunset, that said they were hunting owls by flashlight. It didn't happen and the final count was one short. So close. Subsequent years yielded fewer species and the challenge grew stronger. They invited Dianne and me to go along this year thinking that four more eyes may help. As novice birders, our goal was to stay out of the way and help as we could.

Starting at their house in Portland, we were up at 05:00 and out the door at 05:30. Scopes, binoculars, food, and water were on board. First stop, Sauvie Island, west of Portland on Highway 30. We headed to a smaller side road and began scanning roadside trees with flashlights for owls. A Western Screech Owl (#1, 06:24) called out two times and became the first species on the list and one of three that we identified only by sound. Then came two clear views of Barn Owls flying across the road in front of the car. The last bird we logged on Sauvie Island was a Rough-legged Hawk (#54, 09:01). All the low-hanging fruit had been picked. We were amazed that we had not seen a Great Horned Owl. It would get more challenging to find new species as the day matured.

We headed back to Jenn and Gerry's house with stops at Smith-Bybee Lakes to gather another six species including Brown Creeper (#62, 09:28). A quick stop at Force Lake added two more species. The White-throated Sparrow (#65, 09:49) was an unexpected and pleasant sighting. Driving



Spotted Owl
photo by Richard Crossley

along the industrial area on Highway 30 we picked up Rock Pigeon and Glaucous-winged Gull. It really pays to have experienced birders on your team when it comes to gull identification. Gerry and Jenn recite field marks as they call the ID and leave little doubt that the call is correct.

A twenty-minute breakfast break at their house gave us another five species, the last of which was Fox Sparrow (#71, 10:11). Off we went. We gathered several species

as we drove away from Portland. Next stop, Fernhill Wetlands in Forest Grove. We took the time to walk the perimeter trail and added ten more species. Two of these, Virginia Rail (#75) and Sora (#83), were heard but not seen. We departed Fernhill after logging Long-billed Dowitcher (#84, 11:59). With sunset at 4:32PM, time was getting short. A quick stop at a park in Forest Grove netted us Acorn Woodpecker (#85, 12:35). We headed for the Oregon coast hoping to find Mountain Quail in Timber. No such luck but we did add Red-breasted Nuthatch (#86, 13:12).

We arrived on the coast and opted to go south to Cannon Beach with slight hopes for Puffin. That didn't work out but we added six more species and headed north toward Seaside after recording Common Goldeneye (#92, 14:29). We spotted a Western Bluebird (#95, 14:58) along the way to Astoria. We needed five species and had about 1.5 hours to find them. Surprisingly, House Sparrow became #97 at 15:48. At 4:13PM we recorded Brandt's Cormorant, #99. The chase was now pretty serious. We headed down Young's River Road hoping for sparrows.

Gerry is an accomplished “bird by ear” person and we were driving slowly along a slough, listening and watching for anything moving. Gerry heard a Pacific Wren and immediately pulled over and jumped out to find the bird. As he and the ladies were scanning the shrubs at the end of a driveway, I walked across the road toward the water. I saw a black and white bird fly off a branch, fly-catch, and return to the branch. I yelled for Gerry and Jenn. Bird #100, Black Phoebe at 16:48. We did a happy dance, high fived and undoubtedly looked pretty silly to people driving by. Then Gerry heard the Wren again and stooped down to look at a lower branch – Pacific Wren (#101, 16:48).

Overall, we spent nearly twelve hours and 220 miles to see 101 species of birds in Oregon on a single, short, winter day. Without their past experience and reconnaissance before the Big Bird Day, the accomplishment would likely have fallen short. If the birds had not cooperated it would still have been an exceptional day with dear friends in wonderful locations and with perfect weather. We felt accomplished and a bit drained. We sat down for dinner and began the official list. Jenn and Gerry always compile a list as they go through each page of the Sibley guide to recall each bird seen that day. That process reinforces the bird and lets them look at similar species. I kept a running log of the birds on an iPhone app during the day and their recall was spot on. We all felt satisfied and rewarded. The dream had been realized.

We casually birded our way back to Portland the next day and saw 72 species. I picked up Life Bird #525, White-tailed Kite near Tillamook. It had been a very good couple of days with dear friends and a new-found appreciation for achieving a goal. We were fortunate to be along for the ride.

February Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Calendar

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January 6 - April 20	Audubon Bird Photo Contest	Submit your photos! See page 6 for details.
February 7	Native Stink Bugs and Their Plant Hosts	Okanogan Highlands Alliance in Tonasket. See www.okanoganhighlands.org for details
February 8	Go Birding with Mark Johnston	Winter field trip in Douglas County. See page 2.
March 23 - 28	Birdwatching for Beginners	WVC class with Susan Ballinger and Joe Veverka. See page 6
June 6	Four-County Bird Count	Mark your calendars! See page 5.

You can find the Wild Phlox online at our website - www.ncwaudubon.org
The beautiful photos are even nicer in color.



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

