



Volume 48 #5 February 2015

From The Great Backyard Bird Count
Website

Count Birds in February!

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online citizen science 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. We invite you 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 13-16. You can count from any location, anywhere in the world!

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

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 the most successful count ever by participating

this year! Then keep counting throughout the year with eBird, which uses the same system as the Great Backyard Bird Count to collect, store, and display data any time, all the time.



Three birders recording bird sightings in the Okanogan Highlands
photo by Julie Ashmore

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 Great Backyard Bird Count, along with observations from other citizen-

science 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 far-reaching 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. For more information or to register, please see [www. http://gbbc.birdcount.org/](http://gbbc.birdcount.org/)

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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North Central Washington Audubon Society is on Facebook too

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

Save the Date!

The 13th annual

**Leavenworth Spring
 Bird Fest**

May 14-17

Come bird with us the third
 weekend in May,
 and discover the natural beauty of
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**LEAVENWORTH
 Spring
 BIRDFEST**

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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.

Woodpeckers are providing most of our bird entertainment this winter. At least six Northern Flickers are coming to our feeders – probably more but that’s the highest number we’ve counted at one time. Some of them are intergrades of the Red-shafted (mostly western US) and Yellow-shafted (mostly eastern US) variations. What’s an intergrade as opposed to a hybrid? An intergrade occurs when two sub-species mate while a hybrid occurs when two different species mate. Anyway, the flicker intergrades coming to our feeders have varying amounts of red on the back of their neck. None have had yellow shafts, so far. Apparently Northern Flicker intergrades are fairly common. One more note about the flickers – most all of them are males. I wonder where the females are spending the winter?

We are also seeing many Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers. At least one Downy is using a nest box for a night roost. I’ve seen her come and go several times. That nest box is easily observed from our dining room table and is now providing year-round entertainment. Both of these species are spending time in our burned pine trees gathering the insects that moved in immediately after the fire. The majority of the work to de-bark the dead trees goes to the Pileated Woodpeckers. They have removed large chunks of bark leaving the wood bare. They have not been to some of the bigger trees so we have a very faint hope that they are still alive despite the red



Pileated Woodpecker on a dead ponderosa pine
photo by Teri J Pieper



Dead pine trees de-barked by Pileated Woodpeckers
photo by Teri J Pieper

needles and warnings from every ‘expert’ telling us that all of our trees are dead.

In late November we had a tree specialist come to top some of our dead trees. We did this because over time, many of the trees will blow or fall over due to the weight of their branches. We want to preserve some as wildlife trees - providing homes for birds and small mammals including bats. In the spring we will use the branches to make piles around some of the shrubs that are re-sprouting to try to prevent the hungry deer from eating them. To see photos and read more about this project see <https://myeverydayphotos.wordpress.com/2014/11/25/making-wildlife-trees/>

NCW Recent Bird Sightings

compiled from the ncwabird email list
by Teri J Pieper

A Red-breasted Sapsucker has been seen at the Cub Creek trailhead near Winthrop this winter. One was seen there last winter also. There are Snowy Owls to be seen in Douglas County between Bridgeport and Mansfield. A Harris Sparrow and a Golden-crowned Sparrow were reported near Twisp but they did not stick around for the Christmas Bird count. Numerous people traveled to Cashmere to see a very unusual Acorn Woodpecker, a bird commonly observed in California. A Black-backed Woodpecker was spotted in a burned area between Twisp and Winthrop. The Methow Valley has had numerous Northern Pygmy-owl observations this winter. The Horan Natural Area in Wenatchee is hosting Bewick’s Wrens. A Wilson’s Snipe was seen on the Twisp CBC in Finley Canyon and another was seen on New Year’s Day from the ski trail along the river near Mazama. A number of woodpeckers including White-headed, Downy and Hairy were reported in a burned area near Lake Chelan State Park on Christmas Day. The Wenatchee CBC reported five species of owls – Great-horned, Northern Pygmy, Short-eared, Western Screech and Barred! At Bridgeport Bar there have been up to a dozen Western Bluebirds and both kinds of waxwings. In Ferry County they are seeing lots of Pine Grosbeaks. Near Quincy, a landowner is reporting more Spotted Towhees, White-crowned Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos than usual. She suggests maybe it is due to the extensive habitat loss from last summer’s fires.

I Love my Bird Feeders!

by Karen Mulcahy, Winthrop

I love my bird feeders. They are what started my love of birding, a love that has grown more passionate every year. I guess you could call it the perfect relationship. Since moving to the Methow from the Portland area two and a half years ago, we have delighted in the different species we see east of the Cascades. But one of the nicest surprises was the day we saw a Hairy Woodpecker fly away from the suet and in his place, a lovely male White-headed Woodpecker!

They look almost ghostly at first with that white head - there is no mistaking them for any other woodpecker species. Unfortunately, they are very elusive, as I learned after an excellent first Tuesday information night by the Methow Conservancy last year. And they are becoming rarer every year. As I looked for information about the White-headed for this article, I was surprised to learn they



White-headed Woodpecker
photo by Karen Mulcahy

are listed as endangered in Southern British Columbia, a species of special concern in Idaho, a critical species in Oregon, and a sensitive species in the intermountain and northern regions of the west. Phew - my little guy is WAY more special than I thought. Audubon states the numbers are stable, however.

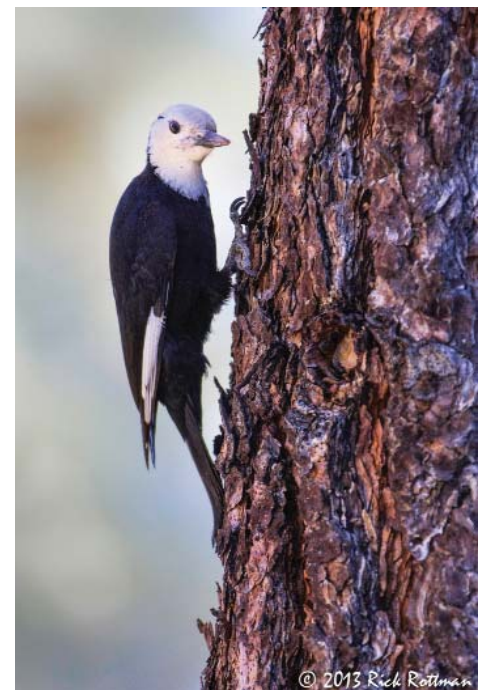
They are woodpeckers, and they do what woodpeckers do. They make nest holes, preferably in dead trees or snags or stumps - even fallen logs. They like to excavate a new nest cavity each breeding season. Biologists think one of the reasons for their poor performance as a species is because nests are vulnerable, typically eight to ten feet above the ground or lower, making them an easy target for predators to plunder. They are very intolerant of humans near these cavities. White-headed Woodpeckers reproduce once a year, typically four or five eggs in a clutch, nesting in

April or May, producing in May or June. A great part of their diet is pine seeds (60%) but they are flycatchers sometimes, and enjoy insects and spiders. Their usual habitat is montane coniferous (ponderosa pine, lodgepole, white fir forest) and they like some open canopy, 50-70%, and sparse understory. Our Twin Lakes neighborhood fits that bill nicely.

These guys are smart; they take pine seeds and wedge them into a bark crevice and hammer them to break them apart. Both the males and females incubate their eggs.

The males take the night shift. I think this speaks to female intelligence! It does make sense for the defender to rest on the eggs in times of less danger, but really, a good night's sleep is priceless! I would hope they nest nearby but there probably is too much disturbance in this neighborhood.

I am always on the lookout for my elusive White-headed Woodpecker. He is definitely not a frequent flyer. Where the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers are daily visitors, he comes every few days or maybe once a week. His last visit was on December 12th before the Twisp CBC. With only 72,000 worldwide, I am thrilled every time he makes an appearance...and I got a picture this time.



White-headed Woodpecker
photo by Rick Rottman

Olympic BirdFest 2015 April 10-12 Sequim

by Bob Hutchinson
Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society

The festival with the most spectacular setting! Visit the rain shadow of the Olympic Peninsula to discover the birds of the coastal Pacific Northwest—Marbled Murrelets, Rhinoceros Auklets, Harlequin Ducks, American Dippers, Black Oystercatchers, Long-tailed Ducks, and more. Guided field trips, a boat cruise in the Strait of Juan de Fuca, silent auction, and a gala banquet. The featured speaker is Lynsy Smithson Stanley on the topic of “Climate change as a ‘Bird Issue’.” Join

the Birdfest Pre-trip on April 8-9, for two days of exploring northwest coastal Washington, a region rarely seen by birders. Immediately following BirdFest, join us for a three-day, two-night birding cruise of the San Juan Islands, April 12-14. Cruise registration: separately at www.pugetsoundexpress.com/audubon. For more information see www.olympicbirdfest.org or info@olympicbirdfest.org or call the Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society at (360)681-4076

Change is Constant

by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley

Your NCW Audubon Society board of directors has been fortunate to recruit some new members in the last year. However, we are sad to announce that our president and conservation chair have both recently stepped down due to their move to western Washington. The board will meet by conference call later this month to address this and other agenda items. Many thanks to Jeff and Chris Parsons for their years of volunteerism on behalf of the North Central Washington Audubon Society. Here are their retirement notes.

Dear fellow NCW Audubon members. I have thoroughly enjoyed my years of working with all of you on the North Central Washington Audubon Society board of directors. Unfortunately, the duties of my new job on the west side of the mountains have made it impossible for me to be able to continue to adequately perform my duties as President and as a member of the board. I can't even keep up with my own personal email anymore! Thank you for entrusting me with the responsibilities of the office of President for the past couple of years. I have been honored to have had the opportunity to serve with all of you and to be associated with the extraordinary quality of the work that all of you do in furtherance of the Audubon mission. I wish all of you the best in your work on behalf of birds and our environment. Jeff.

I have enjoyed serving as your Conservation Chair over the past few years, as well as the Eastern WA Chapter representative on the Audubon WA board of Directors. In addition, last year I was asked to serve as the Chair of WSACC (WA State Audubon Conservation Committee)! Whew ! As you may have heard, Jeff and I recently moved to Olympia for work. We still have our place in Leavenworth where we hope to return in a few years. I have decided to step back from my NCWAS conservation position and chapter representation because of my move to the west side. I hope to return to my involvement with our chapter once I return to Leavenworth full time, but that will likely be a few years away. Meanwhile, the sage brush song bird survey project that was started should still be moving forward under the support of Christi Norman of Audubon Washington and Dan Stephens and our engaged board. We were successful in receiving a Chapter Collaborative grant for over \$800 to help cover costs and Christi is seeking grant funds for the GPS units. Thanks for all your volunteer efforts and for this opportunity to serve as our chapter's Conservation Chair! Best wishes, Chris.

Another New Board Member!

by Debbie Sutherland, Cashmere

Editor's note - Board members Jenny Graevell and Virginia Palumbo introduced us to Debbie and we are happy to welcome her to our board!

So, my story related to birding and conservation is relatively short. I bought my first pair of binoculars for my birthday two years ago. I fell in love with the excitement and challenge of enjoying the different shapes and colors and sizes of birds. The Lord is amazing in his creativity. As far as conservation goes, I haven't been involved in any group organizations except financially. I believe we are to be good stewards of everything we've been given. Education on this front is crucial. I did graduate from WSU in biology, majoring in botany. I worked a few years with the US Forest Service and for the last twenty years have been home with my son who has Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. He is now 24 years old and a very good sport about going birding with my husband, Steve, and me. He has a keen eye and a very good attitude. In the last two years, across the country, my family and I have visited a lot of Audubon Nature Centers from Portland, Oregon to Maine; ranging from staffed centers with gear to a little house with maps out front and info on a board. We found them educational and a good spot to start birding the area. Thank you for your confidence in me, Jenny and Virginia. I hope to meet you all soon.



Long-eared Owl
A new yard bird for NCWAS board member and science office, Don Mclvor
photo by Don Mclvor

2015 Legislative Session Issues to Follow

by Jennifer Syrowitz, Audubon Washington

Washington State Audubon Conservation Committee (WSACC) advocacy efforts in Washington during the 2015 session will focus on marine birds and forage fish as well as climate change, including carbon emissions reduction, clean energy options and fossil fuel transport and export. We are working with several collaborative organizations including the Environmental Priorities Coalition (EPC), the West Coast Climate Campaign (WCC), Sound Action, and others to address legislation regarding oil transport and climate/carbon reduction, carbon pricing, clean energy, clean fuel standards, and funding for forage fish research.

Audubon Washington and Black Hills Audubon Society are hosting an Audubon Advocacy Day on Wednesday, February 18. More information and logistical updates are available at <http://wa.audubon.org/legislative-session-2015>.

Weekly legislative updates will be sent from the Audubon state office to the WaGeneral and WSACC listservs. To sign up, visit <http://wa.audubon.org/communication-tools>. New in 2015, Audubon Washington will send out participatory action alerts around our most pressing issues.

The 2015 legislative session begins on Monday, January 12 and is scheduled to end Monday, April 27.

Okanogan Highlands Alliance Presents: The World Needs More Birders

by Julie Ashmore
Okanogan Highlands

Renowned biologist, birder, and author Dick Cannings will bring his vast knowledge of birds to Highland Wonders on Friday, February 6. In his inspiring presentation, “The World Needs More Birders,” Cannings will demonstrate how going out to enjoy and watch birds can also generate valuable information about the abundance and distribution of bird species in our region. Drawing on a long career as a professional biologist, Cannings will convey anecdotes, stories, and experiences that underscore the need for citizen science programs. Through coordinated efforts, the public can be actively involved in turning bird watching into a collective database of bird breeding, bird behavior, and migration. Community members will be encouraged with the knowledge that anyone can become a birder, and contribute to a better understanding of the future for bird populations in a changing world.

Cannings will provide examples of chance sightings that have sparked comprehensive mapping projects, which now contribute critical knowledge of unique bird species. This Highland Wonders event will also illustrate how the passion of amateur naturalists can catalyze a chain reaction that begins with data collection, which supports the need for studies, which in turn produces the studies needed for habitat protection to be legislated. Amateur birders can provide the legwork, people-power, and on-the-ground observation needed for professional biologists to carry out scientific studies. These studies can only be funded when sufficient data have been collected to indicate that a problem or issue needs to be addressed. While there aren't enough biologists to collect all of the needed data, local birders can help fill in the gaps, which then helps produce the studies needed for critical habitat to be protected. Cannings will also share puzzling changes in specific bird

populations, highlighting mysteries that citizen science might help unravel in the future.

“By developing programs that allow birders to gather scientific data while they are having fun watching birds, we can use the expertise and enthusiasm of the birding community to create large, continental-scale databases that will shape conservation biology in the decades to come,” Cannings says. “We can now combine field observations with cutting-edge web technology to get very detailed information on the numbers, distribution and movements of birds—information that is critical to modern land management decisions. And anyone can get involved!”

Born and raised in the Okanogan Valley of southern British Columbia, Dick Cannings grew up in a family of avid birders. Still residing in the Okanogan, Cannings works as a consulting biologist, teaches field ecology overseas, writes about the natural world, and coordinates many programs for Bird Studies Canada – including Canadian Christmas Bird Counts, the Great Backyard Bird Count, the eBird program, the BC Breeding Bird Atlas and the British Columbia Owl Survey.

The event takes place at the Community Cultural Center (CCC) of Tonasket, beginning at 6:30 pm, with a dinner benefiting the CCC at 5:15 pm. The dinner will be \$7.50 for CCC members and \$8.50 for non-members (no charge for the presentation).

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. Details are provided on OHA's website: www.okanoganhighlands.org/education/hw.

Cassin's Auklet North Pacific Winter Wreck

by Julia Parrish, COASST
Coastal Observation and Seabird Survey Team

Cassin's Auklet, *Ptychoramphus aleuticus*, is a small (~200g, or 7oz) krill and larval fish-eating seabird that breeds along the West Coast of North America, from Baja to Alaska. Easy to recognize, Cassin's have blue feet, dark back and wings, pale belly, and a pale spot on the lower bill right at the chin.

From October 2014 through the present (early January 2015), Cassin's Auklets have been washing ashore from Haida Gwaii south to Central California in unprecedented numbers. Estimates are very preliminary, and suggest that tens of thousands of these birds are washing ashore, at rates 10-100 times "normal." To date, the majority of these birds are young-of-the-year, hatched in 2014.

High breeding success put more than usual numbers of young-of-the-year on the water. Canadian birds – fledglings and adults – migrate south to WA, OR and CA. The onset of winter storms coincided with the deaths of both young and adult birds (a normal occurrence). The higher number of young birds may be increasing the mortality signal, as young have a naturally higher mortality rate.

Cassin's Auklet Facts
Population Size: ~3.5 Million
Population Center: British Columbia, the Scott Island group, off the NW tip of Vancouver Island supports ~80% of the world's breeding population.
Longevity: 6-10 years, max 23
Clutch Size: 1 egg annually except in the southern end of the range, where double clutching (essentially two back-to-back breeding seasons) have become common
Range: Tracking studies have shown that adult birds from Triangle Island and Haida Gwaii, BC travel south at least as far as CA.

There is currently no sign of disease, poison, or other contagion. Environmental conditions, including a shifting in prey availability, and/or location, are distinct possibilities exacerbating the wreck event.

Post mortem exams conducted on freshly dead specimens shipped to the USGS National Wildlife Health Center from Sonoma and Monterey Counties (CA) and Coos County (OR) in November and December indicated emaciation and starvation as the proximate cause of death. No viral or bacterial infections were detected in specimens submitted. The majority of the carcasses were young-of-the-year. Additional carcasses from Washington and British Columbia

are being examined, with results pending.

COASST is a citizen science project of the University of Washington in partnership with state, tribal and federal agencies, environmental organizations, and community groups. COASST believes citizens of coastal communities are essential scientific partners in monitoring marine ecosystem health. See their website for more information: <http://depts.washington.edu/coasst/>

California Condors and Lead in California and Utah

from The Birding Community E-Bulletin
Archives at <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin/>

The California Condor recovery effort in Utah and Arizona has been a cooperative venture among federal, state, and private partners. The partners include The Peregrine Fund, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service, and the U.S. Forest Service.

Recently, these partners have touted some good news. Apparently, the number of California Condors treated for lead exposure from lead-bullet ingestion in Utah and Arizona recently dropped to its lowest level since 2005. Between September of last year, and the start of September of this year, a total of 13 condors were treated for lead poisoning. During the same period the previous year, there were 28 birds treated. The average over five years had been 26 condors per year.

The problem, of course, is that condors can be at risk of death if they ingest carrion that contains lead fragments.

To help the California Condor, the state wildlife agencies in both states have asked hunters in southern Utah and northern Arizona to use non-lead ammunition. In an effort to offset the cost and encourage hunter participation, both agencies have run voluntary programs to provide hunters with a free box of non-lead bullets. The voluntary response from hunters has been significant.

Lynda Lambert, a spokeswoman for the Arizona Game and Fish Department, said that she's cautiously optimistic. She added, "We have between 80 and 90 percent of hunters participating in any given year."

editor's note - This is a great example of education at work. Here in Washington we have the problem with lead shot and fishing tackle being a major threat to loons, swans, raptors and other birds. Hopefully continuing education directed at anglers and hunters can solve that problem before it's too late.

February Wild Phlox

North Central Washington Audubon Society

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

February 6	The World Needs More Birders	Highland Wonders presentation. See page 6 for more information.
February 8	Waterville Plateau Field Trip	Observe the Wintering birds with Dr Dan Stephens. Email dstephens@wc.edu for more information.
February 13-16	Great Backyard Bird Count	See page 1 for more information.
March 21	Shrub-steppe Bird ID Training	Get ready for Spring. See the December Wild Phlox for more information.
April 10-12	Olympic BirdFest	Another fun birding festival. See page 4 for more information.
May 14-17	Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest	Save the date! Watch for information in upcoming Wild Phlox or see www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com/



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