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The Legend of Pale Male (a film) and *Red-tails in Love* (a book): What Two Hawks in NYC Tell Us about Ourselves

by Mark Oswood, Wenatchee
photos provided by www.palemale.com

North Central Washington Audubon Society is an annual sponsor of a film in the Environmental Film Series, at the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center. Our film this year is *The Legend of Pale Male*, on March 18, at 7:00 p.m.

Pale Male is a Red-tailed Hawk, exceptionally light-colored. More exceptionally, he takes up residence on a high-end apartment building adjacent to Central Park in New York City. Pale Male is soon joined by a female and the two become a celebrity couple, watched non-stop by a corps of birders and by streams of passers-by. A young Belgian film-maker finds his purpose in chronicling the family life of the pair and watching their human watchers.

Seeing magnificent birds filmed with

very big lenses is a good enough reason to attend this film, a chance to watch birds with optics you can't afford. But the joy of this film is the adoption of two wild hawks into the urban family of New Yorkers. Life, for hawks and humans, seems built of stories: awkward first times, setbacks and unexpected help, the necessity of persistence.

Around north central Washington, Red-tailed Hawks are not uncommon; I see Red-tails in the sky over my house almost every day, spring through fall. But seeing Red-tails as the New Yorkers did, as something unexpected, almost an undeserved gift, has made me

re-value our common birds. It might be good to occasionally take long looks at Mallards and crows and flickers.

In the February *Wild Phlox*, I mentioned a book that is the natural pairing to this film: *Red-tails in Love*: a wildlife drama in Central Park, by Marie Winn.

Central Park is an oasis of habitats in the midst of the Big City. Winn describes the annual phenology of



Central Park — trees flowering, birds breeding, butterflies emerging — as worked out by generations of amateur naturalists. Central Park concentrates good birders just as it does birds, so that rare birds don't go unnoticed (the Patagonia Picnic Table Effect, wherein the sighting of a rare bird attracts expert birders, who then notice more rare birds). I've been wondering about places in our north central Washington territory that might be our Central Parks, places we bird communally and come to know intimately.



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."

Birding Buddies TWO Field Trips

by Jenny Graevell, East Wenatchee

On March 8 Meredith Spencer will lead a trip to Bridgeport Bar (Shrable Corner). This is where we went during the Hawk Festival. Meet at 9:00 am for about three hours. No restrooms are available, so stop in Brewster on your way.

Virginia Palumbo will be leading a walk at the Beebe Springs Natural Area (near Chelan Falls) from 9 – noon on April 12. Three natural habitats are being restored here - shrub-steppe, riparian, and native grasses/wildflowers. With the Columbia River and its side channels and marshes, the beautiful Beebe Creek, native plantings, and plenty of dead snags, there are lots of birds to be seen. We could see eagles, Osprey and other raptors, Great Blue Herons, kingfishers, early spring warblers and swallows, vireos, waterfowl & shorebirds, woodpeckers, maybe a dipper, shrike or river otter. We will also explore a new trail close by, following a smaller creek up to a waterfall. See you there!

Please call Jenny Graevell at 886-4518 to register for either or better yet, both of these great walks. We will keep you posted about these two events on ncwardubon.org and on the North Central Washington Audubon Society Facebook page.

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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 or drop us a note and we will send you a form for a special rate introductory membership.

This winter continues with unexpected weather patterns that don't seem to be bringing in very many birds. It has also upset the routine of the local cougars in the Methow valley. There have been numerous encounters with pets and livestock and several have been killed to prevent them from becoming more of a menace. I even saw one while I was out hiking a couple of weeks ago. While I suspect I have been seen by cougars over the years, this was the first time I saw one out and about. My dog saw it first and alerted us with frantic barking. It was a few seconds before we saw it going out and away from us through the bitterbrush-covered hillside just above Twisp. That same area has had quite a few reports of cougars in yards and even on a porch. I like to see the big cats stay out of trouble and I hate it when one has to be killed. People say I'd feel differently if it killed one of my dogs. I don't know.

This winter weather continues to puzzle everyone. Just about the time we had all given up on any sort of snowpack or prolonged ski season, the snow began to fall. And fall and fall some more. We went from hardly any snow on the ground to two feet within a week. And still the birds are few and far between at my feeders. I have not seen a single Stellar's Jay here all winter. There was a couple in the fall and then nothing. The Black-billed Magpies have enjoyed the peanuts meant for the jays. Red-winged Blackbirds make daily appearances – not as many as last year, thankfully.

In the art world, The Confluence Gallery in Twisp will be hosting a show starting on April 26 featuring ravens. Be sure to check it out when you are in the valley. The Confluence shows feature some very talented artists, both two and three dimensional and are always pretty interesting.

Regardless of the weather, with March comes the opportunity to view Greater Sage-grouse on their leks. Leks are the areas where the males put on elaborate displays in order to attract the females - sort of a singles bar for the largest grouse species. This singles bar opens in the pre-dawn hours so in order to see them, you must travel in the darkness. These grouse are highly sensitive to any disturbance so you must also view from afar with high-powered optics and you must be attentive and take note if the birds are disturbed by your activity. The Greater Sage-grouse population is dwindling, mostly due to habitat loss and fragmentation. So if you do decide to go in search of these showy birds in the wee cold hours of a March morning, keep in mind that it is up to you to not disturb them or cause them stress in any way. The leks are on private land so you must also keep to the road sides and not trespass. In recent years there have been reports of bad birding etiquette and it is possible that future opportunities to see Greater Sage-grouse will be limited.



Northern Flicker with feathers fluffed during a recent cold spell
photo by Teri J Pieper

One of my favorite harbingers of spring is the sound of the Sandhill Cranes as they journey north to their nesting grounds. Keep your ears open for this melodious and call and then scan the skies til you find the flocks high above.

NCW Recent Bird Sightings

compiled from the ncwabird email list
and Tweets

Reports of bird sightings in our four-county region have been low this month. Is it because not many folks are birding or is it that there just aren't that many birds to see?

Early in February a pair of Northern Pygmy Owls was reported and easily photographed at the Rolling Huts between Winthrop and Mazama. On the ski trails near Sun Mountain there were White-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creepers and Pileated Woodpecker. Bald Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks were setting up territories around known nesting sites. In Cashmere there are reports of Lesser Goldfinches at a feeder! This is an unusual species for all of Washington and it seems to be expanding its range. Keep your finch feeders full and watch for these birds. A Snowy Owl was reported near Mansfield and another one was found dead at the Brewster airport. Bohemian Waxwings have been reported in numerous locations around Okanogan County this month. Just south of Winthrop, a Townsend's solitaire arrived early in the month. A Golden Eagle was reported near Conconully. Sharp-tailed Grouse were seen in the Foster Creek area, south of Bridgeport. Last week a Snipe was seen from the pedestrian bridge across the Methow at Winthrop. I drove to Wenatchee yesterday and saw at least two pairs of Red-tailed Hawks flying together perhaps as breeding pairs or perhaps working out their territories. On the big river, there are lots of waterfowl – Common Goldeneye, Ring-necked Ducks, Bufflehead, Canvasbacks, American Wigeons, Canada Geese and more. Also I saw Common Loons. At Confluence Park I got to watch a Ruby-crowned Kinglet from above when I was on the walking bridge that crosses the Wenatchee River. There were also some very vocal Belted Kingfishers. Along the upper Methow River American Dippers are often seen and heard.



Save the Date Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest

May 15-18, 2014. New this year: We will have online registration for all fieldtrips and classes! Registration will start in early April. For updates on 2014 Bird Fest, please visit www.LeavenworthSpringBirdFest.com, join our mailing list, and “like” us on Facebook.

Celebrate Spring Migration

by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley

Spring migration is a great sight to see in the Pacific Northwest. Two migratory flyways cross our state south to north providing for an ever-changing list of bird species from March through May. Birds have wintered farther south and tried to fill up on nutritious food to get them through the long journey to the place where they will breed and raise their young til they can make the migratory journey south. It is a constant flow. The spring migration seems faster-paced and more intense than the fall trip. Is this due to the short season affecting food supplies when birds need it the most to feed their young? Are they driven by hormones? How do they know where to go? When to go? Migration is a fascinating subject and there are some good books on this topic. Another way to learn about migration is to attend one of the many birding festivals in the NW. Here are a few of them and websites where you can learn more and perhaps plan a fun trip.

March 14-16	Wings Over Washington in Blaine,	www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com/
March 22	Tundra Swan Festival in Usk	www.porta-us.com/tundra-swan-festival.html
March 28-30	Sandhill Crane Festival in Othello,	www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/
April 4-6	Olympic Peninsula Festival in Sequim	www.olympicbirdfest.org/
April 25-27	Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival	www.shorebirdfestival.com/
May 10	International Migratory Bird Day	www.birdday.org/birdday
May 15-18	Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest	www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.com/
May 16-18	Ladd Marsh Bird Festival (NE Oregon)	www.friendsofladdmarsh.org/

Highland Wonders Educational Series: Grassland Ecology and Grass Identification

by Julie Ashmore
Okanogan Highlands

Okanogan Highlands Alliance (OHA) announces the return of one of the region’s premier grass experts, Don Gayton, who will discuss our local grassland ecology and grass plant identification. Community members do not have to be botanists to enjoy this event, as everyone from the rookie to the proficient will get something from Don’s wealth of knowledge. Topics covered will include grassland types, invasive plants, grazing and fire interactions, and simplified methods of identifying grasses. Last September, Don’s Highland Wonders presentation and field trip were filled to capacity, and OHA received requests to offer an indoor presentation to a larger group. This is a great opportunity for those who were not able to participate in the previous grassland learning

experience, as well as a chance for those who attended to reinforce the concepts that were presented, and develop a deeper understanding.

During the March 7 presentation, Don will provide a brief “flyover” visual description of Pacific Northwest Grasslands ecology and biogeography, and then focus on some of the key Pacific Northwest grass species. A simplified method of identification will be presented, based on four common grass tribes.

“Grasslands are fragile, complex, mysterious and magical,” Gayton says. “Native grasslands are wonderfully biodiverse, but are often treated as suburbs or parking lots in waiting. My mission is to provide a few basic tools to help open up the ecology--and the poetry--of our native grasslands.”

Don Gayton, M.Sc., P.Ag., has extensive experience with our region’s grasslands and has published a number of technical articles about them. He is passionate about sharing his knowledge of our precious and endangered grasslands. Don’s books include *The Wheatgrass Mechanism*, *Landscapes of the Interior*, *Interwoven Wild* and *Okangan Odyssey*. Stuart McLean describes him as having “the eye of a scientist and the soul of a poet.”

The March 7 presentation begins at 6:30 p.m. with desserts, tea and coffee; the dinner benefiting the CCC begins at 5:00 p.m. Details about Highland Wonders are provided online: www.okanoganhighlands.org/education/hw.

Methow Conservancy Spring Events

March 4: “Earth is a Solar Powered Juke Box,” 7 pm at the Twisp River Pub. Join internationally acclaimed acoustic ecologist, Gordon Hempton, as we listen to sunrise circle the globe, hear snow melt, whales sing and discover that the Earth is music, clear enough to hum all day. And let’s re-examine our widely held belief that the human ear evolved to hear human speech. We will listen to nature sounds that fit neatly into our peak hearing sensitivity and speculate about the evolutionary consequences of detecting these sounds over great distances. During modern times with our global environmental crises is it enough to hear ourselves or must we, as a species still subject to the laws of survival, once again listen to what the Earth is telling us. This audio-visual presentation will change the way you look and listen to the world around you. The Pub opens at 6 pm for drinks and a \$10 buffet dinner and the presentation is free.

April 1: “Day Hiking in Eastern Washington” 7 pm at the Twisp River Pub. Learn how and where to go lighter, farther and more often in a slideshow by regional trail guide author Rich Landers based on his new co-authored book, “*Day Hiking Eastern Washington*.” The presentation will focus on some of the 125 day hikes covered in the new guidebook as well as tips on dealing with issues ranging from lightning to bears. Landers is the outdoors editor for The Spokesman-

Review and author of *100 Hikes in the Inland Northwest*. The Pub opens at 6 pm for drinks and a \$10 buffet dinner and the presentation is free.

May 8-11: Spring Naturalists Retreat. Spend a long weekend with us where we’ll enjoy beautiful days in the field and engage in presentations and group dinners in the evenings. Under the friendly and expert tutelage of ornithologist Libby Mills and botanist Dana Visalli, both all-round great naturalists to boot, you will be amazed by all that you learn and see in this fantastic nature and educational experience! \$165 per person

May 18: An Evening with Bill McKibben, 7 pm at the Winthrop Barn. McKibben is one of the foremost thinkers and speakers on the environment and climate change, having founded 350.org and authored many books.

May 24: “Imagine the Methow” Campaign Impact Party, 6 pm at the Winthrop Barn. Join us for a fun evening of celebration as we thank you for supporting our Imagine the Methow Capital Campaign, and show you the “impact” you and the campaign have had. There will be great food, music, and lots of ways to see and feel the impact of this incredible community-wide effort.

For more information please call 996.2870 or see www.methowconservancy.org/

Chelan Douglas Land Trust Spring Events

March 1, 9 am–3 pm, Ingalls Creek Forest Ecology Hike with John Marshall and Connie Mehmel
Join photographer and fire ecology enthusiast John Marshall and entomologist Connie Mehmel on March 1 for a winter hike on the Ingalls Creek trail to enjoy the winter wildlife and discuss forest health. John will talk about the importance of fire as an inevitable and integral part of forest ecology, but also a force with the potential for destruction. Connie will discuss insects and their effect on forest health.

April 11, 7 pm, Land Trust Spring Social
Bring your neighbors to come enjoy deserts and learn about CDLT at the Cashmere Riverside Center.

April 22, 7 pm, Environmental Film Festival: *Teachings of the Tree People*. This movie is a tribute to the life and work of Skokomish elder Gerald Bruce Miller (subiyay), a nationally prominent cultural leader and teacher who brought his talents home to lead a cultural renaissance in the Pacific Northwest. His story offers a powerful model of cultural and environmental stewardship. Sponsored by the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust.

For more information please call 667.9708 or see www.cdlandtrust.org

Native Plants in Your Garden

On Thursday, March 27 the Washington Native Plant Society will host a panel discussion about how to choose the right native plant for the right place. Panelists include Ted Alway, owner of Derby Canyon Natives, and Master Gardeners Connie Mehmel and Connie Fliegel. Participants will be able to pose their landscaping questions and learn about native plants that will work in their area, whether it is dry or wet; shady or sunny; sandy or rocky. The panel discussion begins at 7 pm at the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center, 127 S Mission St. It is free and open to the public.

Cat’s ear lily and currant
photo by Teri J Pieper



Natural History Museums: Where Dead Things Come Alive Or What do I do with this Dead Animal

by Peter Wimburger
Curator, The Slater Museum

What do you do when a bird strikes your window and dies or you find a road killed animal? These animals can “live” beyond their deaths in natural history museums. As long as the animals are in reasonable shape, they can be turned into beautiful museum specimens, which are treasures that can be used for research, education and inspiration for centuries. Here is what you can do! Slip the animal into a plastic bag (ziplocs are great) and write down the date and place it was found and put it in the bag. This information is crucial and what makes museum specimens valuable. Put it into your freezer until you can drop it off at one of your local “salvage repositories.” In Mazama – North Cascades Base Camp. In Winthrop – Teri Pieper and Ken Bevis. In Twisp – Kent Woodruff. These animals will ultimately become part of the collection at the Slater Museum of Natural History, on the campus of the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, one of the fine natural history museums in the region. For detailed instructions: www.pugetsound.edu/academics/academic-resources/slater-museum/about-the-museum/specimen-salvage-and-donations.

For hundreds of years, natural history museums have been places of discovery — places where research, education and inspiration about the natural world happen daily. Specimens in research collections can have life spans of centuries, potentially millennia, if well cared for. Most of us are familiar with museums as places where we can see exhibits; however, behind the scenes most museums have extensive research collections. Visitors to research collections often wonder why do we have so many specimens. What possible use are all of these dead things?

Historically, specimens were used to describe species and variation within and between species, examine morphology and anatomy and consider structure/function relationships. They are still used in these ways, but many of the other uses, apart from education, are not as obvious. The value of specimens really lies in their associated data – the two most important pieces are the things you wrote down and put in your plastic bag – date (including year) and place (as exact as you can). Museum specimens provide us with historical record of when and where organisms lived – many studies documenting impacts of climate change have relied on museum records to document shifts in range, and arrival and breeding dates. Today, some of the most common uses of museum specimens would have been unimaginable to their collectors as recently as 40 years ago. The idea that museums would become libraries of DNA would have been unthinkable. We can now reconstruct the entire genomes of recently extinct species. We can look at how genetic variation in populations has changed over time and we can examine rapid changes at both the morphological and genetic level that have occurred as the result of human impacts.

The notion that we would be reconstructing historical diets or migration routes using stable isotopes on a massive scale would have been considered science fiction 50 years ago. Stable isotopes are variants of the same element that have different numbers of neutrons, e.g. carbon-12 and carbon-13 are both stable isotopes of carbon. We really are what we eat and drink. We can now gain a rough idea of what organisms ate by looking at stable isotopes in their tissues. By using nitrogen isotopes, researchers have established that a number of seabird species are feeding lower in

the food chain than they were fifty plus years ago, possibly because of human-caused decline in fish populations. This pattern is seen in multiple seabird species on the Pacific coast. With the advent of more sophisticated analytical tools, it has become possible to look at pollutant concentrations over time, or the historical presence of pathogens, like Hantavirus, in animal populations. These kinds of historical analyses would have been impossible without the specimens housed in natural history museums. Just like collectors even forty or fifty years ago couldn't have imagined the uses to which museum specimens would be put, we likely can't imagine the new uses of museum specimens fifty years hence. In Washington we are fortunate to have three excellent natural history museums – the Slater Museum in Tacoma, the Burke Museum in Seattle and the Conner Museum in Pullman. You can leave your legacy to natural history research and education efforts by salvaging those dead animals and bringing them to the “salvage repository” nearest you. Thanks for your efforts!

For more information on the Slater Museum of Natural History, please see www.pugetsound.edu/academics/academic-resources/slater-museum/ or contact Peter at wimbo@ups.edu. If you are interested in reading more about the uses of museum collections, see: <http://rmbr.nus.edu.sg/news/pdf/Suarez-Tstui2004-MuseumCollections.pdf>

editor's note - Wenatchee Valley College also has a collection of specimens for use in classes and other education events. Please contact Dr. Dan Stephens (see page 2 of this newsletter) for more information on donating to the collection or viewing it.

Notes from Mazama

article and photo
by Bob Spiwak, Mazama

Valentine's Day is now in the past for this year. We might have quietly wished for The Bluebird of Happiness - quietly because most bird flights have been grounded along with 747's and their ilk. And, deadline is tomorrow and a blue bird would have given some substance to the stuff I pour out of the computer.

But, the Stellar Jays are still around. We are back to our normal two pair and we assume they are regular visitors because they are quite bold about getting some feeder-fodder, and let us know with swoops and chatter. It has become a challenge to put out the sunflower seeds because unless the deck has been shoveled daily the nightly snowfalls make the journey to the feeders a hike through deep and sometimes deeper snow. We shoveled it down to bare wood, half of it anyhow, to enable the food service people to reach the dining tables.

The chickadees are still here but as mentioned in an earlier edition, are nowhere as numerous as in past years. The towhees and juncos of earlier winter have not appeared since. Woodpeckers in ones and an occasional pair dominate the bark feeders' peanut butter and birdseed entrees and the smaller birds dodge to and fro, avoiding the abuse of greedy red heads.

Have I mentioned bark feeders before? If so bear with me, if not, find some rough bark in the firewood or elsewhere and drill a hole in the middle at the top of a chunk of it and put a hanger therein. All it takes is a jar of peanut butter, a flat knife and a stirring bowl. Mix a variety of seeds and maybe dried fruit in the PB and slather it onto the bark and into the crevices. It will provide a good foothold for birds both large and small. It is not recommended fresh for temperatures below 20 as we feel the bird beaks could freeze either open or shut. If you want to try it and cannot find bark, let me know and I'll send you a chunk for postage and handling. Here's to Spring: Go Birds!



Snow-covered bird feeder

Spring Naturalist Course Offered

Wenatchee River Institute is pleased to announce the next Wenatchee Naturalist ten-week course offering, April 9-June 11. This will be our fifth course offering with Susan Ballinger as lead instructor. We are partnering with Wenatchee Valley College and weekly classes will be held on the Wenatchee campus, Wednesday evenings from 6:00-8:30. Four all-day Saturday field trips are co-led by expert scientists on April 26 (White River), May 10 (Stormy Preserve, Entiat), May 24 (Wenatchee area birding hotspots), and June 7 (Leavenworth-Wenatchee geology).

50 free clock hours are available to teachers through the college. Tuition is \$350. Persons over 60 years old receive a 10% discounted price of \$315. Officially, registration is available at: www.wvc.edu/directory/departments/conted/

If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Susan Ballinger (skylinalbal@gmail.com or 669.7820). To date, we've served people ages 12-80 years of age, and all levels of fitness can be accommodated by prior arrangement.

Looking and Listening for a Melodic Sagebrush Spring?

If so, join us for a songbird survey, have fun and contribute to avian science as well. Audubon Washington and eastern Washington chapters are developing a new conservation program focused on the shrub steppe ecosystem and its bird life.

The Lower Columbia Basin Audubon Society chapter, Audubon Washington and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) are partnering on a pilot project to count sagebrush songbirds on WDFW and Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) lands near the Tri-Cities of Richland, Kennewick, and Pasco in 2014. For this citizen science project, we selected Sagebrush Sparrow, Brewer's Sparrow and Sage Thrasher as priority songbird species. We invite members from other eastern Washington chapters to participate in



Sagebrush Sparrow
photo by Denny Grandstrand, Yakima

by Christi Norman, Audubon WA the pilot with us. We hope to expand the survey to more chapters next year.

The data we collect will be used to validate the Western Governors Association Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool distribution models for these species in Washington as well as to update the WDFW Priority Habitat Species data base. These applications of our field work will incorporate wildlife values into multi-state land use, transportation, and energy planning, as well as large-scale conservation projects.

For more information, schedules, and signup: Please email Christi Norman at [Audubon Washington, cnorman@audubon.org](mailto:cnorman@audubon.org) or Kevin Black at the Lower Columbia Basin chapter at kevblack787@gmail.com.

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North Central Washington Audubon Society

March Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Calendar
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March 1	Forest Ecology Hike	With John Marshall and Connie Mehmel. See page 5.
March 4	Earth is a Solar-Powered Jukebox	The Methow Conservancy. See page 5.
March 7	Grassland Ecology and Grass ID	In Tonasket. See page 4.
March 8	Bridgeport Bar Birding	Birding Buddies Early Spring Trip. See page 2.
March 18	Pale Male - the Movie	Sponsored by NCWAS. See page 1.
March 27	Native Plants in your Garden	In Wenatchee. See page 5.
April 9-June 11	Spring Naturalist Course	In Wenatchee. See page 7
April 12	Beebe Springs Birding	Birding Buddies on the Columbia. See page 2.
May 8-11	Spring Naturalist Retreat	In the Methow. See page 5.
May 15-18	Spring Bird Fest	In Leavenworth. See page 4.
May 18	An Evening with Bill McKibben	In Winthrop. See page 5.



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