



Volume 49 #8 May 2016

Exciting Opportunities for Conservation Work

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

Our members possess a wealth of skills that, when focused on an issue, can make a real difference. One of our primary goals is to identify ways for our membership to become more involved to enhance our impact for the benefit of birds and habitat. To this effect, North Central Washington Audubon Society is moving ahead with work on several conservation issues important to birds and habitat in our area. All who want to contribute to our work are welcome. The following paragraphs cover open volunteer positions and recent progress on conservation issues we're currently engaged with.

Rock Island Ponds – In March, the Rock Island City Council gave the go ahead for a proposal we helped develop for the ponds' future. Work is now underway to establish an advisory committee composed of Rock Island residents, issue experts, and NCWAS members tasked with making the proposal's vision a reality over the coming years. NCWAS intends to remain substantially involved in this work, though not as the lead entity. In addition to taking part in the advisory committee, NCWAS is also looking to establish a long-term monthly bird survey in support of the proposal.

Volunteer opportunities: 1) NCWAS representative to the advisory committee: 5-10 hours per month. 2) Bird survey lead: 5-10 hours/month.

Upper Wenatchee Community Lands Plan – This is a process being led by

the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust (CDLT) in coordination with Chelan County, Trust for Public Lands, and The Nature Conservancy. It seeks to identify for acquisition high priority parcels of Weyerhaeuser lands sprinkled from near Lake Wenatchee to Blewett Pass. NCWAS is in the process of identifying a list of parcels of greatest value for birds and general ecological integrity for submission to CDLT by the end of June. We recently selected approximately 25 parcels that we will be ground truthing (confirming mapped data with a field visit) over the next six weeks or so. Several NCWAS members are already involved, but we could use more help. Volunteer opportunity: Help us gather data on identified high priority parcels. This would mean going into the field with at least one other person to visit parcels to assess habitat types, condition, etc. The dates and times for these visits are flexible.

Stemilt-Squilchuck Community Vision

– As mentioned in the February issue, this process has resulted in agreement on a plan for public land use in the Stemilt, Squilchuck, and Wenatchee Heights areas near Wenatchee. We remain involved overall in what is now the implementation phase, but we'd also like to participate in a recreation subcommittee which is now being formed. Volunteer opportunity: NCWAS representative to the overall process and the recreation subcommittee – 5 hours per month.

Horan Natural Area Rewatering –

The Horan Natural Area is a wetland complex between Walla Walla Park and Confluence Park in Wenatchee. Loss of historical water sources has led to decreases in aquatic habitats. We've encouraged efforts to rewater the Horan wetlands; we're happy to report that efforts are moving forward. Chelan County PUD Commissioners will consider a multi-year plan to bring substantial water back into the area's wetlands.

Shrub-steppe Songbird Survey

which NCWAS is helping with is now in full swing. We have specific sites to be surveyed in Chelan, Douglas, and Okanogan Counties May 12-15 and June 2-5. Each site is to be surveyed on one day during each of those time frames and we still have open slots available. Please refer to the March issue of the Wild Phlox for further details. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Richard Scranton at rscrans4350@yahoo.com.

For a more detailed overview of the above issues, please refer to the March issue of the Wild Phlox. As mentioned above, we want to involve more of our membership in our conservation work. **If you would like to consider volunteering for any of the above listed projects, please contact Mark Johnston at s697striata@frontier.com or 548-5766.**

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."

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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.

All About Bird Anatomy

When you are studying a new bird and find a description of the malar area or the auriculars, do you scratch your head and wonder just where those parts are located? Cornell Lab of Ornithology has an addition to their extensive website that might help with these challenges. It is located at <https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/features/birdanatomy/>. Various sections of it cover feathers, skin, musculature and much more. I find the feathers section to be the most helpful. Go to the site and see which parts of the grouse shown below that you can identify.



Greater Sage-Grouse
 photo by Dr Michael Schroeder, WDFW

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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.

Spring really ought to be the start of the New Year. I've always wondered why New Years arrives in the deepest, darkest winter time. Spring brings renewal of the landscape and returning birds; bears come out of hibernation while toads and salamanders and frogs, finding a wet landscape, pull themselves out of their own kind of long, deep sleep.

Hillsides that have been burned black and left naked of all vegetation are giving way to the fast snowmelt and creeks are overtaking their banks, changing their channels and causing people to find new routes to and from their daily adventures. Here in the Methow, we are finding ponds and streams in places that haven't seen water in years. I've enjoyed listening to frogs and ducks on my daily walks. In one vernal pond I found a tiger salamander and spadefoot toads! Aspens that burned nearly two years ago are sending up sprouts faster than the deer can eat them this spring. Someday that grove should be quaking again. And the standing burned snags will provide homes for bluebirds, nuthatches, wrens, woodpeckers and small mammals too.

Despite the lack of a shrub layer on our hillside, the Dusky Grouse have returned from their higher, wintering grounds. The males have boomed throughout the last month, even as the snow was melting. Now the females are on nests in the shade of snowberry and burned shrubs and won't flush until a person or dogs get within a couple of feet of them. It can be nearly heart-stopping when this occurs. Shrubs are returning to our hillside also. The snowberry came in thick, quickly after the fire. Seemingly dead serviceberry and chokecherry are sending up shoots pretty vigorously this spring; much more so than last year. Currants are growing well and blooming this year. Our long lines of caged, irrigated, planted shrubs are thriving and some of the planted serviceberry is in bloom. The new trees are coming along as well. Very few of these trees and shrubs have died. It all changes slowly over time. The fire, now going on two years ago, was a fast-moving destructive force. We have to be patient and give the plants a helping hand with water and deer protection while trying to cut back on the amount of noxious weeds that appeared as a result of the fire. It's a long slow process.



Female Dusky Grouse
photo by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley

NCW Recent Bird Sightings

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

Turkey Vultures arrived in the region at the end of March. Snowy Owls and Snow Buntings continued to be seen on the Waterville Plateau up til the end of March. White-throated Swifts were seen in Moses Coulee.

Long-billed Curlews were found on the Rendezvous Road just outside of Winthrop. This is a very difficult bird to find in the Methow. They were probably attracted to all of the soggy ground and standing water resulting from a heavy snowpack and early warm temperatures. I saw a Peregrine Falcon in a tree at our place. American White Pelicans were seen on the Okanogan River early in April. A group of about forty Green-winged Teal were seen on Patterson Lake last week. Rufous and Calliope Hummingbirds arrived at our place on April 1 and have been widely seen around the region this month. A Western Kingbird was reported this week near Bridgeport. Yellow-headed Blackbirds were seen near Pearrygin Lake. Dusky Grouse have been booming in the shrub stepp and Ruffed Grouse have been starting their engines in the riparian areas. Black-backed Woodpeckers were observed near Cougar Lake, above Winthrop.

A WVC/Omak Ornithology class on a field trip at Cassimer Bar near the mouth of the Okanogan River, observed a flock of about sixty Sandhill Cranes. The instructor and some of the students observed that two of the birds were white and somewhat larger than the rest. The flock was headed north towards Canada; no other reports of this group have surfaced.

Yellow-rumped Warblers are being seen and heard nearly everywhere. Osprey also arrived all over NCW by the middle of April.

A Northern Saw-whet Owl and a Spotted Owl were heard in Chelan County. White-throated Swifts were observed at the Peshastin Pinnacles. A Prairie Falcon, Loggerhead Shrike, Cliff Swallows and Red Crossbills were found south of Wenatchee. Near Ardenvoir, a Ruffed Grouse, Gray Jays, Red-naped Sapsucker, Nashville Warbler, all three nuthatches and Western Bluebirds were observed. Snow Geese have been seen in Wenatchee's Walla Walla Park.

Douglas Creek and Badger Mountain Field Trip

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

Wednesday, June 1, 6:00 am til late afternoon

This field trip will feature the exceptionally diverse habitats of Douglas Creek and Badger Mountain which together host an extraordinary variety of birds. We'll be there at the height of the spring birding season and all the birds should be singing on breeding territory. We expect to walk about three miles over uneven ground, so bring good hiking boots and dress for whatever weather we may encounter. Also bring a cap, sunscreen, liquids, and food. Carpool cost: \$15 to be shared by riders. Please contact Mark Johnston to sign up at 548-5766 or s697striata@frontier.com. Limited to eleven birders.

Citizen Science Bird Monitoring Opportunities

By Susan Ballinger
2016 CDLT Conservation Fellow

I would like to invite you to join me on monthly eBird monitoring routes in Wenatchee and Leavenworth. Chelan-Douglas Land Trust seeks information on seasonal bird use of habitats on two properties and these volunteer-powered projects are designed to collect data from April through November. All needed protocols, maps, and field data sheets will be provided. We will work as a team that accommodates a wide range of field ID skill. The projects include:

Mountain Home Preserve, Leavenworth. Meet at the Leavenworth Safeway Parking lot at 6 am sharp, returning by 11am. This is about a three-mile walking route, with a steep initial uphill quarter mile climb on an old road, followed by a ridge top walk on uneven old roads. Dates: May 19, June 16, July 14.

Horse Lake Preserve, Wenatchee. We will meet at the end of the pavement on Horse Lake Road at 6 am sharp, returning by 11 am. This is a five-mile walking route on uneven trails with significant elevation gain, often with native reptile sightings. Dates: May 26, June 23, July 21.

If you would like a chance to practice learning the birds we will likely see and hear on the projects, register for my Wednesday early morning skills development outings, 6:00-7:30 am, at Number Two Canyon, Wenatchee. Meet at the corner of Skyline Drive and Number Two Canyon Road at 6 am sharp to carpool a few miles up the paved road. We will park and then walk along the road about a half mile. Dates: May 4, May 18, and June 1. RSVP appreciated on the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust webpage at <http://www.cdlandtrust.org/whats-new>.

More Spring Fun with CDLT

by Hillary Schwirtlich, Wenatchee

May 4 & 18 from 9 - 10 am: Wednesday Wildflower Walks in the Foothills at Saddle Rock with Susan Ballinger.

May 11 & 25 from 7:30 - 9:45 am: Bird ID Skills Building at Walla Walla Park with Susan Ballinger.

May 12 & 31 at 6:00 pm: Upper Valley Nature Walks at Leavenworth Ski Hill with Connie McCauley.

May 21 from 9 - noon: Birds, Bugs, Butterflies & Blooms Walk at Stormy Creek Preserve in Entiat Valley with Phil Archibald.

For more information, contact Hillary Schwirtlich, Membership & Education Coordinator with Chelan-Douglas Land Trust at 667-9708 or www.cdlandtrust.org

Chelan Ridge Hawk Migration Festival 2016

by Richard Scranton, Wenatchee

Memorial Park in Pateros, Saturday, September 17, 8:00 am – 3:00 pm

Join the US Forest Service's Methow Valley and Chelan Ranger Districts, North Central Washington Audubon Society, and HawkWatch International for the seventh annual Chelan Ridge Hawk Migration Festival! This family-friendly event combines free activities in Memorial Park along the Columbia River in Pateros, with trips to Chelan Ridge to learn about and celebrate raptors as they journey to winter territories. The festival takes place in Pateros and will have vendors, live raptors, birding field trips, and projects for kids. Friday night, the 16th, we offer a workshop with an expert in field identification of raptors to help prepare you for your trip up to the ridge. The shuttle to and from Chelan Ridge lasts 4 hours and includes seeing raptors as they are banded and released. Watch future issues of the Wild Phlox and our website for more information.

Woody Island Bird Walks



Saturday, April 23 &
Saturday, May 21
8:00 – 10:00 a.m.

Come welcome spring on a bird walk around Woody Island in the City of Okanogan. Woody Island is home and refuge to an assortment of wildlife. We will spend our time walking the island's trails and seeing what emerges. The route is about 1.4 miles roundtrip and relatively flat.

Meet in the parking lot at the Agriculture Service Center at 1251 South 2nd Ave in Okanogan. We will walk or drive (~1/4 mile) to the trailhead. Please contact Allisa at 509-422-0855 ext. 111 or allisa@okanogancd.org if you have any questions.



Wildflower Rambles and Birding Strolls

by Mary Kiesau, Winthrop

Join Mary Kiesau, the Methow Conservancy's Educational Programs Director, on one (or more) casual natural history "walk and talks" to see and learn what is happening in the natural world of the Methow. Mary focuses on birds and plants on all the walks but some walks below indicate a particular focus. These outings are perfect for people of all ages and levels of knowledge - no experience required! Children who are able to walk on uneven ground for two plus hours are welcome to attend with an adult chaperone. We'll go to a different location on each walk, and the days and times change to attempt to accommodate a variety of schedules. No dogs please. These mini-classes are free but space is limited so registration is required. Contact us for more details or to reserve your spot at mary@methowconservancy.org or 996-2870.

May 7, 9:00-11:30 am Mother's Day Special Birds & Blooms
May 17, 8:00 - 11:00 am Birds & Blooms
May 27, 1:00 - 4:00 pm, Birds & Blooms
June 1, 7:00 - 8:30 am Birding Stroll
June 9, 7:00 - 8:30 am Birding Stroll
June 14, 7:00 - 8:30 am Birding Stroll
June 20, 7:00 am - Noon Summer Solstice Birds & Blooms Hike

Join the NestWatch Flock This Spring

from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology
Join the NestWatch flock this spring. Spring is here, and that means birds are nesting—in bushes and trees but also in flower baskets, on windowsills, and in birdhouses. We are asking citizen scientists and bird-lovers who find a bird's nest of any species to share their observations with NestWatch at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Becoming a NestWatcher is easy. Participants report the location of a nest, the species, the number of eggs laid, and other important milestones as the birds incubate, raise, and fledge their young. Nest monitoring is a fun learning experience for the whole family.

How does watching birds at the nest fuel conservation? "There is still a lot that scientists don't know, even about common species," says U.S. NestWatch project leader Robyn Bailey. "For example, what are the impacts of feeding birds during the nesting season? We've added new questions about whether birds are supplemented during the nesting season to help address the knowledge gap about this widespread practice."

Find out more about the project, sign up, and learn how to safely monitor nests at NestWatch.org. And watch for the NestWatch "Home Tweet Home" photo contest coming in July!



Mixed Housing. An American Robin nesting on top of a nest box being used by Tree Swallows photo by Teri J Pieper

Fodder From the Feeder

by Karen Mulcahy, Winthrop

Spring is truly here. A few days ago I heard a House Wren for the first time, and many other birds have been all about the property. The hummers are back, mostly the Calliope Hummingbird, but I have seen a male Rufous as well. There are American Goldfinches - the males in their bright breeding splendor, lots of Pine Siskins, and many Cassin's and House Finches. It's quite amusing to see that the Violet Green Swallows commandeer the same lobster pot shaped birdhouse that we brought back from New Brunswick, year after year. The Western Bluebirds seem to like the twig birdhouse from Newfoundland and a bluebird box we acquired last year. But the Pygmy Nuthatch - he wants them all!

It's quite comical to watch a group of them as they flit about the garden. Never solitary, they come through several at a time, and inspect every house, inside and out, chattering all the time. They challenge the swallows and the bluebirds who will then come flying in fast when they see the pygmies around. Apparently, the pygmies will tolerate bluebirds and swallows nesting nearby, but not chickadees or other nuthatches despite the fact they travel with chickadees in the winter (and kinglets, juncos, and even woodpeckers).

The Pygmy Nuthatch can be found year round in our neck of the woods, and prefers mature ponderosa pine forests, at mid to low elevations. They have been found at 10,000 feet or even higher in Mexico. We mostly see them in spring and summer at our house. These tiny four inch guys will nest in snags or a dead limb eight to sixty feet above ground, usually above twenty feet, and will adapt existing holes to their liking, anywhere from one to six inches across and five to ten inches deep. They have been seen nesting in aspen by

digging out cavities on scars or darkened places on the bark and defending the cavity by covering the opening with their body, blending with the scar. Interestingly, they are one of the few North American songbirds that are cooperative breeders - they will have several males defending the nest and feeding the incubating female and her chicks. Often the other males are sons from last year's brood. Only two nuthatch species worldwide do this. They like seeds and cache them like other nuthatches, under bark, but in breeding season, most bugs are fair game.

Another unique feature of this species is how they survive the cold winters. They will shelter in tree cavities together (up to 100 have been documented in one cavity), and lower their body temperature. Chickadees will also take refuge in tree cavities, but they are solitary. Pygmies never roost alone. They are always in a group, and it is often their family members. Did I say they were social - these guys are uber-social! Of course, flocking with other birds in the winter such as the chickadees helps protect them from predators, as they heed the chickadees' alarm calls.

Thankfully, these birds are still listed as LC - least concern. But fire suppression, logging, and grazing has converted many mature pine forests into forests of differently aged trees and dense thickets - not very encouraging habitat for the Pygmy Nuthatch. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology feels we will see their numbers decline from the present estimate of three million breeding birds. Audubon's climate maps show their territory will decrease and stretch further north. For now, I am happy my yard is encouraging their presence for me to enjoy!



Two Snow Geese have been entertaining birders and photographers and other visitors at Walla Walla Park recently.
photos by John Barta, Wenatchee

Annual Wenas Audubon Weekend

from the Wenas Audubon website

Every Memorial Day Weekend, members of Washington State's Audubon Chapters and their friends gather in the Wenas Valley, located on the east slope of the Cascade Mountains between Ellensburg and Yakima. With a variety of natural history and recreation opportunities, the Wenas Valley is a beautiful area that supports a fascinating assortment of spring flora and fauna, and offers the spiritual fulfillment of simply being outdoors in the spring. Everyone, whether members of Audubon chapters or not is welcome to join us for this outing, which is attended each year by around 200 men, women and children and a large number of birds which, we like to think, enjoy being watched ever as much as we enjoy watching them.

The gathering is held in the vicinity of the Larrison Tree along Wenas Creek within the Wenas Creek Campground. Camping is primitive, but it's about as nice a place for group camping as there could be. There are campfire (around our approved propane device) programs on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings, and Field Trips (both birding trips and wildflower trips) scheduled Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. Love of nature of all varieties means there may be insect hunts or bat watching as well.

And best of all, the entire event is open to all and is FREE. A Discover Pass is required. For more information, see www.wenasaudubon.org/

Methow Conservancy's Annual Spring Naturalists' Retreat May 12-15

by Mary Kiesau, Winthrop

The Naturalists' Retreat is an annual celebration of the Methow Valley in springtime! Come 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 you will be amazed by all that you learn and soak up in this fantastic nature and educational experience!

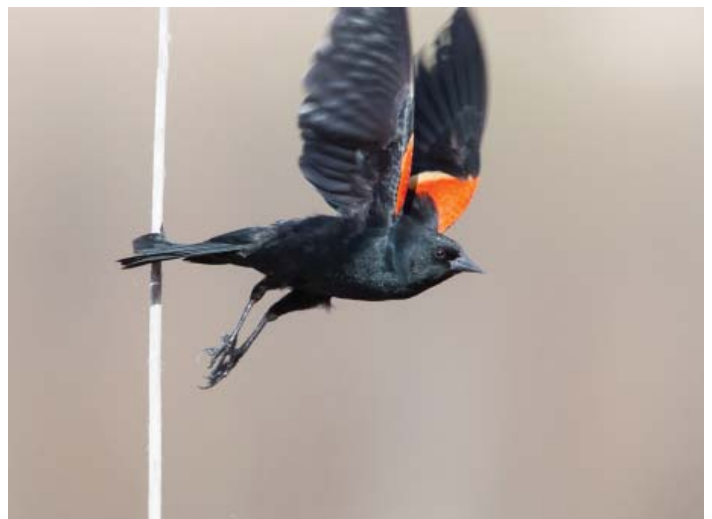
Arrowleaf balsamroot, bitterroot, bitterbrush, Chelan penstemon, larkspur and much much more will be in full bloom throughout the Valley. Bright bluebirds, and tropical migratory birds like the red and yellow Western Tanager and Yellow Warbler will be flooding back into the Methow and singing all over the Valley, looking for mates after their long journey from South and Central America. Look for and learn to hear vireos, warblers, flycatchers, orioles, hummingbirds, bluebirds, Lewis' and other woodpeckers, raptors, waterfowl, and maybe even a Lazuli Bunting! We'll go to a variety of places throughout the Methow Valley on Friday, Saturday and Sunday to experience all that the natural world of the Methow has to offer. In the evenings, we'll share meals and hear presentations from Dana and Libby on the Methow's natural history, botany, and the life and times of Methow birds.

Registration is required and the retreat is limited to 20 people. Participants should be willing and able to take part in the entire retreat including evenings. Participants should be in good physical condition, able to complete moderate hikes and spend six plus hours in the field. Free tent camping is available at Dana's property along the Methow River near Twisp or you can make your own lodging arrangements.

• Thursday evening, dinner is on your own. We'll meet at 6 pm for introductions and logistics, and one instructor will give a presentation.

- Friday, we'll be in the field from 8 am to 3 pm, then we'll meet at 6 pm for dinner and a presentation. Friday's dinner is a shared meal provided by the Methow Conservancy (included in the retreat fee).
- Saturday, we'll be in the field from 8 am to 3 pm, then we'll meet for dinner at 6 pm again, location to be announced, and we'll share our highlights from the weekend with photos, stories, and maybe even songs!
- Sunday, we'll be in the field from 9 am to 1 pm or so.

Locations for day and evening events will be given shortly before the retreat starts. The retreat starts at 6 pm sharp on Thursday, May 12 and goes through the early afternoon of Sunday, May 15. Cost is \$200 per person, including two dinners. To register, send an email to mary@methowconservancy.org or call our office at 996-2870.



Red-winged Blackbird
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

May Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Calendar
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May 7 - June 20	Wildflower Walks & Birding Strolls	With the Methow Conservancy. See page 5
May 6	Hooves, Burns, Browse	Fire effects on ungulates. In Tonasket. See last month's Phlox
May 11 & 25	Bird ID Skills	With CDLT at Walla Walla Park. See page 4
May 12-15	Spring Naturalist Retreat	In the Methow. See page 7
May 19-22	Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest	Celebrate the Birds of Spring! See last month's Phlox
May 21	Birds, Bugs, Butterflies, Blooms	In the Entiat Valley with CDLT. See page 4
May 21	Okanagan Bird Walks	Woody Island with Allisa Carlson. See page 5
May 27-31	Annual Wenas Audubon Campout	Birds and Wildflowers in the Wenas Valley. See page 7
June 1	Douglas Creek and Badger Mtn	Guided Field Trip with Mark Johnston. See page 4
September 17	Hawk Migration Festival	Mark your calendars for this fun event! See page 4



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