



The Wild Phlox

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Winter Raptor Survey Project New Routes Available in Your Neighborhood

by Jeff Fleischer, Project Coordinator
Winter Raptor Survey Project
East Cascades Audubon Society - Bend, OR

I am project coordinator for the East Cascades Audubon Society's (Bend, OR) Winter Raptor Survey Project. The project was initiated in Oregon fifteen years ago and then expanded into Idaho, into southern Washington along the Columbia River from the mouth up to the Tri Cities and east to Walla Walla, and into the California portion of the Klamath Basin starting eight years ago. Last winter we ended up with 312 active routes in the project covering more than 18,000 miles of transects surveyed by over 240 primary project volunteers.

We are expanding the project into eastern Washington this coming winter, focusing on the areas around Pullman, Spokane, Ellensburg, Moses Lake, Othello, Wenatchee, the Okanogan and north of the Tri Cities. I have several dozen routes available to offer you in these areas.

The primary survey season is December through February and we ask our volunteers to conduct one survey each of these months on a day that fits their own life schedule. In addition to the three primary months, volunteers have the option of doing surveys in November and March as well if interested. These months do have migratory activity, and this is a wintering survey project. These optional months are valuable though as they serve as bookends for the primary survey season. Volunteers are encouraged to do these added surveys if that is their wish.

Participants need to feel comfortable with identifying at least the more common species of raptors. More than 90% of all birds counted on these surveys consist of the following species: Red-tailed Hawk, American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle, and Rough-legged Hawk. If you are comfortable with identifying these five species, we would be grateful for your participation in the project! We have found thirty species of raptors on project surveys in the fifteen years including all three accipiters, all five species of falcons, several other buteos, and a wide variety of owls along with a few other species not in these family groupings. If you are comfortable with identifying some or all these additional species, your

knowledge would be invaluable in advancing this project. It is not necessary that you know them all. This is a community-based science project with one of the objectives being to learn more about these regal creatures.

I have concentrated the new routes in areas surrounding the key towns in order to minimize excessive driving. If any of you live some distance away from these towns and wish to do surveys near your home area, I would be more than happy to put together a route close to where you live, just let me know! I should mention that the average length of these routes is fifty to seventy miles and they are designed to be completed in one day. Winter driving will also be a consideration; folks should feel comfortable dealing with winter conditions.

If this project sounds like something that you would be interested in, please email me as soon as you can. I will be filling these routes on a first-come first-served basis so if you have a favorite area, let me know as soon as possible. I will also provide you with a survey protocol, a data collection form to be used on the surveys tailored specifically to your route, and be available to answer any questions you may have. My goal is to insure that every participant is comfortable with what they will be doing on these surveys. I would be glad to answer any questions you have prior to making a commitment.

I might mention that these surveys are addicting! I have quite a few folks involved that helped me initiate this project fifteen years ago. Learning about these birds in a systematic way will offer you not only increased knowledge of raptors but you will enjoy the activity and what you see; the 240 folks that participated last winter will attest to that.

Routes are currently available for Othello, Warden, Moses Lake, George, Quincy, Ellensburg, Beverly – Smyrna, Orondo - Waterville – Palisades, Methow Valley and under consideration for the Okanogan Valley area. Contact Jeff Fleischer at raptorrunner97321@yahoo.com if you are interested in participating.

More information about this long-running project can be found at <https://www.ecaudubon.org/winter-raptor-survey>

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”

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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.

Walking the Wild Side, The Nature of Nature Writing

On October 12 from 8:30 am - 4:30 pm, the Wenatchee River Institute (WRI) and Write on the River will bring together three North Central Washington writers in one workshop, *Walking the Wild Side, The Nature of Nature Writing*: Ana Maria Spagna of Stehekin, Heather A. Wallis Murphy of Leavenworth, and Derek Sheffield also of Leavenworth. Each writer offers unique perspectives on observing, recording, and sharing words inspired by the natural world.

The workshop will be held on WRI's Barn Beach Reserve property and along the banks of the Wenatchee River. The morning hours offer presentations and writing prompts from Spagna, Wallis Murphy, and Sheffield, with afternoon field writing. The workshop will conclude with readings by participants and guest writers. "By the end of the day, the workshop will have enriched peoples' understanding of their own words and of the wild surrounding them," explained Wallis Murphy.

Cost for full-day workshop with picnic lunch is \$70. Members of WRI or Writers On The River pay only \$60. Attendance is limited to 45, so register soon! For more workshop information, see <https://wenatcheeriverinstitute.org/> or contact Rachel Bishop, rbishop@wenatcheeriverinstitute.org or 548-0181 x5.

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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



No doubt, you have already heard or read about the terrific loss of birds over the course of the last fifty years. According to a new study published in the journal, *Science*, North America has lost more than one in four birds. Let that sink in. Twenty five percent of the bird population of our continent has perished. Multiple factors are involved in this catastrophic loss. According to an article from the National Audubon Society (www.audubon.org) habitat loss, pesticide use, insect declines, climate change, outdoor cats and glass skyscrapers are just some of the known threats to avian life. The research team that produced this study includes The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, American Bird Conservancy, Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, US Geological Survey, The Canadian Wildlife Service and other institutions. They analyzed the breeding population of 529 species by pooling data from the North American Breeding Bird Survey, Christmas Bird Count, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service waterfowl surveys, and 10 other datasets. They also analyzed more recent data collected by weather radar technology that can track large groups of birds as they migrate to estimate their numbers. The weather radars indicated a 14 percent decrease in nocturnal spring-migrating birds in the last decade alone.



Stellar's Jay
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

I admit, this is pretty depressing. The Cornell Lab and its partners including Audubon, produced a list seven things that individuals can do to help birds. You can see the list at www.3billionbirds.org/7-simple-actions. They include making windows safer, keeping cats indoors, planting native plants, avoiding pesticides, drinking bird-friendly coffee, protecting our planet from plastics, and watching and sharing birds with others. I think many of us involved in Audubon and other organizations are already doing most, if not all these things. Now we need to figure out how to reach others with this important message.

Summer came to a rather abrupt end recently. I took down the hummingbird feeders in August and put up the seed feeders earlier this week. The birds found these feeders almost immediately. How do they do that? We haven't seen Pine Siskins all summer but in no time at all, there was a large flock of them feasting on thistle and sunflower seeds. American Goldfinches seem happy with the sunflowers in the garden. We are also trying a platform feeder this year.

There were lots of California Quail this summer and I thought they might use it. Of course, since Ken put it up, we haven't seen a single quail in the yard. Go figure. The Spotted Towhees, White-crowned Sparrows, some finches, Mourning Doves, Black-billed Magpie and a single Stellar's Jay are cleaning it off every day. It is the first jay we've had since the fire, now five years ago. I am glad to see it.



Hiker with
Northern Hawk Owl fledgling
photo by John Danielson, Omak

NCW Recent Bird Sightings

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

Chelan: A Barid's and a Pectoral Sandpiper were seen at Walla Walla Park. A Black Swift was seen on the Maple Pass trail off Highway 20 at Rainy Pass.

Douglas: Atkins Lake has been a hot spot for birds this summer. On one occasion, there were at least 500 assorted ducks, and some good shorebirds, including, Long-billed Dowitcher, Least and Baird's sandpipers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs (mostly at the pond on Heritage), one Sanderling and some Pectoral Sandpipers. Raptors included two adult Bald Eagles, Northern Harriers, and a Peregrine Falcon. A Glaucous-winged Gull, a Red-throated Loon and some kind of jaeger was seen along the Columbia between Brewster and Bridgeport on Highway 173. Sandhill Cranes are being seen on the Waterville Plateau.

Ferry: A Baird's and a Western Sandpiper were seen at

Haag Cove Campground. A Hermit Thrush was singing, and a Great Horned Owl was calling on the Kettle Crest Trail. A Spruce Grouse female with two nearly full-grown youngsters were seen at the north trailhead for the Kettle Crest Trail.

Okanogan: Sightings near Twisp included a Black-throated Gray Warbler, a Lesser Goldfinch and two Red-necked Phalaropes. In the Pasayten Wilderness near Horseshoe Basin, hikers spotted an adult Northern Hawk Owl with two fledglings learning to perch and maneuver on snags. Migrating sparrow flocks are full of White-crowned and Chipping Sparrows and Golden-crowned, Savannah, Lincoln's and Vesper Sparrows are being seen with them. Sandhill Cranes have been seen throughout the Okanogan flying overhead and in fields along Cameron Lake Road.

Summer Bird Walks at Lake Wenatchee State Park

by Mary and Tim Gallagher,
Lake Wenatchee

Lake Wenatchee State Park is our favorite neighborhood birding spot. Exploring the beach, walking along the river and up into the forest, there are always birds to discover.

Last winter, Ranger Paul Tomas asked if we would volunteer to lead summer birding walks for campers. We committed to four dates launching Birds of Lake Wenatchee, a two-mile walk and discussion about how to spot, identify and appreciate our critters of the sky.

NCWAS Board Members Mark Oswood and Bruce McCammon, added their support. Mark loaned us five pairs of Pentax Papilio II binoculars from the 'What's that Bird' program. For many of the participants, this was their first time using binoculars. Hearing their voices change as they really saw a male Western Tanager was rewarding. Magnification makes a difference. Bruce



provided copies of his fine poster: *Common Birds of North Central Washington*. This proved to be a great visual illustrating the importance of learning “size” and “shape” in bird identification. The posters added to the walk experience. Several youngsters were eager to hang them on their walls and one schoolteacher asked for two — one for herself and one for her classroom.

Highlights included a very well-behaved, leashed black lab, who just sat in the sand as a chipmunk scampered right in front of him. On another walk, we had a dad with his son, who wanted to learn more about birds because his sixteen-month old, “just loves watching birds”.

We plan to lead Birds of Lake Wenatchee walks for campers in the summer of 2020. Satisfaction comes

with sharing birds and especially seeing the wonder spread across the face of a fledgling birder.

A Raspberry Surprise

When we moved to the Methow about five years ago, I planted a few rows of raspberries and have watched them spread out with each growing season. My husband Peter and I try to be good gardeners by properly thinning and pruning them in the spring. We apparently are not aggressive enough with our thinning



and always seem to end up with a wild and tangled maze of raspberry vines by July. It makes our berry picking an awkward and prickly endeavor but has paid off in another way...Lazuli Buntings! It turns out that these buntings seem to like messy raspberry vines for nesting. This past early July when I went out to pick, I was immediately scolded by a pair of buntings that flew on and off a wire fence behind the raspberries. They kept diving into a neighboring tree where I thought they might be nesting. A few days later Peter discovered their nest embedded right in the top of our

article and photos by Janet Bauer, Wenatchee

vines. Soon there were three eggs in the nest and the female bunting became more and more tolerant of us as we went out to pick. The male seemed to leave once the eggs were laid as we never saw him again. The nest was successful with the young leaving the nest by early August.

To add to this story, this was the second time this has happened. When we lived in Wenatchee, we had an equally messy raspberry patch and a beautiful pair of Lazuli Buntings nested in the vines during



female Lazuli Bunting

the summer of 2013. Unlike this summer, the male bunting hung around that year and did a large share of feeding the young. Moral of the story...let your garden get thick and overgrown and you might just get a lovely bird surprise.

Songs of Nature with Ken Bevis

A Musical Journey with our Fish and Wildlife

by Ken Bevis, Methow Valley

The Second Annual NCW Audubon Social is coming up on Thursday, October 24, 7 pm at the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center, 127 South Mission in Wenatchee. This event is co-sponsored with Cascades Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group (CCFEG).

If you love birds, come and meet others who do too, and enjoy the program with Methow Valley's singer/songwriter Ken Bevis in "Songs of Nature." We promise good conversation and excellent cookies! Families welcome.

Nature troubadour, Ken Bevis will perform a program of original songs inspired by the amazing fish and wildlife of our region. He writes catchy folk tunes with memorable melodies that make the listener think and laugh. He will be joined by the talented guitarist from Omak, Keith Kistler. Keith is also a board member for CCFEG.

Bevis works as a wildlife biologist for the Department of Natural Resources and writes and plays music as often as possible. He has been writing songs for over forty years,

and since moving to the Methow Valley in 2008, Ken has blossomed as a musician. He found a rich community of fellow players and listeners who share various venues such as open mics, farmer's markets, pubs and events in the diverse Methow Valley. He has played concerts for various organizations around the state, including other Audubon Chapters and now, finally, for two organizations he not only belongs to, but heartfully supports.

Ken has two recordings, the recently released *Great Divide*, and his 2016 work, *Wanderer's Moon*. Both are compilations of original songs about nature and life, featuring a talented array of players that enrich and fill the songs with love. CD's will be available at the program.



Ken Bevis

photo by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley

This concert will feature songs about woodpeckers, bears, salmon, bull trout, bees, bugs and lots of other critters. It promises to be a fun and memorable event in the excellent setting of the Wenatchee Valley Museum. Bring your friends!

For more about Ken, see www.kenbevis.com.

FeederWatch Season Starts Soon

from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Project FeederWatch turns your love of feeding birds into scientific discoveries. FeederWatch is a winter-long (November-April) survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. Participants periodically count the birds they see at their feeders and send their counts to Project FeederWatch. Your bird counts help you keep track of what is happening in your own backyard and help scientists track long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. With FeederWatch, your observations become part of something bigger.

Anyone interested in birds can participate. FeederWatch is conducted by people of all skill levels and backgrounds, including children, families, individuals, classrooms, retired persons, youth groups, nature centers, and bird clubs. You can count birds as often as every week, or as infrequently as you like: the schedule is completely flexible. All you need is a bird feeder, bird bath, or plantings to attract birds.

New participants are sent a Research Kit with complete instructions for participating, as well as a bird identification poster, calendar, and more. You provide the feeder(s) and seed. Then each fall participants receive the sixteen-page, year-end report, Winter Bird Highlights. Participants also receive access to the digital version of Living Bird, the Cornell Lab's award-winning, quarterly magazine. Project FeederWatch is supported almost entirely by its participants. The annual participation fee is \$18 for U.S. residents (\$15 for Cornell Lab members). The participation fee covers materials, staff support, web design, data analysis, and the year-end report. Without the support of our participants, this project wouldn't be possible.

Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada. See <https://feederwatch.org/about/project-overview/> for more information and to join Project FeederWatch.

Birding and bird photography in Ecuador

by Bruce and Dianne McCammon,
Wenatchee

photos by Bruce McCammon

Our travel bucket list includes several locations in South America. We did not hesitate long when we were asked to join a group of friends from Wenatchee to participate on a tour that emphasized birding and bird photography in the Andean highlands of Ecuador. We joined the group that was organized and lead by John Winnie, Jr. and his wife, Janet, from Bozeman, MT. The other members of the group included our Wenatchee friends, Susan and Paul Ballinger and Jane and John Zanol. Tom Sparlin was the last team member. After a few days of independent travel in Ecuador, we convened at Puenbo Birding Gardens near Quito on August 10, 2019

Our tour, designed by John Winnie, covered a wide variety of habitats and elevation zones. We were as low as 4,900 feet elevation and as high as 14,342 feet. The groundwork that John and Janet did the year before really paid off for those of us on the 2019 tour. The different elevations meant different habitats and different birds. We all added many life birds and were sort of numbed by the constant appearance of new species each day and at each location.

Our bird guide was Ecuador native, Edwin Orlando Perez. Edwin was a treasure for us in that he speaks English fluently and has extensive knowledge of the history and culture of Ecuador. He's a gifted naturalist and knows the birds of Ecuador by sight and sound. To put that in perspective, there are over 1600 species of birds in Ecuador while Washington state has 496. We all benefitted from Edwin's extensive knowledge, kind personality, connections, and sense of humor.



Chestnut-breasted Coronet

Our team was composed of two groups of people: those who wanted to see and identify as many species as they could and another group of photographers

who wanted to capture high quality images of spectacular birds. All of us appreciated that Susan and Jane dedicated themselves to recording all their bird sightings in eBird. Including their time in the Amazon before our tour began, these two eBirders logged 343 species. Being a member of the photographic group, Bruce came home with photos of 102

species and new bird photography skills. Traveling with a pro photographer pays many dividends.

Our tour began at Puenbo Birding Gardens near Quito. This small resort is owned by the energetic Mercedes Rivadeneira who rents only to birders or bird photographers. It's a great place to meet people who share an interest in birds. After Puenbo we drove west of Quito to spend four nights at Sachatamia Lodge at 5600 feet elevation. eBird records show 165 species at Sachatamia in August. Next, we spent two nights at Bellavista Cloud Forest Lodge (7200 feet, 163 species). Then we moved east across the Andes to the Amazon and spent two nights at Wildsumaco Lodge (4900 feet, 321 species) followed by two nights at Guango Lodge (8900 feet, 148 species). We visited other birding hotspots as we traveled between our lodging locations. We returned to Puenbo for our departures home from the Quito airport on August 22.



Toucan Barbet

It's impossible for us to name a favorite bird but several of the names seem poetic and worthy of being repeated. For example: Carunculated Caracara, Rusty Flowerpiercer, Gould's Jewelfront, Buff-winged Starfrontlet, Booted Racket-tail, Andean Emerald, Slate-throated Whitestart, Wire-crested Thorn-tail, Lineated Foliage-gleaner ... it goes on.

Feel free to contact us if you have interest in a tour like this. John Winnie plans to provide this, or a similar, tour again in the future. He also leads a tour to the Galapagos Islands in association with the Ecuador highlands tour. We recommend the tour if you enjoy travel including the company of other bird enthusiasts, wonderful lodging and food, expert guides and amazing birds.



Turquoise Jay

Under the Aspen Grove

article and photo by Thomas Bancroft, secretary,
Washington Ornithological Society

Rustling sounds filled the meadow while millions of small silvery flashes came from the copse. It was just a gentle breeze that morning but enough to make the leaves flutter. A pale green then green-silver would sparkle, and waves of these flickerings would transverse back and forth, like ripples moving across a small pond. No wonder these trees are called quaking aspens.

A loud commotion came from my left. Just 20 feet away, a 6-foot high post had a birdhouse. Six chattering Tree Swallows were doing acrobatics within a few feet of the box. A pair had a nest there, and perhaps these others were trying to usurp the space. The birds never touched, but they came within inches as each twisted and turned. Their long pointed wings and broad tails providing precise control. Finally, one bird settled onto the roof, chattering lightly, and the others dispersed. At that point, I suspected this was some kind of social interaction, a morning greeting.

My attention turned to the aspen grove, and the bird I had come to find. The “chebec, chebec, chebec,” drifted from deep in the trees. The Least Flycatcher was singing. This species is in the genus *Empidonax*, a group of small, drab birds, which look virtually identical and can be reliably separated only by their songs.



Least Flycatcher

This individual, less than six inches long, was probably sitting on a branch four or five feet off the ground, scanning for flying insects, and giving its incessant territorial chant. The remarkable thing was that he was well outside his normal breeding range.

I first saw this species in Western Pennsylvania when I was in high school. It breeds north from the central Appalachians through Canada and west to the Rockies. A few breed in northeastern Washington, but this site at Conboy National Wildlife Refuge in south-central Washington is hundreds of miles out of its normal range.

I was curious to find this bird for I had a strange feeling of connection to it, almost like this little guy was a brother. Except for undergraduate school, I'd spent my first 60 years living in Eastern United States before moving west to Seattle. Since settling here, I've felt both out of place and yet extremely content. The flycatcher, also, didn't seem to care if it was far from its regular haunts. Several dozen birders had heard his song over the last week. He was apparently here for the breeding season.

My left hand clutched the parabolic microphone pointing toward the sound, while my right hand held my binoculars in the ready position. The digital recorder was running while I searched the

understory for this elusive bird. No one was allowed anywhere beyond these trails, and if I didn't want human-made sounds in my soundtrack, I couldn't move. My best chance to see this individual was if it flew and landed on a visible branch.

Other birds were also singing on this early June morning. The elaborate warbles of a house wren came from the understory to my left, and a warbling vireo's slurry notes drifted through the quaking leaves above me. White-breasted Nuthatches, Red-breasted Sapsuckers, Western Bluebirds, and Western Wood-Pewees also made their presence known. Headsets covered my ears, giving me a stereo concert of this forest patch at the edge of the wet savanna that covered most of this Refuge.

Suddenly, I realized a second Least Flycatcher was calling off to my left, so I turned the parabolic reflector in that direction to see if the sound would become more distinct. Yes, it definitely was a second individual. Both sexes sing in this species. The first part of the female's "chebec" is slightly lower in pitch, but the second part is virtually identical. Males, though, are not evenly dispersed through suitable habitat but rather form clumps of small territories. It is like a classical lek system where the males all

compete for females on a stage rather than be spread throughout the theater. My ears weren't discerning enough to decide if this was a pair or two separate males.

They have an exciting display, but I was there at the wrong time of day. For a short period after sunset, the male will climb up through the branches to the top of the canopy offering warbles, whits, and chebecs as he goes. He then performs a "flight song" in which he flies up from the treetops for 30 seconds, singing non-stop, and then tumbles back down, much the way a butterfly might flutter. Of course, ornithologists think it has something to do with mating, but we don't know the actual function of this flight song. In my imagination, I can only assume that the male goes high to become visible to a distant female who might be wandering through looking for a mate.

A flash of brown zipped behind an aspen trunk and then landed on a dead branch a few feet off the ground. The Least Flycatcher looked off to my right, gazing up and down into the small opening under the aspens. A second later, he was gone, but a surge of energy stayed with me. This bird was living life wherever he was.

For more writing and photos from Thomas Bancroft, please see www.thomasbancroft

October Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Calendar

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1st and 3rd Wednesday	Beebe Spring Bird Walks	With Virginia Palumbo. www.ncwardubon.org/events.html
Every 3rd Wednesday	Horan Area Monthly Bird Walk	www.ncwardubon.org/events.html
October 12	The Nature of Nature Writing	At Wenatchee River Institute. See page 2
October 13	Homestream Park Opening	On the Methow River in Winthrop. A wonderful new gateway celebrating salmon and the natural world. See www.homestreampark.com/
October 24	NCWAS Social in Wenatchee	At the Museum. Live Music. Food. Friends. Mark your calendar. See page 5.



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The beautiful photos are even nicer in color.



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