



# The Wild Phlox

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## NCWAS Photo Contest Results

by Bruce McCammon, Wenatchee

The 2020 NCWAS bird photography contest ran from January 6 to April 20, 2020. It is always interesting to watch the rate at which entries fly into our email. The first three photos this year arrived only three days after the contest opened. The last entry came in at 10:30PM on the last day of the contest. Certainly, the frequency of entries picked up in the last two weeks of the entry period.

Twenty-five photographers entered the Adult category and submitted 70 photos. The Youth category had ten photos



Youth - First Place  
Bald Eagle by Ilo Curtis, Twisp

from four entrants. We would like to see many more youth entries in future contests and encourage anyone who knows a young photographer to submit their bird photos. Actually, the same holds true for adults. We can always use more photos of the beautiful birds in our area.

Holding a contest during a pandemic shut-down had its challenges. I am certain that the circumstances kept some people from getting out to get photos. The contest stalled for a short time as we sorted out some judging issues. I really want to thank a willing, and quite capable, backup judge for stepping in when needed most. I very much appreciate the network of bird photographers and birders I've built. They are a friendly, helpful group. I appreciate your support and patience.

The photos entered in this year's contest can be viewed on the NCWAS website ([www.ncwaudubon.org](http://www.ncwaudubon.org)). The winning entries are presented here. We look forward to future contests and hope that you will consider entering you best images. More winning images are on page 6.



Best of Show  
Northern Pygmy Owl with Prey by Karen Eadie, Peshastin

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”

## Social Distancing with Birds

by Steve Easley, Chelan

I was extremely lucky to have scheduled a nature and cultural tour to the Yucatan Peninsula for March 6 - 16, arriving back home just as airline travel restrictions were beginning to be instituted. What fun it was to be able to add over 75 bird species to my life list, and it was inspiring to learn about the Mayan civilization. We visited the Uxmal, Labna and Chichen Itza archeological sites and were amazed by the engineered design and construction of Maya infrastructure.

But let me focus on a birding visit I made last Saturday, May 16, to the vernal ponds one mile north of St. Andrews on Road L-NE in Douglas County. As we've been having a dry spring, I was concerned that the ponds may have shrunk in size. Not so, they were brimming with water - and shorebirds and waterfowl - on both sides of the road. Here is a list of species seen: American Coots, Northern Shovelers, American Wigeons, Cinnamon Teal, Great Blue Herons, Long-billed Dowitchers, Wilson's Phalaropes, American Avocets, Turkey Vulture, Barn Swallows, Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Brewer's Blackbirds, and Killdeers (plus Blue-winged Teal and White Pelicans at another pond south of Sims Corner). Give the ponds a visit soon. I cannot think of a better way to practice social distancing!

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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](http://www.audubon.org)





As we enter our third month of 'shelter in place' because of Covid-19, we find ourselves adjusting to this new 'normal'. The biggest change seems to be that we no longer gather in groups for fun experiences. So, in this issue of the Wild Phlox, there is no calendar on the back page. There are no events to attend. Instead, I have listed some resources that we can use to share bird sightings, learn about birds and natural history, and find out where to go birding. Socially distanced, of course.

We are sad to announce that our June 6 big day is cancelled. Still, you can go out and count birds in our four-county region, socially distanced, and report them to eBird and to Art Campbell (see page 2)

There are many other changes like learning to wear masks when going to a public place or trying to determine the right time to shop for groceries or how to get groceries delivered. But the natural world is out there, and we can still enjoy it, even if simply from our own backyards or a walk around the neighborhood. I admit to being frustrated because I had to cancel two major trips and the campgrounds are all closed. I find great solace in a quiet campsite with the sounds of the birds or a rushing stream or just the silence of it all and the lack of online activities.

This Mountain Bluebird and his mate are using a nest box attached to our house. He had to challenge some swallows that had already chosen that box. Generally the bluebirds nest away from our house and we see them on walks. This year we are delighted to see them everyday on our deck railing and this snag.

If you are reading this online and not printed, you will notice that the newsletter has two extra pages. That is because I had two excellent stories from our members that I wanted to include plus our wonderful winning photos from the NCW Audubon Society photo contest. If you have the printed copy in hand, I hope you can get to our website and see the electronic version. Not only is it longer but the photos are just so beautiful in color. If you would like to get notices for the online Wild Phlox, please send your email address to [ncwaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:ncwaudubon@gmail.com). We do not share email addresses with any other organizations.

This is the last issue of the Wild Phlox for our Audubon 'year' that begins in September. For updates from NCWAS, please visit our website or Facebook or Instagram social media sites. They are listed on page two. The Wild Phlox will return September 1.



Mountain Bluebird male  
photo by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley

## NCW Recent Bird Sightings

Chelan: A Snow Goose was seen at Peshastin. A Western Grebe was seen at Lake Wenatchee. A Canyon Wren was seen in Number Two Canyon near Wenatchee. Flammulated Owls were heard near Blewett Pass. A Northern Goshawk was seen from the Icicle Ridge trail. A Golden Eagle was seen from Wenatchee. A Northern Harrier was seen in Plain for a few weeks.

Douglas: A Long-tailed Duck was seen from Lincoln Rock Park. A Black-bellied Plover and a Black-crowned Night-heron were seen at a pond on Heritage Road. A Hermit Thrush was seen in a Mansfield alley. A Townsend's Solitaire and a Western Tanager were seen in the Mansfield cemetery. A Golden Eagle was seen from Bridgeport Hill Road. An Olive-sided Flycatcher was seen near Douglas Creek. A Pacific-slope Flycatcher and a Swainson's Thrush were seen on Road 5 NE. Black-chinned and Calliope Hummingbirds, a Clark's Nutcracker, Red-breasted Nuthatches and Cassin's Finches were seen in Rock

Island.

Ferry: A Gray Flycatcher and Loggerhead Shrike were seen in Swawilla Basin. A White-throated Sparrow was seen on Mikalson Road.

Okanogan: American White Pelicans were seen over Winthrop. A Black-necked Stilt and a Grasshopper Sparrow were seen from Cameron Lake Road. A Long-billed Curlew was seen from the Aeneas Valley Road. A Rose-breasted Grosbeak was seen near Winthrop. Black Terns were seen in the Sinlahekin Wildlife Area. Flammulated Owls were heard near Winthrop. Common Poorwills were seen near Sullivan Pond, outside of Winthrop. A Black-throated Sparrow was seen near Tonasket. An American Avocet was seen at Pearrygin Lake. Harelequin Ducks were seen on the Chewuch River. A Long-billed Curlew was seen off the East Chewuch Road. An American Redstart, a Pacific-slope Flycatcher and a Veery were seen near Mazama. A Gray Catbird was heard between Twisp and Winthrop.

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

# Road Birding - the Moses Coulee Loop

article and photos  
by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

Here is one of my favorite hunting routes for birding from the road. Starting in Wenatchee, take the Senator George Sellar bridge to East Wenatchee and Highway 28. Go south on Highway 28 for 15.5 miles to Palisades Road. Follow Palisades Road 25 miles to Rimrock Road. Turn right and take Rimrock Road north to Highway 2. On Hwy 2 go right, easterly, for 1.1 miles to the Jameson Lake Road. Go six miles to the lake. Returning home, retrace that path, or stay on Highway 2 and go west through Waterville, down the face of the Waterville Plateau through Pine Canyon to Orondo and back to Wenatchee.

There is a lot I can say about birding on the Moses Coulee loop. The route follows the spectacular geology of central Washington - and where there is a change of geology, there is a change of habitat, and where there is a change of habitat, there are different birds.

It's May. My birding partner Denise meets me at my house in Malaga, three miles down the Columbia from Wenatchee. It's my turn to drive, so she loads her birding gear into my station wagon. She is an expert. She travels with a spotting scope, binoculars, and an armful of bird books - Sibley's and Peterson's of course, but she also has specialized books like *Sparrows of the United States* by Broadley and Rising, and *Birds of the Pacific Northwest* by Shewey and Blount. We fill our coffee thermoses and tell our husbands that we will be a while, and we take off.

Denise and I each keep lists of the species we see. She hopes to add to her life list now approaching 500 species. Her work takes her around the nation, and wherever she goes, she plans to take a few days off for birding. She has found all the easy ones, and she practices staying sharp by competing with her daughter to see who can spot the most species each year, starting over each New Year's Day.

By contrast, I am a duffer. I started enjoying birding as a ten-year-old on the Oregon Coast. When my parents kept me home from school to recover from a tonsillectomy, Mom plunked me down on a chair in front of a window and gave me a 1950's era copy of Audubon's *Birds of America*. The first species I identified was an Oregon Junco. A few months later, I was thrilled to see a Pileated Woodpecker and to find it in the book.

I started my own "life list" of bird sightings only after I retired. It is up to only 167 entries, all in North Central Washington. I have identified the easy ones, like California Quail, myself, but I have been careful to verify sightings of countless little brown birds with experts I have met through the North Central Washington Audubon Society.

Starting in Malaga, amid orchards, we see the plethora of species still joining the cacophony of birds at dawn in every May morning. We note House Sparrows, Northern Flickers, California Quail, Mourning Doves, Brewer's Blackbirds, Killdeer, American Robins, American Goldfinches, and Red-

winged Blackbirds. In Lake Cortez, the irrigation reservoir in the middle of my subdivision, we see Mallards, Common Mergansers, Hooded Mergansers, Canada Geese, and Wood Ducks.

For ten years I have seen the Ospreys return to their huge stick nest atop a platform in the middle of the Appleyard railroad switching yard. I am told that organizations like the PUD, erect platforms for the Ospreys to nest on, to lure them off antennae and aials. The Ospreys always nest on the highest structure near a river. Two or three winters ago, a windstorm knocked the top several feet off the nest and left the rest canted to the southeast like a leaning tower of Pisa. Nevertheless, the Ospreys returned and added to the nest, building straight up from their crooked base.

We follow the Columbia upstream to the Senator George Sellar Bridge to East Wenatchee and take Highway 28 down river again. Even before we get to the bridge, we see an American Crow and a Bald Eagle, and in town, Rock Pigeons fluttering around their choice of urban habitats.

From East Wenatchee we take Highway 28 downstream past the Rock Island Dam and the abutting wall of spectacular basaltic columns that look like great crystals bent into a curve. Fifteen-and-a-half miles downstream, we turn left off the highway onto the Palisades Road. It is not well a well-marked road, but it is in good condition, a paved two-lane blacktop. However, it has few turnouts for us slower drives to allow faster drivers to pass.

The Palisades Road runs up the flat floor of the Lower Moses Coulee. The Coulee is lined with walls of tall, dark columns of basalt. The floor is irrigated, a lush and green agricultural area planted with grass and hay crops. We see Barn Swallows, Tree Swallows, the Western Meadowlark, Western Kingbirds perched on utility wires, Bullock's Oriole, American Kestrels, Red-Tailed Hawks, a sole Turkey Vulture perched on a pole in its usual hunched posture, and a Lazuli Bunting. We spot a Lark Sparrow, a sighting we confirm with Denise's specialty book.

There is no traffic on the road, so we slow the car to a creep, open the sunroof, roll down the windows, and listen for bird calls. Hearing one, I back up, but the back-up signal on my car warns about traffic coming from the side. I check my mirrors. I am mystified until a broad swath of irrigation water sweeps over the car, saturating us.

We inch along for about 25 miles. At the upper end of the Coulee, the road goes right through the middle of the Billingsley Farm with a house and corral on one side of the road and heavy equipment parked on the other. Barn Swallows buzz around the farmstead.

The road begins to climb a twisted path to the Upper Moses Coulee. Part way up the climb, we hear a buzzing bird call. We stop, look, and listen, and spot a Rock Wren in its

favorite habitat, a pile of rocks. Our climb ends at the floor of the upper Moses Coulee. We take Rimrock Road left, northerly, through wheat fields. Some of the wheat fields we pass are marked "Hunting by Permission Only." I am sure the owner is addressing men with shotguns and pointing dogs in search of pheasant, not older women with binoculars and a spotting scope, and we respect the private property.

Cliff Swallows swarm in and out of the neighboring basalt cliffs. Mountain Bluebirds occupy nest boxes mounted on fenceposts all along our route. A bright male poses obligingly for a photograph.

My camera is ideal for quick grab shots of twitchy little birds frightened by the black eye of a camera lens. I'll pull up their photos on my computer later, to examine their field marks to identify them carefully at leisure. The camera is a Nikon P 600 point-and-shoot with internal stabilization for hand-held shots. It is the 35mm equivalent of a 26 to 1440 mm lens, and with all the manual focus, aperture, and exposure adjustments of a digital SLR. Still, I'd like to train myself to simply see field marks faster, the way Denise and other practiced birders do.

After about six miles on the Rimrock Road, we come to U.S. Highway 2. From there, we turn right and go east on Hwy 2 for just 1.1 miles, then turn left onto Jameson Lake Road. It is not well marked; it's not even shown on the Rand McNally Road Atlas, though it does show on my AAA paper map and my GPS. The road proceeds through sagebrush and rabbit brush, typical shrub-steppe habitat, home to Horned Larks, and to Say's Phoebe, which I have mistaken for a faded American Robin. In six miles we reach the south end of Jameson Lake.

With the change of habitat to wetlands, we see a whole new cast of avian characters. The lake is long and narrow, and the road follows its eastern edge. From the shore we see living jewels of colorful waterfowl - Ruddy Duck, Northern Shoveler, Mallard, Red-Necked Grebe, and a Yellow-headed Blackbird. We do not overlook the Double-crested Cormorant, Clark's Grebe, Western Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, Lesser Scaup, and Great Blue Heron. I am incredulous that any bird could be so bright as the metallic orange of the Cinnamon Teal in the sunlight.

We backtrack, then turn right, westbound, on Highway 2 across the Waterville Plateau. A Common Raven croaked his greeting, or his warning to us, from the roof of a barn. We follow the highway down the face of the Waterville Plateau through Pine Canyon to Orondo, and to the Columbia River,

noting orchard birds and river birds along the way back to Wenatchee.

I once took a course in nature photography, including birds. I expected our teacher to say that we would need cameras with long lenses and fast exposures. No. He said that the first lesson was to slow down and to look deeply. I think we have applied that lesson pretty well. We have seen fifty species. We have traveled around 120 miles in six hours. That's twenty miles per hour.

More information about birding the Waterville Plateau can be found at [www.ncwaudubon.org/BirdingSite/routes.php?RoutesID=8](http://www.ncwaudubon.org/BirdingSite/routes.php?RoutesID=8) and <https://wabirdguide.org/beezeley-hills-and-moses-coulee/> and <https://wabirdguide.org/waterville-plateau-and-bridgeport/>



Say's Phoebe

Extra Reading Matter for the Curious: Mason, Charles L., *The Geological History of the Wenatchee Valley and Adjacent Vicinity*, Second Edition Revised, 2006, The World Publishing Company, Wenatchee, WA.

"*Wenatchee Ice Age Floods Geological Trails*," illustrated map, The Wenatchee Valley Visitor and Convention Bureau and the Wenatchee Valley museum and Cultural Center, Wenatchee, WA.

Judd, Ron, "*Moses Coulee: Dramatic tales of the land and its people*," The Seattle Times Pacific Northwest Magazine, April 23, 2014.

Kirby Billingsley was a proponent of public ownership of utilities when that was still a legal question, also a strong conservationist, and strong proponent of public parks along the Columbia: website of the Chelan County PUD, <https://www.chelanpud.org/parks-and-recreation/our-parks/day-use-parks-Kirby-Billingsley-hydro-park-Kirby-Billingsly-Mr.-Columbia-river.org> (Accessed May 3, 2020)

"*The Big Year*," movie with Steve Martin, Jack Black, and Owen Wilson, competing to see 1,000 species in a year. Based on the 2005 book *The Big Year* by Mark Obmascik.



Mountain Bluebird



# More Winning Photos

Images from the North Central Washington Audubon Society 2020 Photo Contest.  
Continued from page 1



Adult - First Place  
Pileated Woodpecker  
Gordon Congdon, Wenatchee



Youth - Second Place  
Eastern Kingbird  
Jesse Utz, Grand Coulee



Youth - Honorable Mention  
species unknown  
Jaiden O'Banion, East Wenatchee



Adult - Second Place  
Osprey  
Kurt Snover, Winthrop



Adult - Honorable Mention  
Clark's Nutcracker  
Tim Nicol, Republic

# Bird Fest 2020 Went Virtual!

This year Wenatchee River Institute and North Central Washington Audubon Society's Spring Bird Fest went virtual. We are pleased to announce it was a great success! The weekend included a Stay-At-Home Bird Watching Challenge, daily bird photography from local photographers, a video getting to know some of the faces of bird fest, a virtual trip up Number 2 Canyon, a video connecting the young birders to our feathered friends, and a couple happy hours with a fabulous bird trivia game. Sip and Paint of Leavenworth held a virtual paint night. Icicle Creek Center for the Arts transformed their artist exhibition to online, too. There wasn't much time, but all of these organizations came together to make it happen!

by Rachel Bishop, Wenatchee River Institute

Videos from virtual Bird Fest can be seen at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEiyeGRgaLY&t=69s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEiyeGRgaLY&t=69s) and [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLG-U4VWzAM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZLG-U4VWzAM)

Highlights: Over 50 households participated in the at home birding challenge with 122 bird species seen over the 4 days! Birding happened all across Washington in Leavenworth, Plain, Peshastin, Cashmere, East Wenatchee, Bellevue, Everson, Bellingham, Bremerton, Kingston, Sequim, Cle Elum, Moses Lake, Monitor, Malaga, Olympia, Snohomish, Lacey, Winthrop, and Twisp. Folks outside of Washington as well: Stevensville, MT and Santa Rosa, CA. We look forward to next year's Bird Fest and hope to see you there! Happy Birding!

## Book Review:

### *What It's Like to be a Bird*

by Merry Roy, Wenatchee

David Sibley's 2020 book is a surprise. *What It's Like to be a Bird* is definitely not a field guide. His original idea actually was to create a field guide for kids, so he was surprised too. This is a large format book with stunning paintings, many life-sized, of more than 200 species. Fitting a life-sized pelican on a 8.5 x 11 page doesn't work, but Sibley paints the pelican's head, bill, and neck, and our imagination fills in the rest.

The text is a series of mini essays, each focusing on one detail of the bird's biology in nontechnical terms. He incorporates new scientific research on how birds adapt to environmental changes and cross references topics, creating a network of understanding bird's senses, flight, migration, feeding, survival, and social behavior.

This is a book for birders and non-birders, for the young and for the old. It is meant to be browsed, not read in sequence, and most importantly, it is meant to lead us to become more engaged and active observers of the natural world.

David Sibley wrote that he learned "a bird's experience is far richer, more complex and more thoughtful than I'd imagined".

A Book for All Seasons, the Leavenworth bookstore, ordered Sibley's book for me. The trip to pick it up was a perfect opportunity to put his counsel into action - go out into nature and be an engaged and active observer.

*editor's note - I ordered my copy from Trail's End Bookstore in Winthrop and was able to pick it up curbside. Well worth the purchase.*

## Pairings at the Rooster Comb

by Merry Roy, Wenatchee

Trailside Oasis

Kestrel and Raven:

hints of animosity, undertone of David and Goliath.

Red-tailed Hawk and Red-tailed Hawk:

whiff of romance, intimation of matrimony.

Meadowlark and Wind:

suggestion of ventriloquism, breath of melody.

Blooming Bitterbrush and Big Sagebrush:

scent of honey, pungency of shrub steppe.

Shootingstars and Balsamroot:

constellations of magenta, bouquet of gold.

Drink up! Santé! Salud!

To your health! \*

\*research shows that being in nature improves cognitive, emotional and physical health for both children and adults. Some doctors even write prescriptions for going to parks and spending time in other natural places.

from Richard Louv in his book Vitamin N.



American Avocet at Atkins Lake  
photo by Joe Roy, Wenatchee



# Accidental Serendipity

by Mary Gallagher, Lake Wenatchee

*“Nearly all of his music is sweet and tender, lapsing from his round breast like water over the smooth lip of a pool, then breaking farther on into a sparkling foam of melodious notes, which glow with subdued enthusiasm... The more striking strains are perfect arabesques of melody, composed of a few full, round, mellow notes, embroidered with delicate trills which fade and melt in long slender cadences. In a general way his music is that of the streams refined and spiritualized. The deep booming notes of the falls are in it, the trills of rapids, the gurgling of margin eddies, the low whispering of level reaches, and the sweet tinkle of separate drops oozing from the ends of mosses and falling into tranquil pools.” John Muir writing about the Water-Ouzel (American Dipper) in The Mountains of California (1894)*

Due to Covid-19 “Stay-at-Home” order and related closures, I decided to make the most of this forced time at home, getting things done inside and outside to exercise and explore. I especially would be looking and listening for my favorite bird, the Belted Kingfisher. Luckily, living near Lake Wenatchee, we have a yard and our neighborhood includes forest and riparian habitats.



Yellow-breasted Chat  
photo by Bruce McCammon, Wenatchee

Early in April, I decided to walk through the closed Nason Creek campground to check on a cliff face where in 2013 a pair of Kingfishers had dug a burrow. For reasons unknown to me they abandoned the nest and had not returned. Perhaps this year they would?



Osprey  
photo by Monica Maxwell, Wenatchee

As I walked around the closed gate, I heard loud chirping above me. The Osprey had returned to their nest on the broken top of an elder ponderosa pine. They sounded like a married couple arguing over where to put the new furniture or in their case the newest branch. As a large shadow passed over me, all grew quiet. One of the ospreys had left and now the other could arrange the branch to its own liking.

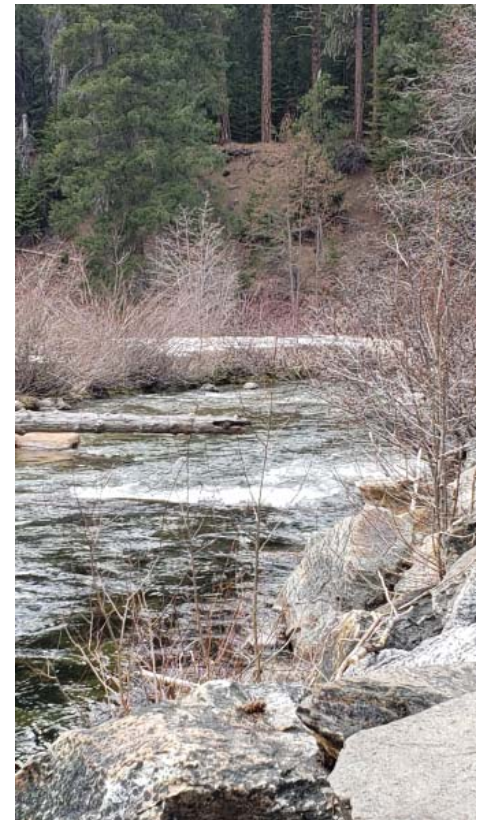
The only sound was the music of water: Nason Creek unfrozen and gurgling and bubbling over, under, and between rocks and logs. I was listening for the yattering of kingfishers

as I moved to glass the cliff. No new holes. No Kingfisher. Discouraged I looked down at the spring beauties popping up from the pinecone littered ground. Their cheerfulness made me smile. That is when I heard the singer, louder than the creek, and

recognized an American Dipper.

I followed the sound of his song. There on an exposed river rock, I saw the small, plump, grey body dipping on strong legs. Then I heard another song, at first distant and then closer, as a second dipper flew in and landed on the

rock. I didn’t know that both sexes of dippers could sing? Watching through my binoculars I saw that the second dipper had something in its beak, and yet still could sing. Was it an offering for the other? Both were mature birds. As if to answer my questions the second dipper flew up to the tip of a fallen log. That is when I heard a third song, muffled but a song. My binoculars followed and there nestled in the broken tip of a long-fallen tree hung up on a gravel bar log jam was a spherical mossy nest. In my search for a kingfisher nest I had discovered a dipper’s nest.



Dipper nest on log  
photo by Mary Gallagher, Lake Wenatchee

For the next four weeks I was a curious but cautious watcher of this nest. Careful to keep my distance and not to stay long. I watched in all directions so that any ravens or other corvid species in the area would not be clued in where they might find a meal. I came at different times of the



day and from different directions. I watched from across the river atop the cliff face. I watched from between the large, hard rocks brought in to keep the creekbank from being eroded away. I saw spring beauties and glacier lilies



Dipper nest

photo by Tim Gallagher, Lake Wenatchee

bloom and fade away as arrowleaf basalmroot budded and bloomed. The willows, alders, red osier dogwood and vine maples slowly unfurled. Song Sparrows and Pacific Wrens sang. A Mallard drake and his two hens paddled by. Yellow-rumped Warblers flew out from the willows hawking after insects. The Osprey pair flew over often and continued having loud discussions.

The water rose as the days warmed and rain fell. The rock I first saw the adult dippers on became submerged. I worried the nest log may have the same fate. Nason Creek's song grew louder and faster. I still listened and looked for kingfishers, but mostly I learned about dippers.

They are amazingly dedicated parents. Taking turns. Often one stayed near the nest while the other foraged for food. At first the morsels seemed small, and the adult bird would disappear into the nest, often flying out with a tiny white balloon, what I learned was a fecal sac. Delivering the groceries on the way in and taking out the trash when they left. The groceries got bigger; I could see wings and grub bodies. The fecal sacs enlarged also. The parents were no longer going into the nest. Three wide opened beaks greeted them at the

entrance. All crying out, "feed me, feed me, feed me."

I calculated as best I could when they might fledge. My husband brought his camera with its 400mm lens. I shared the location with a few trusted friends.

I was grateful for Covid-19 closing this campground. I kept watching the water level. Then white paint was splattered on the log below the entrance hole. The nestlings had fine gray feathers and bulged out of the opening...and then life duties kept me away. I returned and saw an empty nest. What had happened?

A ringing song came to my ears—at the far end of the log a pale grey fledgling was being fed. The adult passed off the food and was gone. The youngster with rounded smooth feathers on



Dipper feeding youngsters  
photo by Tim Gallgher, Lake Wenatchee

stubby wings was dipping on pinkish legs. As my binoculars swept across the nest log, I saw another fledgling sound asleep in the sunshine. The one at the far end of the log started walking back, and without a moment of hesitation, confidently walked across where creek water was lapping a low point, to join its sibling sleeping in the sun. I was concerned about the third baby. Was he or she gone?

I crept closer to the nest than I had been, using the leafing out vegetation as a screen. I stopped just in time to see the third baby emerge and hop up on top of the log as the other parent brought in a moth. As soon as the youngster had it the parent began to sing. I turned on my phone video. As I recorded, I heard two songs. The fledgling and parent began a duet with Nason Creek singing along.

Just as John Muir described in 1894, "*composed of a few full, round, mellow notes, embroidered with delicate trills which fade and melt in long slender cadences.*"

Here I was, an audience of one. Not in the Sierras, but in my own neighborhood at 2,000 feet in the Cascade Mountains.

For the next few days, the youngsters stayed close to the nest, and I think probably spent the night inside. I never saw any of them fly, but the last time I was there, they were a good two hundred yards downstream from the nest. One parent had two fledglings on the far side of the creek and was busy bringing them food. While on my side of the creek the other parent and third fledgling were dipping about in a calm protected pool, the youngster finding a grub on its own.

Can I dare say I am grateful for this time? But I must. There are hidden blessings in the restrictions of Covid-19.



Sora

photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

# June Wild Phlox

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