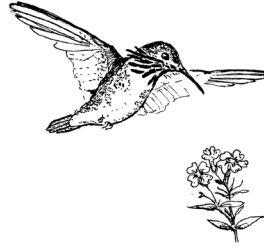


# The Wild Phlox

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## The Fisher Queen

A new year is a time for new goals and new life birds. Maybe a new favorite bird? I doubt that I will ever change my favorite bird although, my life bird list continues to grow.

I do not remember when or where I saw my first Belted Kingfisher, but I do remember the date and location when my fascination with kingfishers began. It was June 7, 2004, in a friend's backyard in Seattle. We were planning our first multi-night backpack trip in Olympic National Park. I was thumbing through the *Cascade-Olympic Natural History: A Trailside Reference* by Daniel Mathews. A kingfisher illustration and these words stopped me. "Our kingfishers, in real life, raise their young amid a heap of regurgitated fish bones at the end of a hole in a mud bank. Is 'nest' too sweet a term for such debris?"

I had never given any thought to where a kingfisher nested. A bird I associated with rivers and bays, flying fast, or perched motionless in a tree, it just seemed odd they nested in a dark tunnel. Living in Seattle, near the Ballard Locks, I was familiar with the local kingfishers, but mud banks? All I could visualize at the time were cement walls. Where could I find a kingfisher nest? I did find kingfisher nests and learned more about these birds and other birds in the neighborhood. As I became a birder, my fascination was strongest with the kingfishers. They are my favorite bird. Why? They are mostly blue, my favorite color. Their shape is easy to recognize

with a stocky body and a head that seems oversized, with their crest of feathers and large dagger of a bill. About 13 inches, they are a medium-sized bird. They have many calls from a soft muttering to a loud rattling. I call it "yattering". They often fly low and fast over the water with a staccato wing beat. They can stop their flight and hover in place, peering down to fish from mid-air. They perch patiently, sometimes with their head turned to one side or the other, but often



looking straight down into the water for hours. Fishing. When the fish are there, they launch into a dive with speed and precision, piercing the water, and submerging below the surface. Every time I witness the water clap shut over them, I hold my breath. I don't exhale

by Mary Gallagher, Lake Wenatchee painting by Christina Baal, used with permission until they erupt, twisting and shaking water in all directions to fly back to their branch with their prize. Their eating process is most intriguing. They thwack their catch to be sure it is dead, removing excess scales and sharp spines. In a final maneuver, they align the fish with their bill and swallow it headfirst.

I will go one step further; the female Belted Kingfisher is my favorite bird. She is more colorful than her mate, which is unusual in the world of birds. They both have a powder blue breast band, but she has an added splash of rusty red in a lower band across her breast. *Atypical sexual dimorphism* is the scientific term.

This painting, *The Fisher Queen*, captures the essence of the female belted kingfisher. A poised, confident, powerful bird. The artist, Christina Baal, granted permission to share. She hopes to inspire others to paint birds. We met in May of 2018 at The Biggest Week in American Birding in Ohio. She has an ambitious goal to draw 10,000 birds. Currently she is nearing 500. Check out her website: [drawingtenthousandbirds.com](http://drawingtenthousandbirds.com)

I am not planning to paint even one bird. My 2021 goals are to write about the Belted Kingfisher and organize my life bird list, at least the number of kingfisher species I have seen. Maybe thirty of the 114 species. Another twenty plus essays. That would be fun.

What are your creative birding goals for this new year?

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”

# Protect birds From Salmonellosis

from WDFW

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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.

According to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), sick and dying birds are being reported in western Washington. The current die-off of finches - such as Pine Siskins - as well as other songbirds, is attributed to salmonellosis, a common and usually fatal bird disease caused by the *Salmonella* bacteria, according to WDFW veterinarian Kristin Mansfield. “The first indication of the disease for bird watchers to look for is often a seemingly tame bird on or near a feeder. The birds become very lethargic, fluff out their feathers, and are easy to approach. This kind of behavior is generally uncommon to birds,” Mansfield said. “Unfortunately, at this point there is very little people can do to treat them. The best course it to leave the birds alone.” If you observe sick birds, WDFW recommends cleaning and disinfecting feeders and the ground around them. You may want to discontinue feeding birds for the time being. You can find more information about salmonellosis at <https://wdfw.wa.gov/news/help-protect-wild-birds-deadly-salmonellosis>

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Why do we want your email? We may need to contact you regarding your donation. Also, we occasionally send email notifications about events or opportunities. You can unsubscribe at any time. We will not share your email address with others.

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Feeding birds seems like the perfect pandemic hobby. Set up feeders where they can be easily observed from the comfort of your house with binoculars handy. Make sure to have some water for the birds too. We like an assortment of feed – black oil sunflower seed, niger seed, suet, peanuts and a peanut butter/shortening spread mixture on bark – to attract an assortment of bird species. We are seeing a lot of California Quail this year so my husband put out some cracked corn, thinking they would like that. I am not sure it was beneficial to the quail, but it sure did attract a lot of English Sparrows. We have never seen to many of them at our place, knock on wood, so when the corn was gone, he did not get anymore. The quail still come around to get sunflower seeds. My husband also constructed a large and a small brush pile, quite a ways from the house, that the quail use for cover when making their way up here. Some may spend the night in it too.

And then we saw the notice from the WDFW to be on the lookout for *Salmonella* in birds. Oh dear. And someone in the Methow is seeing conjunctivitis in American Goldfinches. I see that in maybe one or two birds every other year or so. For more information on that, see <https://feederwatch.org/learn/house-finch-eye-disease/> And then a friend of mine mentioned that she could no longer feed birds because of the alarming number of free-roaming and/or feral cats. She said she was seeing a few dead birds every week. That is a real and preventable tragedy.

So, what's a person to do? I can only suggest that we all must make our own decisions based on our own local situations. When I have seen conjunctivitis symptoms, I have tried to clean up our bird feeding area and the feeders. We also do not feed year-round. Once spring arrives, the feeders get cleaned up and put away. The debris underneath them goes to the compost pile. And we get out hummingbird feeders. If there were free-roaming cats coming to our feeders, we would do everything in our power to force them to leave. Living in the country without close neighbors, we have not had to face that here.

We have enjoyed watching birds from the comfort of our home this winter. The Pine Siskin numbers are amazing! Most days, we are seeing Red Crossbills and Evening Grosbeaks too. What a fabulous color combination! Steller's Jays are attracted to the peanuts and are funny to watch. I am usually up before dawn and there are no birds. As the sun makes its way towards the horizon and the distant peaks begin to show the color of alpenglow, the birds begin to arrive – first a few finches and then the jays. And then a lot of finches (house, gold, siskins) and some woodpeckers – hairy and downy and up to six Northern Flickers! The grosbeaks, crossbills and quail come later. And we get occasional visitors like Northern Pygmy Owl, Northern Shrike, American Kestrel and Sharp-shinned or Cooper's Hawk. Everyone has to eat.

## NCW Recent Bird Sightings

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

Chelan: Anna's Hummingbirds are wintering in Chelan and Wenatchee. A California Scrub Jay was seen on the outskirts of Wenatchee. A Rough-legged Hawk, a Say's Phoebe, a Greater White-fronted Goose, Snow Geese, and a White-throated Sparrow were seen at Confluence State Park. A Wilson's Warbler was seen at Beebe Springs. A Red-necked Grebe was seen from Will Risk Park. A Peregrine Falcon and a Gray-crowned Rosy Finch were seen in Nahahum Canyon. A White-headed Woodpecker was seen in Cashmere.

Douglas: A Gyrfalcon was seen south of Leahy Junction on Highway 17. Snowy Owls have been seen near Atkins Lake. American Tree Sparrows and Snow Buntings are being seen on the Waterville Plateau. A Glaucous Gull was seen on the Columbia across from Brewster. Pygmy Nuthatches were observed in pine trees near Bridgeport. At Bridgeport Bar there were Golden-crowned Sparrows, Hermit Thrush, Lincoln's Sparrow and Purple Finch. A Northern Shrike was seen in Moses Coulee.

Ferry: A Blue Jay has been frequenting feeders in the eastern part of Ferry County. Those same feeders hosted Cassin's Finches. Ruffed Grouse and a Northern Pygmy Owl were also seen in that area. White-winged Crossbills and Common Redpolls were seen on the Colville Forest. A

Rough-legged Hawk and Pygmy Nuthatches were seen on Toroda Creek Road.

Okanogan: Pine Grosbeaks and Northern Pygmy Owls have been seen around the Methow Valley. A Rough-legged Hawk was seen near Winthrop. A Western Screech Owl has been eyeing chickens outside of Twisp. Two White-winged Scoters and a Wilson's Snipe were seen at the Starr boat launch on the Columbia. Some Western Bluebirds are spending the winter in Winthrop. Others were seen at the Whitestone Lake boat launch. A Harris's Sparrow is also wintering near Winthrop. Anna's Hummingbirds are being reported in Twisp and Okanogan. A Golden-crowned Sparrow was observed in Twisp. An American White Pelican, a Marsh Wren, a Yellow-rumped Warbler, Virginia Rails, a Dunlin, a Say's Phoebe, and an Iceland Gull were seen at Cassimer Bar. A Barred Owl was seen on the ski trails north of Winthrop. A Red-breasted Sapsucker was observed high in the Rendezvous area north of Winthrop. Gray-crowned Rosy Finches are being observed near Twisp. Four Trumpeter Swans have been seen several times near Winthrop. A Savannah Sparrow was reported near Brewster. Flocks of Bohemian Waxwings were seen in Winthrop. A Snowy Owl was reported in the Aeneas Valley. A Red-breasted Merganser was seen on Lake Osooyoos.

# Being Glue

by Mark Oswood, Wenatchee

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.  
“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” J.R.R. Tolkien – The Fellowship of The Ring

We find ourselves thrown together by time and place and circumstance. But we are bound together by our choices. You are givers. You are givers of things material and things invisible. You are givers of yourselves. Your giving is a kind of glue, binding together communities. Please know that you are much needed and always appreciated. Thank you.

Our once-a-year donation request fedges in late summer. Below, we list folks making donations through early January 2021. We'll list donations made after early January in the September 2021 Phlox. Larry and Penny Tobiska are “first responders” for donations received. The list of donors is derived from their data.

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# Nason Ridge Community Forest Update

by Mary and Tim Gallgher,  
Lake Wenatchee

With this being a budget year in Olympia, a lot of important decisions are on the table. The session runs from January 11 until April 25 and will be a predominantly remote session due to Covid-19.

For this upcoming session, the Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) has recommended a funding level of \$22 million for the 2021-2023 capital budget. There are fifteen grant requests adding up to a total of \$33,489,342. Nason Ridge ranks #1.

So why ask that the 3,714 acres on Nason Ridge be funded as the newest Washington State Community Forest? Nason Ridge is the premier statewide example of how extensive local support and fundraising of over one million dollars in just a few months led to protection of land from a single use industrial forest to all resource values and recreation. With approval of the funding and designation as a Community Forest, Nason Ridge will be a model for a sustainable, multi-use forestland locally owned and managed.

Western Rivers Conservancy (WRC) working with the local community and the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust (CDLT), negotiated a purchase agreement after Weyerhaeuser halted logging plans and agreed to sell the property. WRC's main concern was to protect Nason and Kahler Creeks, both crucial sources of cold water for the Wenatchee River and prime habitat for chinook, coho, sockeye, steelhead, and bull trout.

WRC is continuing to work with CDLT and now Chelan County and the state to raise the millions of dollars needed to allow the county to become the long-term steward of Nason Ridge and create a Community Forest. To date, Chelan County has received a \$750,000 grant from the Washington Salmon Recovery Board and a \$500,000 grant from the Chelan County Public Utilities District Tributary Committee. The additional \$3,000,000 grant from the RCO would ensure that Nason Ridge will stay in local control. As a Community Forest, 3,714 acres of forestland will be protected for habitat preservation, ecological restoration, recreation, and sustainable forest management. The overall goal of the Community Forest is to combine ongoing community participation in land use decisions with active forest management that provides benefits from job creation,

restoration that can meaningfully contribute to salmon and steelhead recovery goals, forest health improvements for fire and climate change resiliency, and recreation and environmental education opportunities.

## HOW CAN YOU HELP TODAY?

Please email or mail a letter of support to your state representatives encouraging them to support funding for the Community Forest grant program and mention that Nason Ridge is the top priority grant recipient. Go one step further and contact the members of the Capital Budget Committee. Representative Mike Steele, from the twelfth District where Nason Ridge is located, is a ranking member of the Capital Budget Committee. He is in the best position to help get this funding accepted.

The three Chelan County Commissioners, Yakama Nation, NCW Audubon, Weyerhaeuser, Trout Unlimited, and many others stand in support of the Nason Ridge project and funding for the Community Forest grant program. The Commissioners have met with the twelfth District representatives and communicated their support. Senator Brad Hawkins supports the program, as he was a co-sponsor of last year's SB 5873. The County has applied for one of the grants to secure funds to take over stewardship of Nason Ridge from Western Rivers Conservancy. Nason Ridge is a classic example of how grassroots community efforts successfully coordinated resource priorities, recreational needs, and habitat improvements in the short-term. YOUR efforts are now needed to move this project into a Community Forest designation and long-term sustainability.

For additional Nason Ridge details, please visit the North Central Washington Audubon Conservation page website.



American Dipper  
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

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## Save the Date for NCW Audubon's Presentation for the 2021 Environmental Film Series

by Merry Roy, Wenatchee

Join us in viewing a video talk by Dr. Drew Lanham and participate in a follow-up Zoom discussion with a local panel March 16 at 7 pm. Dr. Lanham is an ornithologist, college professor, conservation activist, poet, and author of *Nine Rules for the Black Birdwatcher* and *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*. You will be able to view the presentation at your leisure and join us virtually for the discussion March 16 from 7 – 8 pm.

REGISTRATION AND MORE INFORMATION COMING SOON

# NCW Audubon's LISTSERV

by Art Campbell, Winthrop

Do you watch birds?

Do you want to watch birds?

Would you be interested in what other birdwatchers are seeing in our chapter's four-county region?

Would you like to tell other birdwatchers what you're seeing?

If your answer to any of these questions is yes, our chapter's birding listserv, NCWABird, is for you! The listserv is an online forum where any listserv member can post an observation by sending an e-mail to the listserv address. The e-mail is then automatically sent to all members.

As a member, you can post observations of birds (common or rare, it doesn't matter) and their behaviors that you find interesting. You can also ask questions. For example, some members have taken photos of birds, and then posted the photo with an e-mail to the listserv asking for identification help.

Started in December 2012, the listserv currently has over 100 members, and we want to expand that number to include birdwatchers throughout Chelan, Douglas, Ferry, and Okanogan counties.

To join the list serv, send an e-mail to Art Campbell at rapakivi@methow.com. He'll put you on the membership list and then you'll be ready to go, receiving posts from others and able to send an e-mail with your own observations. If you try it, we hope you'll like it, but if you find it isn't your cup of tea, Art will happily remove your email address from the listserv.



Gray Partridge  
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

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## A Harris's Tale

The Harris's Sparrow is North America's largest sparrow, named by John James Audubon for Edward Harris, his friend and travel companion in the mid-1840's. With its chunky size, black bib, and pink bill, the Harris's Sparrow really stands out when in a mixed flock of other "little brown birds." It nests entirely in northern Canada in stunted boreal forest from western Hudson Bay northwest to the Yukon. Because of its remote habitat and shy behavior in summer, its nest was not discovered until 1931, long after those of most other North American birds. After breeding, most Harris's head south to winter in the southern Great Plains, from Nebraska to eastern Texas. Each year a tiny number drift west toward the Pacific coast. It is reported to be a "rare but regular" wintering bird in Washington.

During the wintertime, it is a species that often comes to feeders in brushy areas. It likes black sunflower seeds, millet, and cracked corn. Apparently, our winter feeder and



photo and article by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

brushy yard has what it likes as a juvenile Harris's Sparrow spent the winter with us in 2018 and this winter another juvenile arrived in late November and has visited most days since then. If we are lucky, it will continue to keep us entertained until it leaves for spring migration in late February. Unfortunately, Christmas Bird Count records since 1965 have shown a significant decline in Harris's Sparrow numbers on their wintering grounds. Despite being relatively unstudied, there

has been a population decline of 63% since 1970. In 2016, it was placed on North America's Birds' Watch List which includes bird species that are most at risk of extinction without significant conservation actions to reverse declines and reduce threats. Habitat loss and climate change are both thought to be causes of its decline. It is my hope that the elegant Harris's Sparrow visiting us this winter will stay safe, well fed, and successfully find its way back to the far north to breed in the spring.

# NCW Christmas Bird Count Results

## **Bridgeport, reported by Mike Schroeder**

Meredith Spencer and I thank all who helped make the 25th annual Bridgeport Christmas Bird Count a success on December 16. We observed 101 species with an estimated count of 32,540 birds. This was almost 9,000 above our long-term average. Even though some of us had to deal with fog, in addition to the pandemic, the Bridgeport area might be one of the best birding spots in eastern Washington. Notable increases included Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Greater Scaup, Hooded Merganser, scaup (both species combined), Ruddy Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Long-eared Owl, Belted Kingfisher, American Crow, White-breasted Nuthatch, Song Sparrow, and Pine Siskin. A few of the birds that declined included Ring-necked Duck, California Quail, Horned Lark, American Robin, waxwings (both species combined), and Red Crossbill. One of our favorites, Sharp-tailed Grouse, was observed in multiple locations, despite this year's wildfire.

Forty-four species have been observed every year and 159 species have been observed at least once on count day (not counting nine species only observed during the count week). We added three new species this year.

You may be aware that Rick Hendrick passed away ten days prior to the count. Rick participated in the first 24 counts and was always at home when chasing an elusive species, building and monitoring nest boxes, restoring habitat, and feeding birds. Rick was a Vietnam vet (Bronze Star and Purple Heart), a Volunteer of the Year for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and a beekeeper. This year, and in past years, we were able to enjoy some of the 'fruits' of Rick's labor - honey. We will think of Rick when we peruse the books from his bird library. He is going to be greatly missed by all of us.

## **Leavenworth, reported by Joe Veverka**

I thought there were a few interesting findings this year. Heather Murphy had 56 Red Crossbills on the Dempsey Route. Gretchen Rohde found 14 Pine Grosbeaks up Eagle Creek. We had 131 Pine Siskins up from 9 last year. Experts say it is a big finch winter! This year the most reported specie was the European Starling with 569 individuals followed very closely by the Dark-eyed Junco at 566. We had 807 juncos in 2019 and 1401 in 2018. The total number of dippers counted this year was 20, down from 28 (2019) and 27 (2018). As a CBC we counted and identified 4071 individuals of 65 species compared with 4,212 individuals of 59 species (2019) and 6,464 individual birds of 60 species (2018). As quiet as the count seemed to be, we did very well on species. We had 20 participants this year compared with 30 (2019) and 23 (2018). Pretty good, all things considered! Let's hope next year we can welcome new participants and have a CBC potluck.

## **Chelan, reported by Steve Easley**

Chelan's CBC occurred on January 2. Due to social distancing rules because of COVID, each of the normal six sections of our 15-mile diameter circle had to be split into two or more

sub-sections to accommodate 13 counting parties. There was a total of 19 mobile participants and six backyard counters. The advantage of each party covering half the acreage as normal is that this allowed them to be more patient and thorough in finding birds. We found 83 bird species, the most since our 2012 (94 species) and above the 32-year average of 77 species. Total individuals tallied were 8675, fewer than the 32-year average of 9865 and far below the maximum count of 15,348 in 2003; this reinforced the general findings that populations of many bird species have been trending downward during the 2000's. Each year always has a few highlights. Most notable was a new species added to the count list, the Lesser Goldfinches (5), that Virginia Palumbo discovered in her yard. And there were eight species with the maximum count on record: Trumpeter Swan (20), Redhead (456), Barrow's Goldeneye (110), American Kestrel (32), Anna's Hummingbird (5), Common Raven (77), Canyon Wren (6), and American Dipper (7). Notable also were no waxwings, the second consecutive year that they have been missing.

## **Wenatchee, reported by Dan Stephens**

This was the 60th Wenatchee CBC and my 26th as compiler. There have been 161 total species recorded on the Wenatchee CBC in 60 years. Our total of 84 species is about average for the last few years, and our total number of birds of 8228 is lower than average (10,029). We battled almost constant snowfall all day in most parts of the count circle. Lesser Goldfinch showed up for the second year with 9 individuals. Greater White-fronted Goose occurred for the second year with 4 individuals. American Robin had one of their lowest showings (10th lowest) with 13 birds. No waxwings this year, which has happened in the past a few times.

## **Twisp, reported by Julie Hovis**

The 33rd annual Twisp Christmas Bird Count was held on January 3. Like everything else these days, the count was much different because of COVID-19. No effort was made to recruit new participants, there was no early morning gathering at the Cinnamon Twisp Bakery, and the post-count potluck was done via Zoom. Despite these changes and restrictions, 71 species were recorded and for the second year in a row all 12 routes were covered. It also was another record year for number of participants (60) and number of birds counted (5,989). So maybe there is one good thing about the pandemic – people have more time to watch birds! There were several other noteworthy firsts. A new species, Anna's Hummingbird, was added to the count, an "intergrade" Northern Flicker (a hybrid between the red-shafted and yellow-shafted subspecies) was observed, and a record number of Common Goldeneye's (409) were counted. The 34th annual Twisp Christmas Bird Count will be on January 2, 2022.

*You can find all the reported counts at <https://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/CurrentYear/ResultsByCount.aspx>*

# February Wild Phlox

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