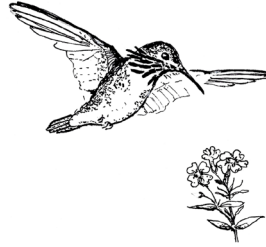




# The Wild Phlox

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## Shrub-steppe Conservation What Can We Do?

by Richard Scranton, Wenatchee

For five years, North Central Washington Audubon Society participated in breeding bird surveys in our region's shrub-steppe habitat. This was a collaborative, community-based science effort with other eastern Washington chapters, Audubon Washington and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife to identify songbird distribution within the remaining shrub-steppe in our state. It generated over 20,000 bird observations from 130 volunteers and represents an unprecedented volunteer undertaking in support of shrub-steppe birds and their habitat.

Now that the surveys have ended, what will happen with all that data? Representatives from Audubon Washington and several eastern Washington chapters have formed a committee that will work to put it to good use. The group's mission statement is to '*Promote Restoration and Conservation of Shrub-steppe Habitat in Washington State.*'

Survey data has identified the highest quality shrub-steppe habitats in the state. The goal of this committee is to promote methods to keep these habitats sustainable. Shrub-steppe has long been the most threatened habitat in Washington with only a small fraction of its historic acreage remaining. There are many factors that could make the situation worse. One example is the devastating fires in Okanogan and Douglas Counties last September.

Updates will be posted to our website. If you would like to get involved or have questions, contact Richard Scranton at [rscan4350@yahoo.com](mailto:rscan4350@yahoo.com).

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and Conservation Northwest partnered to make a beautiful film about our region's shrub-steppe habitat. You can find a link to the film on our website at <https://ncwaudubon.org/shrub-steppe-song-bird-survey/>.



Rough-legged Hawk  
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

From the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife:

The shrub-steppe of central Washington's Columbia Basin is a land of rich biodiversity, vibrant communities, and poignant beauty. It is a place both iconic and increasingly at-risk.

Here, at the northern extent of the great "Sagebrush Sea" that once sprawled across much of the American West, growing collaboration between agencies, Native American tribes, conservation organizations, local landowners, and other partners seeks to preserve and restore shrub-steppe ecosystems while supporting cultural and economic values.

Despite impacts from severe wildfires and habitat fragmentation, recovery programs are underway for species such as the Greater Sage-Grouse, pygmy rabbits, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and pronghorn antelope, while efforts including the Arid Lands Initiative and Conservation Reserve Program foster constructive partnership for the future of Washington's shrub-steppe.

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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Membership | Mark Oswood | moswood@nwi.net

Newsletter | Teri J Pieper | teripieper@hotmail.com

Science Officer | Don McIvor | puma@methownet.com

Festival Coordinator | Richard Scranton | rscran4350@yahoo.com

Social Media | Monica Maxwell | monicalynnm1979@gmail.com

Bruce McCammon | bruce.mccammon@gmail.com

Julie Hovis | jahovis711@gmail.com

Joe Veverka | joe\_everka@yahoo.com.

Website - [www.ncwaudubon.org](http://www.ncwaudubon.org)

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Mailing address - **PO Box 2934 Wenatchee, WA 98807**

**North Central Washington Audubon Society is on Facebook too**

*All phone numbers in the Wild Phlox are area code 509 unless otherwise indicated.*

# NCWAS presentation for Environmental Film Series: Under Revision

by Mark Oswood and Merry Roy,  
Wenatchee

Last month, we announced that our 16 March program (all digital) in the Environmental Film Series would focus on a video lecture by Dr. Drew Lanham. Since then, Wenatchee Valley College announced an exciting webinar, with Dr. Lanham as a video participant, on 18 February. We co-sponsored this WVC event. Consequently, we are reconfiguring our presentation for the Environmental Film Series: new topic, new date. We will announce the new plans as soon as they've coagulated, via the Phlox, website, Mailchimp, and Facebook (“hailing on all frequencies”).

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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)



March is the month that holds the promise of Spring – spring wildflowers, spring migrants, melting snow and the appearance of fresh water to attract birds. Or March can bring lingering snow, mud, and gray skies. Up here in the Methow Valley, we are buried deep with snow and have little hope for early spring wildflowers in the coming weeks. But that does not mean we won't be seeing spring birds soon. Many years we see early Say's Phoebes and Western and Mountain Bluebirds with a snowy backdrop. At least one phoebe has already been seen at Pearrygin Lake and Western Bluebirds have managed to spend the entire winter in Winthrop. I wonder what they have been eating.

In the continuing pandemic conditions, I have missed birding with friends. No winter raptor surveys, no carpools to the Columbia River or the Waterville Plateau. Birding the plateau is difficult in the best of circumstances but driving around it with only dogs for companions makes it even harder. The dogs need to be trained to spot any unusual birds in the snow! I am still determined to do it in hopes of seeing a few winter rarities and the austere landscape covered in snow.

I was recently reminded that March also means that Sandhill Cranes will return to central Washington. The Othello Sandhill Crane Festival will be virtual again this year, happening the weekend of March 20. Check their

website for online events and if you are going to travel to the region, they will be providing a list of good crane watching locations.

Most every night I hear one or two Great Horned Owls hooting. This sound is another precursor to Spring. The owls are establishing their territory and getting ready to nest. Some nights I can only hear one and I wonder what the other owl is doing. Is she already on a nest? The one nest tree I identified on our hill blew over in the terrible Labor Day windstorm last year. They do not make their own nests, instead relying on abandoned nests or cliff ledges to lay their eggs and raise their young.

In the February 2021 *The Wild Phlox*, page 4, we listed a contribution from Dale Crouse. The contribution is from Dale and Janet Crouse. We regret the error and send our apologies to the Crouse's.



Bohemian Waxwings  
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop



Golden Eagle  
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

## NCW Recent Bird Sightings

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

Chelan: A Greater White-fronted Goose and a White-throated Sparrow were seen in Confluence Park. Evening Grosbeaks were seen in Chelan. A California Scrub Jay was seen in Wenatchee. Bushtits were seen at the Leavenworth ski hill. White-winged Crossbills were seen near Leavenworth. Lesser Goldfinches and a Northern Pygmy Owl were seen in Chelan.

Douglas: Snowy Owls have been seen near Atkins Lake. Snow Buntings, Gray-crowned Rosy Finches, Greater Sage-Grouse and a Gyrfalcon were seen near Mansfield. Pygmy Nuthatches were seen in Central Ferry Canyon. A Lincoln's Sparrow was seen at Bridgeport Bar. Wild Turkeys were reported on the Big Bend Wildlife Area. A Rufous Hummingbird and a California Scrub Jay were reported in East Wenatchee. An American Dipper was reported at Lincoln Rock State Park.

Ferry: A Blue Jay is wintering in eastern Ferry County.

Okanogan: Evening Grosbeaks are being seen between Twisp and Winthrop. An Anna's Hummingbird continues in Okanogan. A Harris Sparrow continues outside of Winthrop. A Black-backed Woodpecker was seen off Bear Creek Road. A Golden-crowned Sparrow has been seen five miles up the Twisp River. Bohemian Waxwings and Pine Grosbeaks are being seen around Winthrop. Two Virginia Rails, a Say's Phoebe, Brown-headed Cowbirds, a Fox Sparrow and Yellow-rumped Warblers were seen at Cassimer Bar. Western Bluebirds were seen at Loomis and in Winthrop. An American White Pelican was seen at Washburn Island. A Say's Phoebe was seen at Pearrygin Lake. A Hoary Redpoll was reported near Chesaw. A White-headed Woodpecker was seen at the Highlands sno-park. Pine Grosbeaks were seen in the Okanogan Highlands. A Northern Goshawk eating a snowshoe hare was encountered at the Highlands sno-park ski trails.

# Okanogan Valley Bluebird Boxes

## Community Conservation

by Todd Thorn, Okanogan Highlands

Bluebirds. In the depths of winter, they seem a vision of a different, distant time and place. Yet shortly, they will return to grace our region with their light skipping flight, striking color, and soft cheerful call notes.

Those visiting or living in the Okanogan from March to October are likely to see more bluebirds due to a longstanding project within the community to build, place and maintain bluebird boxes. This loose-knit group of bluebird activists has placed and tends a network of about 600 bluebird nest boxes. The boxes (and bluebirds) are typically placed on fenceposts bordering county roads throughout the Okanogan, including roads to Conconully, near Riverside, the Tunk Valley, Aeneas Valley, Wauconda, and from Tonasket to Chesaw through the Okanogan Highlands.

The project offers a rewarding way to connect with others and bird conservation. Around thirty volunteers visit and inspect each box yearly, scraping out old nesting materials, making repairs or replacing nonfunctional boxes. Initial

efforts were organized by wildlife biologist Dale Swedberg in the 1980's. Over the years, Lee Johnson has sustained the effort, building countless boxes and recruiting people to tend them. Last summer the Chesaw Explorer Club organized a box-building party complete with masks and social distancing, building 100 boxes in a day. One volunteer, Gary Rittenmeyer, came north from Chelan a few years ago to help clean boxes in the Aeneas Valley. Since then he's built and tends a growing set of boxes (currently 31) around Chelan and Mansfield.

The project has received support from the Reman and Reload company of Oroville, Chesaw Explorers, Okanogan Highlands Alliance, Okanogan Land Trust, and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. Daniel Anderman, a bird box maker from Leavenworth, has donated twelve boxes he built to the project.

If this sounds like an effort you'd like to join, please contact Todd Thorn ([todd@canyonwren.us](mailto:todd@canyonwren.us)). We are looking for someone or a group to adopt boxes in the Tunk Valley.

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## Birding Jargon - BBB and LE

by Mary Gallgher, Lake Wenatchee

Birding involves learning the associated jargon: F.O.Y., Lifer, L.B.B., etc. (First of the year, new species on a life list, little brown bird). Recently I came up with two new abbreviations: B.B.B. and L.E. Let me explain.

In late January for my husband Tim's birthday, we traveled by car to Bend, Oregon. Our main objectives were downhill skiing, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing—all outdoor activities, which might include birding.

The afternoon of his birthday, we put on our hiking boots (no snowshoes needed) and walked to Lava Island and on to the Big Eddy along the Deschutes River. We were stretching our legs after a morning of skiing.

Hoping for Belted Kingfishers, I listened for yattering and looked at branches over the river for their silhouette: a squatty body with a large head and dagger bill. I expected American Dippers and a variety of ducks. Mallards were dabbling with a pair of Canada Geese in a calm bend of the river. A female Hooded Merganser was hanging out with three female Common Goldeneyes and a solitary female Barrow's Goldeneye.

In a series of Class 3 rapids, there was a male Common Goldeneye with a harem of females diving into the churning water. I did not know that goldeneyes would dive into rapids like that. I had never observed that feeding behavior until that moment. I jotted in my notebook next to COGO: L.E.

I searched every exposed river rock around the rapids but did not see any American Dippers. Usually, they were the species we saw here in these turbulent areas. We continued, the trail taking us up high above the river. As I peered down, movement near the rocky edge of the river captivated my attention. A dipper? The pudgy bird I was watching was dipping with its legs, but its head never came out of the river water. I looked through my binoculars to clearly see it was a Wilson's Snipe. It was a bird I did not expect to see here. In the open. Standing in the river. Dipping. A bird I have heard more than seen in cattail marshes and sloughs.

Fascinating to watch, the snipe kept its head and long protuberance of a bill under water and dipped its body as it walked along in the lapping water near shore. We watched for about ten minutes then walked on another mile. On our return the snipe was still there, still dipping, still probing. I realized that I had never seen a Snipe eating before. I jotted in my notebook next to WISN: L.E.

Learning about birds firsthand is what I enjoy the most about birding: observing a moment in a bird's life. A Life Experience.

Later that evening, I asked Tim, "who was your best birthday bird?"

"The Wilson's Snipe" was his reply.

Best Birthday Bird (B.B.B.) and Life Experience (L.E.) with a bird, are my new abbreviations.

# A 2020 Snipe Hunt

The organic muck on the beach formed a rolling carpet with lots of bumps and depressions; wave action during the last storm molded this place. The shoreline was wide, maybe a dozen feet, from the water's edge up to the growing plants and then curled around Juanita Bay. I was snipe hunting and had my binoculars up to my eyes. One of these shorebirds should be hiding here.

One night back in the mid-1960s, I was sent on my first snipe hunt. All the new scouts were gathered together, and the camp counselors had us bring a t-shirt to hold one of these elusive creatures. The head person held a flashlight tight to his chest, shining it at his chin as he gave us directions. The light created a ghostly look, making his voice sound ominous. We were to search the dark woods, making grunting sounds to attract a snipe and then grab it, wrapping it in our spare shirt. "Don't come back until you have one," was his last words. That critter, though, was imaginary, and the older Boy Scouts had sent us on a fool's errand. I knew snipes existed by high school and had found this bird in swampy areas in Western Pennsylvania.

Behind a row of muck was a little cinnamon, off-white, and black with some long creamy-colored lines, the back of a snipe. She had her long bill tucked under her back feathers, and her eyes closed. One yellow leg held her up from the mud. Her exquisite plumage was what I needed, and my spirits seemed to rise. It was early November, and the coronavirus pandemic of this past year had cast a heavy weight on my soul. Isolation, distance, masks, and zoom seemed the way of life. I needed contact with something alive, mysterious, and



photos and article by Thomas Bancroft

wonderful.

With that thought, the Wilson's Snipe stretched and turned to walk down to the water's edge. Her six-inch bill began to probe into the mud. Her eyes set well back on the sides of her head

allowed her to see behind her while she searched for invertebrates. Apparently, the bill tip is flexible, allowing just the end to separate to grab a worm. A second bird joined this one, and they moseyed along the shoreline while I settled to watch these beautiful examples of adaptation.

A couple of dozen yards along their stroll, they stopped, turning their bills back along their sides, and began to preen. One twisted its tail, showing the barring and

brown tips, pulling that bill through some under-tail coverts. As a flying snipe descends, the wind flowing over spread rectrices makes that incredible eerie winnowing sound so crucial in their

courtship and territorial defense. Each of the last few summers, I've been able to listen to it in the mountains of Washington, joy filling my body.

Here on the shores of Lake Washington, one began to pull on its scapular feathers, the upper mandible bent upward near its tip, and I realized I'd just seen the end flex. These individuals continued preening, working their sides, breasts, and tails. Eventually stopping all activity, they put their bills under their back feathers and closed their eyes. I'd been watching them for

close to an hour, and the chilly November temperatures had penetrated my bones. But these avian marvels had given me a sense of peace and serenity. Hope had returned to my soul.

# Searching for Nutcracker Nests

I'm seeking help in locating Clark's Nutcracker nests for my Nutcracker Ecosystem Project and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology Clark's Nutcracker/Whitebark Pine Ecosystem initiative. Nest sightings will assist studies of the role of Clark's Nutcrackers in conifer ecosystems, the effects of climate change on the birds and coniferous forests, and educational efforts to elevate awareness. Very few nutcracker nests have ever been documented, so any and all new nest information is wonderfully helpful. Nests are made of twigs/sticks and are ~8-12" wide, ~4-9" high, and 8-60' off the ground, primarily in conifers. Nests can be found in live or dead trees, and dense or open stands of trees. Nest building tends to

by Taza Schaming, Ph.D. Research Associate  
Northern Rockies Conservation Cooperative

begin in early March (but may be earlier or later depending on the location and year) and is the most easily observable sign of nesting. Nestlings should all have fledged by mid-June.

If you spot Clark's Nutcrackers nesting, please send GPS point and/or other location information, such as tree species and height of nest in the tree, as well as nest status (building, eggs, nestlings), date located, and any other details to [tazaschaming@gmail.com](mailto:tazaschaming@gmail.com). Please let me know if you have any questions! For more information, see [www.thenutcrackerecosystemproject.com](http://www.thenutcrackerecosystemproject.com).

# The Home Place:

## Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature

### A Book Review

by Merry Roy, Wenatchee

J. Drew Lanham's writings and contributions are everywhere these days, and that's not surprising. Dr. Lanham is an Alumni Distinguished Professor of Wildlife Ecology and Master Teacher at Clemson University, a gifted ornithologist, writer, poet and speaker, and a leader in the Black Birder movement.

His 2016 book *The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature* is the compelling story of his childhood on a South Carolina farm and his experiences growing up surrounded by the natural world. Drew is the third child of two respected educators, born on the land his parents inherited and farmed along with their teaching jobs, and influenced by his grandmother.

Drew calls himself "an eco-addict ... a wildling born of forests and fields."

He writes that he is "colored" by the red clay, the brown spring floods, and the gold ripening tobacco of this home place, as well as by family, identity, and race. Poetry runs through his prose.

His descriptions of the home place, his experiences in the natural world, and the stories of his grandparents' and parents' lives give one the feeling of knowing Drew Lanham well, of being a friend of the family. He tells of the sorrows and difficulties of racial prejudice, yet I felt his strength, his solid identity through family and the land undergirding his life.

This is a book to read and reread.

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## Birding While Black

### When is Birding Unsafe?

When I heard of Dr. Drew Lanham's offering a Zoom presentation to a Wenatchee audience (with NCWAS as one of the co-sponsors), I realized that I should read his book before tuning into his presentation. His book is *The Homeplace, Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature*. The book is a short, sweet account of his growing up in rural South Carolina. Lanham grew up with guidance from parents who were educators, and from his grandmother who called up the presence of her deceased husband (Lanham saw him at least once) and who grew healing herbs for his bellyaches.

One of the essays in his book is chilling. Lanham wrote about "birding while black." While he and a white female colleague were working as biologists, they were followed in a deep forest by white men in a truck. She figured that their stalkers were protecting a bootlegging operation or were poaching deer. He feared a physical assault. That essay led to another in *Orion* magazine, "*Nine Rules for the Black Birdwatcher*," and his "Nine Rules" has led to many interviews in many media. His message is always the same: Exposure to nature is healthful, rich, and rewarding, but racism in our society requires people of color to remain vigilant to their surroundings and to anticipate unpleasant, even dangerous, confrontations for doing nothing more than birding.

Lanham's precautions imply a question: Is birding alone in remote places safe for any of us, regardless of race? I have seen a few things that have given me pause, like hunting camps on the Colockum Pass area adorned with confederate flags; a shrine scooped into a hillside decorated

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

with red candle wax; a man carrying a shovel; the fresh carcasses of deer shot out of season; and men with rifles who did not notice me. I was careful not to startle them. My brother warned me to stay away from illegal marijuana patches in northern California.

Only one encounter alarmed me. I was walking a short, quarter mile walk, down an old logging road to look at a weir constructed by fisheries biologists across the Cedar River. They were harvesting migrating salmon to relocate to hatcheries. Before I got to the weir, a man came up behind me and insisted that I come with him to push through the bushes to get to the edge of the river. When I refused, he walked close behind me where I could not see him. I ordered him to back off. When I got to the weir, I asked some biologists to watch my back—I told them that I was leaving at once, and if the man followed me, they should call the police. I wondered if I were being histrionic, but when I told a King County Deputy about it, he wrote up an incident report.

In fact, I like my friend Susan's approach to encountering strangers. When we saw several men at a campsite, she walked up and asked, "Pardon me, but do you have any Gray Poupon?" They laughed and invited us to join them for lunch. Now I conclude that, as a septuagenarian, my greatest risk when I go birding is taking a nasty slip and fall.

I am looking forward to Dr. Lanham's second book, scheduled for publication in March 2021. Although his book of poetry is out of print, pending the release of the new book, it is easy to find his words on NPR, in *Orion*, in *Vanity Fair* and on YouTube. Just start Googling his name.

# Duck Stamping

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee  
Duck stamp images used with permission

Whoa! Who knew? The State of Washington has an official duck stamp program, managed in conjunction with the Washington Waterfowl Association.

If you hold a current state bird hunting license, you are entitled to a State duck stamp for free, but you do have to ask for it. If you don't have a hunting license, but enjoy the art of duck stamps and prints, and want part of your money to go waterfowl conservation programs, visit the website for the Washington Waterfowl Association. The WWA is a private, nonprofit, volunteer organization that works on waterfowl conservation projects on public land. It sells duck stamps and prints from the stamp art on behalf of the state. You can see the stamps and prints it has on hand, and a slide show of prints back to 2012, at [www.washingtonduckstamp.com](http://www.washingtonduckstamp.com).

Stamps cost \$17.00 each, sold singly, or in blocks of 2,4,6, 9, or 30. That whole page of 30 stamps would set you back \$510.00. The prints that become the images on stamps are 7"x9" with 1-1/2" borders. They are numbered and signed by the artist. They are archival prints. Duck stamp prints cost \$70.00. A mat and frame are available for \$105.00.

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) implemented a duck stamp program called the "Migratory Waterfowl and Wetlands Conservation Program" in 1985 and printed its first duck stamp in 1986. In 1998, it added all game birds to the program. Under that program, revenue from hunting licenses and duck stamps was dedicated to acquiring waterfowl habitat. However, in 2012, the State Legislature voted to discontinue the artwork part of the bird hunting license. That's when the Washington Waterfowl Association (WWA) "rescued" the state duck stamp, according to

its website. It manages the state contest to choose artwork for the stamp and produces and sells duck stamps and prints of the artwork that go into the stamps. All the revenue from the stamp and art sales, after costs, goes back to the WDFW. You can find out more about funded WDFW projects here: <https://wdfw.wa.gov/hunting/requirements/waterfowl/stamp>.

WWA puts out a call to artists interested in duck stamp art.

Artists are asked to submit digital copies of their work before

September 1 of each year. A winner is then commissioned to produce the duck stamp design. The design appears on the duck stamp, prints of the stamp art, and on the State's pamphlet about hunting seasons for birds and upland game. The State announces the subject of each year's stamp ahead of time. Thus far, subjects of the prints all have been waterfowl, with the 2019 print also featuring a handsome chocolate lab. The style of each print thus far has been ultra-realistic, like federal duck

stamps. However, unlike the federal rule promulgated by the U.S. in 2019, the stamps are not required to include some artifact or image of hunting.

Mike Bell, from WWA said, "Next year's subject will be Mallards with a black lab to round out our lab series. Yes, the state does not do a great job of promoting the stamp, but we

take what we can [there is no link on the State duck hunting program to its duck stamp program]. ... this program is very fragile and self-sustaining (no collectors buying stamps = no more program). The reason we keep the artwork portion alive, is for the collectors. These collectors are buying less and as current collectors are getting older they are dropping off. If the heritage of the actual stamp is to stay alive, we need younger hunters and waterfowl art collectors to buy the art."

For questions about the program, contact Mike Bell 425-529-8566



2018 Duck Stamp  
painted by Donnie Hughes



2020 Duck Stamp  
painted by Tim Turrene

# March Wild Phlox

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Learn about Nests!	From the East Cascades (Bend, OR) Audubon Society	Nests, eggs and offspring <a href="http://www.ecaudubon.org/nestseggsandyoung">www.ecaudubon.org/nestseggsandyoung</a>
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March 4, 11, 18, 25	Spring Wildflowers Their Beauty and Biology	Native Plant Society, Okanogan Chapter. Via Zoom. Dana Visali. <a href="http://www.wnps.org/events/996">www.wnps.org/events/996</a>

You can find the Wild Phlox online at our website - [www.ncwaudubon.org](http://www.ncwaudubon.org)  
The beautiful photos are even nicer in color.



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Visit the NCW Audubon Society website for updates on these and other events [www.ncwaudubon.org](http://www.ncwaudubon.org)

