

The Wild Phlox

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NCW Christmas Bird Count Reports

compiled by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

Despite another year of Covid, the five Christmas Bird Counts conducted in North Central Washington remained strong. Here are the reports for each area:

Bridgeport, reported by Mike Schroeder

The 26th Bridgeport Christmas Bird Count was held on December 14. Thirteen observers recorded 97 species with an estimated count of 22,793 birds. This was about 1,000 below the long-term average, but well within the “normal” range. Bridgeport had fresh snow the previous day, but the sunshine and moderate temperatures made it a beautiful afternoon. Notable increases included Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Ruddy Duck, Wild Turkey, and Common Raven. Notable declines included Steller’s Jay, Black-billed Magpie, European Starling, Dark-eyed Junco, and House Finch. Forty-four species have been observed every year and 162 species have been observed at least once on count day (not including nine species only observed during count week). Three species were added this year, including multiple observations of Anna’s Hummingbirds.

Chelan, reported by Steve Easley

The Chelan Christmas Bird Count was held on December 20. There were 16 participants and four home feeder watchers. Total species were 81 (33-year average is 77) and total individuals were 10,034 (33-year average is 9,865). I think our above-average results were due to COVID forcing us to break up into smaller groups, thus allowing us time to more thoroughly cover our respective areas. Thanks to our feeder watchers, we had a new record of ten Anna's Hummingbirds. Roses and Wapato lakes were open, allowing Dan Stephens to tally up great numbers of various waterfowl—thanks Dan! And thanks, Dave Rudholm, for tracking down a number of species, such as Red Crossbill, that weren't found elsewhere in the count circle. And my sincere thanks to everyone for braving the cold (but at least dry) weather to watch for and count our feathered friends! Although we cannot count the four Turkey Vultures Dan Smith saw near the 12 Tribes Casino during count week, at least I was able to add this new species to our species list. Good find, Dan!

Leavenworth, reported by Joe Veverka

I'd like to thank the 20 participants who came out and counted birds on December 14! Some took on more than one route which helped immensely in filling out the coverage. There were a few things of note. First, we had

absolutely gorgeous weather! Greg Harris had Snow Geese flyover on the North Road route which looks to be a first on the Leavenworth CBC. We also had a Rough-legged Hawk and a few Western Bluebirds. Comparing total count day numbers to previous years we did pretty well. We found 64 species and 4,010 individuals compared to 2020 (65 species and 4,071 birds), 2019 (59 species and 4,212 birds), and 2018 (60 species and 6,464 birds). We only counted 167 European Starlings this year, which was our most abundant species last year with 569 individuals. This year the most abundant species was the Dark-eyed Junco with 567 counted, up from 566 last year. How's that for consistency? House Finch was the runner-up (425) followed by Pine Siskin (381), California Quail (283), American Crow (251), and American Goldfinch (244).

Twisp, reported by Craig Olson

Fifty enthusiastic birders took to the field or watched at their feeders for the 34th Annual Twisp Audubon Christmas Bird Count held on January 2. Although it was quite cold and overcast the whole day, 71 species and a record 6,607 birds were counted. The most abundant species were Bohemian Waxwing (714), American Goldfinch (585), California Quail (509), Pine Siskin (470), and Dark-eyed Junco (404). Other noteworthy observations included Gray-crowned Rosy-Finch (155), Red Crossbill (136), White-headed Woodpecker (4), Trumper Swan (1), Northern Goshawk (1), and Northern Pygmy-Owl (1). Two additional species, Gray Jay and Northern Saw-whet Owl, were observed during count week.

Wenatchee, reported by Dan Stephens

The Wenatchee Christmas Bird Count was held on December 30. Eighteen participants tallied 79 species and 8,344 birds. The most numerous species were Canada Goose, American Coot, Horned Lark, European Starling, Rock Pigeon, and Dark-eyed Junco (Oregon race). Lesser Goldfinch was seen for the third year in a row with two individuals, but Greater White-fronted Goose, which was observed in 2019 and 2020, was absent.

(Editor’s Note: Count week is defined as the three days before and after the official count day and is a list of species not observed on count day. Although count week species are not added to the number of species or number of birds observed on count day, they provide information about species that might be observed during future counts.)

The mission of the North Central Washington Audubon Society is to:
 “Enhance, protect, and restore healthy ecosystems and native biodiversity using science, advocacy, education and on-the-ground conservation to promote the welfare of birds in North Central Washington”

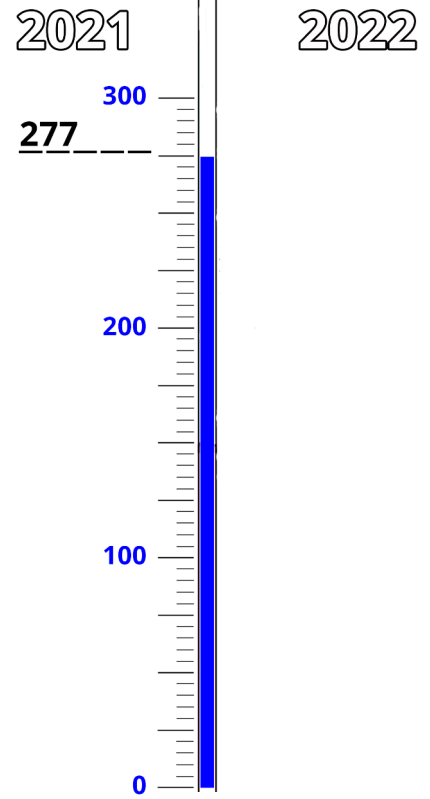
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How many bird species will be entered into eBird this year?
 NCWAS Four-county Area End of month counts



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Editor's Notes

As the fledgling editor of the Wild Phlox, I guess it was inevitable I would publish an article that would ruffle some feathers—I just didn't expect it to happen so soon! Such was the case with the front page article in the December 2021 issue of the Phlox (*Keeping Pine Siskins Safe*). Because the methods described by the author helped him protect siskins from salmonella, I thought his experiences might help someone else. It was never my intent to imply his methods were the only way to protect siskins. So, as a followup to the article, the best advice I can offer is to keep your feeders and the areas below them clean; consult the Audubon and Cornell Lab of Ornithology websites for their recommendations; and feed the type of seed that works best for you.

This issue of the Phlox includes an article about another controversial topic—winter feeding of Anna's Hummingbirds (see article on page 5). I must admit I've had mixed feelings about feeding hummingbirds in the winter, but after doing some research I believe it is acceptable to do so provided the feeders are kept clean and unfrozen, and there is a commitment to provide food every day throughout the winter. Also in this issue is a new feature compliments of Bruce McCammon: a "thermometer" graph that will update the cumulative number of species entered into eBird in 2022 for our four-county area. Look for it on page 2 in this and future issues.



Anna's Hummingbird
photo by Bruce McCammon

This issue does not include the usual *Recent Sightings* feature. I needed to remove it to make room for Kent Woodruff's heartfelt tribute to Devon Comstock (see below).

Although I didn't know Devon well, I shared two experiences with her that will always remind me of Devon when I think about them. She was with me when I caught and banded my first (and only) Red Crossbill. And she willingly volunteered to hold onto an extremely agitated Pileated Woodpecker while I extracted it from a mist net. Her calm demeanor and experience with handling large birds that day definitely helped diffuse a rather stressful situation. She will be missed.

A Moment In Time ... Remembering Devon Comstock

tribute and photo by Kent Woodruff, Twisp

Yesterday, as the first hints of spring were beginning to show, I decided to drive out on the Waterville Plateau, look for some birds, and think about my friend Devon in a place she worked and loved. Four weeks ago I learned the devastating news that she was gone, and the depth of the winter darkness all of us have been facing got much darker. It's been hard to find answers to the many questions that have arisen. One thing is clear. Devon cared deeply—about her work, about her family and friends, and about the landscape around us.

I met Devon when she arrived in my yard in August 2005 to connect with her crew mates to begin the fall season at our migration research station. She and her buddy Christy had started raptor migration work the previous season at HawkWatch International's flagship research station in the Goshute Mountains of Nevada and they wanted to have another season further north. She was a beloved member of that crew. It was such a positive experience, Devon returned for another migration season which turned out to be our record year with more than 800 hawks, falcons, and eagles captured and banded — and 2,300 raptors documented migrating through. I am confident that season's success was in part because of Devon's diligence. She was passionate, dedicated to her work and her team, and had a dry (perhaps British) sense of humor that often showed itself in the trapping blind.

After that season Devon stayed in touch, something she was good at, and she let me know it was her goal to be the best biologist she could be with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. And with her characteristic persistence, that's exactly what she did. She was the ultimate field biologist; developing expertise with mountain goats, bighorns, waterfowl, shorebirds, mule deer, Sage Grouse, native bees, pygmy rabbits, and hundreds of songbird species. She was at the very top of her game as a biologist.

The last time I saw Devon, it was smoky and hot. We had a beer together and talked about her years here in eastern Washington. She shared the plans her family was working on and what their next steps might be. She told me she cared about me. We hugged and said we would stay in touch. Then our time was up.



Snowy Owl

As I was sitting in the truck, remembering that moment, I saw some movement in the open field to my left. Flying low, then perching in the field, then looking back at me right through my binoculars was a big, beautiful Snowy Owl!!! I enjoyed a few minutes relating to that bird, marveling at my luck. There was enough time to capture a quick photo, then it was gone. Sitting there in the truck afterward, it came to me ... the owl had helped me recognize that some very important moments are fleeting.

Thank you Devon for our time together!

Conservation: How We Roll

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

In a nutshell, the NCWAS Conservation Program is managed and implemented by our Conservation Committee and designed to deliver maximum long-term benefits to birds in our region. The committee reports regularly to the board and is currently composed of ten members that together bring a diverse set of skills and expertise to our work.

Sound science, constructive engagement, and perseverance form the core around which the program is built and implemented. We work to identify important large-scale issues that have the potential to directly benefit or harm the ecosystems our birds depend upon. Once we've decided to address an issue or undertake a project, we don't just submit comments and call it good. Instead, we determine who the key decision makers are and familiarize ourselves with relevant processes and laws. With this information in hand, we're able to engage most effectively and through appropriate channels. Finally, regarding all issues we tackle, we stick with them until we're either successful or have run out of options.

Almost all issues or projects we tackle are very long term. Prime examples include the Horan Natural Area, Chelan County's Icicle Strategy and Shoreline Master Program, Enloe Dam, shrub-steppe habitat conservation, Rock Island Ponds, and the Stemilt Process. On a shorter-term basis, in collaboration with Audubon Washington, we annually work at the state level for passage of legislation relevant to bird conservation.

To augment the major issues component of our program, we also work more locally where smaller scale actions have the potential to achieve outsized benefits. Our bird surveys and bird box projects are examples. Pat Leigh's article (see below) details our American Kestrel Box Project. It's just one of the several community science projects we have underway.

To learn more about our conservation and community science projects, please visit the conservation page on the NCWAS website at <https://ncwaudubon.org/conservation>.

For the Love of Kestrels

The striking American Kestrel, with its Mardi Gras-ready face is declining in population. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's "All About Birds" website, this smallest and possibly the fiercest of falcons on our continent has lost half its population in the past 50 years.

Easy to spot perched on wires or poles or hovering over open fields as they prepare to snag an unsuspecting meal, you might be tempted to think they are thriving, but studies show that the population is shrinking. Possible causes include loss of habitat, less food, fewer nesting spots, exposure to pesticides, climate change, and increased predation by hawks.

With urban sprawl eliminating prime nesting spots such as old buildings and old and dead trees, conservationists are finding success by providing kestrel boxes in what would otherwise be prime nesting areas.

NCWAS is taking on just such a project. Over the course of 30 years, Richard Hendrick installed and maintained around 250 kestrel boxes in the greater Mansfield area, many of which were destroyed in recent wildfires. When Richard passed away, he left carefully-kept records, including GPS coordinates for the location of each box that he had installed. Kent Woodruff, determined to see his friend Richard's efforts carried on, recruited NCWAS member Stu Smith, who mapped the locations and divided them into 14 areas. Stu also created a database to track nesting activity. Last spring and summer, volunteers



American Kestrel

article and photo by Pat Leigh, Mazama

located 50 of the original boxes and installed 30 new boxes, generously built and contributed by Ken Smith of East Wenatchee. Ken has promised to have another 50 new boxes ready to install this coming spring.

Volunteers were assigned specific areas. Once their boxes were cleaned or installed, they monitored the boxes, first counting the number of eggs, then returning to count the number of chicks.

In spite of limited resources, we were able to document 130 young kestrels in the boxes that were monitored. We hope to see that double in 2022! Find out how you can help us grow this program by contacting Richard Scranton, NCWAS Kestrel Box Project Lead, at

rscran4350@yahoo.com. And there's more! Keith Watson from Twisp is the new youth conservation coordinator for Conservation Northwest and he has ideas for box construction, installation, and monitoring. He wants very much to be involved.

Kent Woodruff, grateful to see his friend's efforts carried forward says, "I am heartened by the success of boxes we found and installed. It indicates kestrels are desperate for nest sites in otherwise good habitat. It shows that the future is bright for being able to augment the population with a little focused effort."

For more information from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, click on the following link: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/americas-smallest-falcon-is-getting-smaller>.

Winter Solstice Hummingbird Survey

by Bruce McCammon, Wentachee

eBird data show that Anna's Hummingbirds are resident all year in the NCWAS four-county area (Chelan, Douglas, and Okanogan counties). The Anna's range has expanded to the north and east as a result of increased yard plantings, increased use of hummingbird feeders, and climate change. Of the four hummingbird species we are fortunate to see, only the Anna's stays around through the winter. Rufous, Black-chinned, and Calliope hummingbirds migrate to Mexico.

Winter feeding of hummingbirds is controversial. Some people worry about keeping hummingbird feeders up in late fall and winter, thinking that the feeders will keep birds from migrating. This is not true. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology states "Keeping your feeders up has no influence on whether a bird will start its journey south." This conclusion is found in many other publications. NCWAS has a page devoted to hummingbirds on their website. The page provides links and references to scientific publications, books, and news articles about hummingbirds. Check it out at <https://newaudubon.org/hummingbirds>.

Given that Anna's are here, what is a responsible way to care for them during the cold times? If you use feeders during the winter, you inherit the responsibility to keep the feeders clean and unfrozen. There are several ways to do this. You can bring your feeder(s) in overnight to prevent freezing. If you do, it is critically important to have the feeder outside well before sunrise. When a hummingbird breaks from torpor it needs to find food quickly, and feeding during the cold morning period is critical to their survival. An option to the bring-in/take-out approach is to heat the feeder. There are a wide variety of heated feeders available commercially. Do-it-yourselfers have posted many of their solutions on the internet. A quick search will lead you to many options. How you prepare the nectar for your feeders is another important consideration. The standard and safest mix is four parts water to one part cane sugar (4:1). The 4:1 mix is tried and true and you can't go wrong using it. Some people switch to a 3:1 mix during extreme cold periods. This lowers the freezing point a bit and provides a richer energy source for the birds. The Cornell Lab, Audubon, and respected authorities agree that using a 3:1 mix is OK and will not harm the birds. They all make it clear that this should only be done during extreme cold and it is never appropriate to use a 2:1 ratio. If you have any reservations at all, stick to 4:1.

So Many Questions

The presence of Anna's in our area in the winter inspires many questions. Are the birds we see in winter the same ones we see in the summer? Is the Anna's an elevational migrant? How many of these birds are here? What nectar sources do they prefer during different seasons? NCWAS has joined forces with the Wenatchee Naturalist to begin gathering information to address these questions with the North Central Washington Hummingbird Project.

The project plans to conduct four surveys each year. The surveys will be conducted on solstice and equinox dates. A background paper for the project is available to read or download from the NCWAS website's hummingbird page. Each survey takes place starting thirty minutes before sunrise or sunset and ending thirty minutes after sunrise or sunset. Participants can choose either the sunrise or sunset period to make their observations and use a standard protocol to record their data. Then they submit their observations to eBird and share their checklists with the project eBird account so the accumulation of information is available to the organizers.

Winter Solstice Survey: December 21, 2021

The winter solstice survey was completed on December 21 and the last eBird checklist was submitted a few days later. Twenty-nine observers submitted checklists and counted 63 hummingbirds. Who knew? The data came from as far away as Omak and Colville. Although not submitted to the project, observers in Tonasket and Kettle Falls also documented Anna's Hummingbirds on December 21. The table below shows the number of birds counted throughout our area.

Area	Number of Birds Counted	Number of Observers
Wenatchee	37	17
East Wenatchee	10	4
Cashmere	7	3
Leavenworth	3	1
Manson	2	1
Omak	2	1
Chelan	1	1
Colville	1	1
Total	63	29

Yes, the Anna's range continues to expand. The Hummingbird Project survey on December 21 provides new information about the Anna's expansion and year-round residence in North Central Washington. Monitoring multiple Anna's nests in Wenatchee in the spring and summer of 2021 added first-time information about nesting and fledging success for scientists to use as they study population dynamics and migration. It's exciting to be on the edge of awareness about a remarkable bird species. In an age when we hear so much about species decline, habitat fragmentation, and species stress, our observations show that the Anna's is doing well. It is time to CELEBRATE THE ANNA'S!

In Our Own Way

Ski, Sing, Eat

My ski poles pierce the snow,
creaking and squealing
along tracks set in spangled powder.
Ponderosa and fir bend
under heavy loads.

As the sun warms, trees avalanche
in tall plumes of glitter;
sifting snow obliterates the track.

Bird sound disappears in creak and squeal
and avalanche thump,
but one loud Chickadee overcomes
with his jubilant eponymous call.

A Dipper, stub-tailed silhouette
gray on the stream's curve,
forages, wading the snowy
edge of Icicle Creek,
feeding on numbed larvae.

Chickadee, Dipper and me;
we celebrate snowfall and blue sky
each in our own way.

Merry Roy
Leavenworth, WA
1.4.22



American Dipper
photo by Peter Bauer

Got Owl Pellets?

The Wenatchee River Institute (WRI) in Leavenworth puts on a variety of programs focusing on both youth and community environmental education. This year we have restarted Traveling Naturalist in the Classroom after a one-year hiatus; this program brings WRI educators into 4th and 5th grade classrooms at five schools throughout North Central Washington. Students practice their nature journaling skills, complete small experiments, and spend time outdoors around their school during a one-hour lesson each month. For one of the upcoming lessons, students will learn about owls and get to dissect owl pellets. WRI has a small stash of pellets, thanks to Susan Ballinger and the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, but we are looking for more as we hope to repeat this program in the future. Do you have an owl that roosts nearby or any stashes of pellets of your own that you are looking to donate for a good cause? Owl pellets must be sterilized in an oven before use with students, but WRI can do that part for you. Please contact Tucker Jonas at tjonas@wenatcheeriverinstitute.org for more information. Thank you!

Field Trips!

NCWAS is once again organizing field trips. Participants must be fully vaccinated (two shots plus a booster), practice social distancing in the field, and wear a mask (N95 preferred) when carpooling. Thank you for your cooperation!

Pateros to Bridgeport Birding Loop 8 am-3 pm, Saturday February 19th

Meet trip leaders Richard Scranton and Mark Johnston along Lakeshore Drive across from the Sweet River Bakery in Pateros at 8 am (day of trip phone number 253-297-0705). Beginning at Pateros, we'll spend several hours birding areas between there and Bridgeport in search of passerines, raptors, waterfowl, and more. Please bring liquids, lunch/snacks, a mask, and dress for the weather. Participants must be able to walk at least two miles over uneven and possibly snowy ground. Potential carpool drivers will need a Discover Pass. Carpool cost \$25 to be shared equally by passengers. Limit 10 participants. Email Mark at toxostoma495@gmail.com to register.

East Wenatchee Porter's Pond 8-10 am, Saturday March 5th

Join Joe Veverka and Tucker Jonas for a couple hours of birding at Porter's Pond in East Wenatchee. We will meet at the Apple Capitol Loop Trail 19th Street Trailhead at 8 am and walk along the Apple Capitol Loop Trail and side trails looking for waterfowl and grebes on the river. We expect to find several species of waterfowl as well as wintering sparrows and perhaps even some early arriving Violet-green Swallows. Walking should be fairly easy, not exceeding two miles at a birder's pace. Bring binoculars, good shoes, plenty of water, and snacks. Don't forget a camera. All skill levels are welcome and no preregistration is required. If you have any questions email Joe Veverka at joe_everka@yahoo.com.

Update on the Arctic NWR, 1/15/2022

by Mary Gallagher, Lake Wenatchee

Protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is not only about conservation, but also for environmental justice. Fossil fuel development in the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge threatens the way of life for the Gwich'in along with other Arctic Indigenous peoples. The case for protecting this sacred land is so clear that we have now seen all six major U.S. banks and all five major Canadian banks, along with two dozen banks around the world, announce they will not fund any new oil and gas development in the Arctic Refuge and across the Arctic region.

Corporate Boardrooms:

The Corporate Campaign, led by the Gwich'in and others, continues to reach out to insurance companies to advocate for policies that show good stewardship for climate and Arctic communities and not allow any underwriting of oil and gas projects in the Arctic Refuge. Recently we saw the insurance company Zurich expand their Arctic commitment to state they will not support oil and gas projects broadly throughout the Arctic. See more by visiting the Gwich'in Steering Committee's Corporate Commitment page at <https://ourarcticrefuge.org/corporate-commitment-to-protect-the-arctic-refuge>.

Arctic Refuge Supplemental EIS:

Last August, the Biden administration began the process to undertake a new review of potential oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Trump administration rushed through an illegal and inadequate approval process in 2019, where millions spoke out against the proposal and pointed to significant flaws in the analysis. The Biden administration's review currently underway will hopefully address what it cited as serious flaws in the previous statement and allows for the public to again

voice their support for protecting the Arctic Refuge. The scoping process occurred last year, and we are waiting for the draft Supplemental EIS to be released shortly to once again have the opportunity to support protecting this amazing place. Stay tuned!

The Build Back Better Act:

It was announced before the holiday break that efforts to move the Build Back Better Act through Congress had stalled, and no real movement has happened since.

Where did things leave off when negotiations stalled? Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee language for the Build Back Better Act was released and includes the House language to repeal the refuge oil and gas program and buy back the leases. Byrd Rule challenges are still expected when the bill begins to move again.

What is the Byrd Rule? A parliamentary rule named after former Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) aimed at ensuring all pieces of Budget Reconciliation are actually related to the budget. There is optimism the Build Back Better Act will move forward once Congress has finished the voting rights bills. Please contact your congressional representatives to keep this important legislation moving forward.

For more information visit these websites:

National Audubon: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/arctic-refuge>

Alaska Wilderness League: <https://www.alaskawild.org/grassroots-toolkit>

Lois Norrgard, National Field Organizer for the Alaska Wilderness League, has been very helpful in providing timely information and assisting with communication to interested individuals and organizations.

What is Leucism?

from "All About Birds" by the
Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Leucism is not a genetic mutation, but rather describes defects in pigment cells that are caused during development. This may result in full leucism, where there is a reduction in all types of pigment. An animal with full leucism will appear paler than normal. Leucistic animals may also show irregular patches of white—this is referred to as partial leucism, and these animals are often referred to as "pied" or "piebald." Because the development of the eyes occurs separately from other areas of the body, eye color in leucistic animals is not affected and will be normal in color.



Leucistic House Finch
photo by Teri J Pieper

February 2022 Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Resources and Calendar

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1st Wednesday of the month	Horan Natural Area Bird Walks	See our website for details
February 16	An Evening with Marcela Todd Zaragoza - Her Research on Small Seabirds	Wenatchee River Institute https://wenatcheeriverinstitute.org/
February 18-20	Winter Wings Bird/Photography Festival	Klamath Falls, Oregon https://winterwingsfest.org/
February 18-21	Great Backyard Bird Count	https://www.birdcount.org/
February 19	Pateros to Bridgeport Loop Field Trip	See article on page 6
March 5	E. Wenatchee Porter's Pond Field Trip	See article on page 6
March 25-27	Othella Sandhill Crane Festival	https://www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/
April 7	Paul Bannick - A Year in the Lives of North American Owls	Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center See our website for more information



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The beautiful photos are even nicer in color.



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