

The Wild Phlox

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Banding Common Loons in Northern Washington

by Daniel Poleschook, Jr. and Virginia R. Poleschook
Adjunct Scientists, Biodiversity Research Institute

One of the most appealing birds to occupy the Okanogan region during the summer breeding season is the Common Loon. There are presently about 25 Common Loon breeding territories in northern Washington. That number has slowly increased from only two known nesting locations in the state in 1985. The slow repopulating of breeding Common Loons in Washington is encouraging, as in the last century Common Loon breeding has been extirpated from California, Oregon, and Idaho, primarily due to anthropogenic causes of using lead fishing tackle, shootings, and loss of habitat. The increase in Common Loon breeding territories in northern Washington is partly due to conservation efforts that have been conducted for the species.

Positive identity of individual Common Loons is enabled by affixing colored leg bands (banding) on their tarsi. During 1995-2021, 57 adult and 76 chick Common Loons were banded in Washington. A substantial amount of research has been conducted on the group of banded birds, including behavior, ecology, migrations and movements, DNA assessments, and conservation needs. We recently compiled our research results, including over 40 documents, in a U.S. Forest Service report titled *Washington Common Loon Reference Records*, and we are in the process of building a website where documents from that publication will be accessible. Until the website is finished, we would be pleased to have inquiries and answer requests about those documents.

All Common Loon banding in Washington has been conducted by the Biodiversity Research Institute (www.briwildlife.org), whose biologists have banded over 6,500 Common Loons across North America, all without a single fatality. We have coordinated logistics and provided equipment and banding assistance in Washington since 1998. In addition, various biologists from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, and dozens of volunteers have effectively assisted in the yearly banding effort.

Banding Common Loons in Washington usually takes place in the first week of July, when chicks are large enough to retain leg bands on their tarsi and are still small enough to be more readily captured. Night-time captures are made from a boat using spotlights. A total of four bands are typically placed while banding Common Loons in Washington. Banding does not modify Common Loon behavior or longevity.

We use high quality cameras and telephoto lenses to enable positive identity determinations and enhanced accuracy of our surveys. Photos 1-4 on page 3 are a sequence of images with captions that illustrate the importance of banding in providing detailed information on the ecology and conservation needs of Common Loons in northern Washington.

Without rigorous banding efforts, financial support, and the high degree of banding success that has been achieved, we would know much less about Common Loons in Washington and virtually nothing about their migrations and movements. Banding provides positive identity, and thus important determinations can be made about longevity, territorial fidelity, territorial takeover, productivity, genetic relationships, contaminant levels, and morphometric data. Without question, banding is the most important element in Washington Common Loon conservation.

We are indebted to all those that have assisted us with banding and many other efforts to promote Common Loon conservation in Washington. Our lives have been enriched by your help and friendship. Thank you.

Editor's Note: If you have Common Loon sightings or would like to participate in banding, please contact Daniel Poleschook, Jr. (daniel.poleschook@gmail.com, 509-939-2748) and Virginia "Ginger" R. Poleschook (ggloon@msn.com, 509-939-9699). And you can learn more about their Common Loon conservation work by searching for their names on the internet.

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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Newsletter Editor | Julie Hovis | jahovis711@gmail.com

Festivals, Community Science | Richard Scranton | rscran4350@yahoo.com

Social Media | Monica Maxwell | monicalynnm1979@gmail.com

Website | Bruce McCammon | bruce.mccammon@gmail.com

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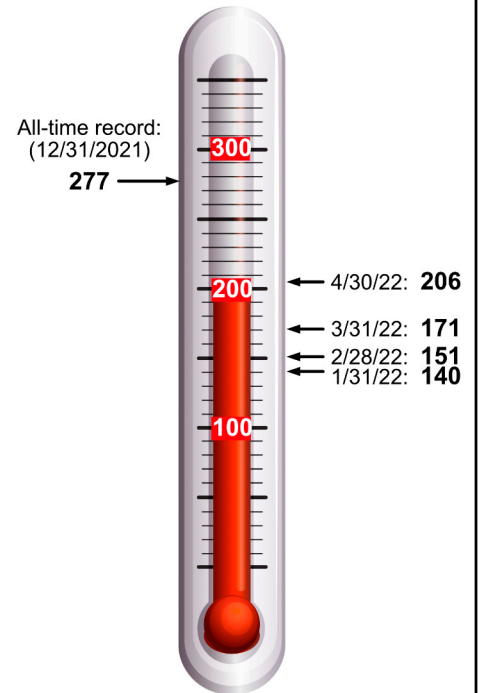
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2022 eBird

Total Number of Bird Species Entered
 NCWAS four-county area End of month counts



Jan-Apr 2022 eBird stats
 Total observers: 407
 Total checklists: 5,784

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In the last issue of the Wild Phlox, I mentioned I saw a banded Common Loon while birding near Bridgeport. Thanks to a friend of a friend, I was able to connect with the researchers who banded the bird and email them what I had observed (a silver band above a green band on the left tarsus). Amazingly, that information was enough for them to identify the bird as one of two chicks that hatched and was banded in northern Washington in 2019. While corresponding with the researchers, I invited them to write an article for this issue about their Common Loon banding and conservation work. They readily agreed, which resulted in the lead article on the front page and the photo essay below.

This is my fifth issue as the newsletter editor. When I volunteered for the job, I was worried there wouldn't be enough material for each issue. So far that has not been a problem; in fact, several times I have held articles over until the next issue because I received too much material. I am grateful for everyone who has contributed and hopeful you'll "keep 'em coming!"

Common Loon Banding

photos by Daniel Poleschook, Jr. and Virginia R. Poleschook
Adjunct Scientists, Biodiversity Research Institute

A large net is used for night capture



Photo 1. A large salmon net, spotlights, and loon calls are used to capture Common Loon chicks and adults at night. On July 28, 2008, we captured and banded this chick and named her "Amelia."

"Amelia" at release following banding, July 28, 2008

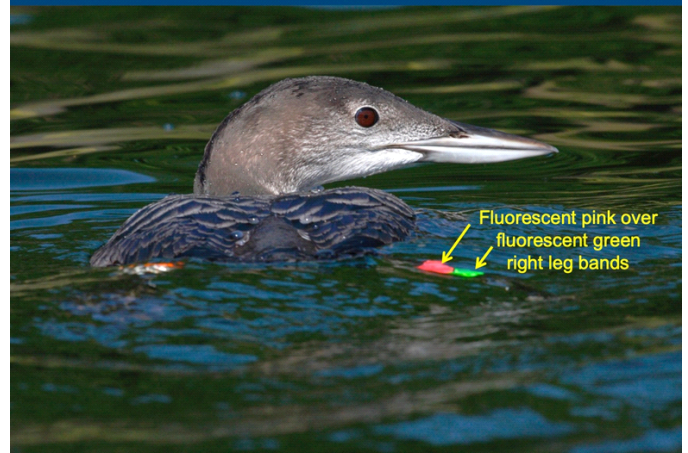


Photo 2. "Amelia," age 41 days, at release following banding. Four leg bands were emplaced: orange with a white stripe over the aluminum U.S. Fish and Wildlife identification band (#0938-44615) on the left tarsus, and fluorescent pink (which later faded) over fluorescent green on the right.

"Amelia" on nest, Bonaparte Lake North, May 21, 2017



Photo 3. "Amelia" became a territorial female at Bonaparte Lake North in 2015 at age seven, 22.7 air miles from where she hatched. Here she is, positively identified by her leg bands, turning her single egg of the year on May 21, 2017, at age nine years. The egg successfully hatched, as can be seen in Photo 4.

"Amelia" with chick June 7, 2017



Photo 4. "Amelia" on June 7, 2017, with her newly hatched chick aged one day. Her location, and her faded fluorescent pink over fluorescent green right leg bands are positive identification. "Amelia" did not return to her territorial lake in 2021. Her territorial longevity was six years, slightly less than the average of about eight years for Common Loons of the region.

Upcoming Field Trips

compiled by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

June 6: Nespelem to Goose Lake and Beyond

By early June, all the spring breeding birds should be present in our region. We will spend a full day birding between the Nespelem River and Goose Lake, with the likelihood of continuing on to the Aeneas Valley. We'll have an excellent chance to see several species that are uncommon in our area, such as American Redstart and Northern Waterthrush. Dress for the weather and bring lunch, snacks, water, etc. There will be only limited walking along unpaved roadways. We will meet at 6:00 am at the Sweet River Bakery in Pateros (203 Lakeshore Drive) and expect to return by 5:00 pm. This trip is limited to ten birders. To reserve your space, email trip co-leaders Art Campbell at rapakivi@methow.com or DJ Jones at djtrillium@icloud.com.

Field trip 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!

June 12: Okanogan Highlands

Come bird the Okanogan Highlands! This day-long adventure will begin in Tonasket, ascending from the Okanogan Valley to roam through the varied habitats of the Highlands and sample its wonderful bird life. Our tour last year identified 92 species in the cliffs, wet meadows, shrub steppe, grassland, forest, riparian, wetlands, and open water habitat along the way, and we missed some of the regulars! Plan to walk short distances over level to slightly rolling terrain. Please bring lunch, water, sun protection, and anything else you need to enjoy a day in the Highlands with the birds. We'll meet at 7:30 am with a projected end time of 4:30 pm. Group size is limited to eight birders. Contact Todd Thorn to reserve your space with the group and for meeting directions at water.thrush@yahoo.com.

Trip Report: Upper Wenatchee Watershed

article and photo by Mary Gallagher, Lake Wenatchee

On Saturday, April 23, and Monday, April 25, Sarah Smith and Mary and Tim Gallagher led field trips to three locations in the Upper Wenatchee Watershed. Participants ranged from those who had never been on a birding trip to an experienced birder from the Boise area. Scheduling two field trips so close together at the same locations was rewarding and showed how weather and day of the week affected species counts. On Saturday we had a total of 43 species but on Monday we had 53 species. How could two days in spring make such a difference in number of bird species seen at the same places?

Each trip started at 7:00 am, before the wind and people showed up on the beach at Lake Wenatchee South State Park. Both days we had 23 species there, not the exact same species but the same number. The water was so still that while standing and listening we heard a Common Loon take off from way up the lake. The hard slapping of its wings to lift that heavy body into the air rang out across the tranquil water. A first-year male Common Goldeneye was hanging out close to the shore with a pair of Buffleheads, giving us great looks. The goldeneye swam in and walked onto the beach and began to preen. It was a new experience for me to see this duck out of water. As we turned to leave so did the goldeneye. He waddled back into the water and then ran across the flat surface, his wings whistling him north.

There were similar counts at the Little Wenatchee Road Bridge over the White River on Chelan-Douglas Land Trust property, with 27 species on Saturday and 28 species on Monday. The flooded fields in this area are very

rewarding to observe in the spring. We heard Virginia Rails and Common Yellowthroats competing with the Red-winged Blackbirds and Song Sparrows for airtime.

Cinnamon Teal were a treat to see. In the deciduous woods on Saturday, we had great looks through the scope at a female Downy Woodpecker busy excavating a cavity. She too stopped and spent time preening her feathers.

The most interesting difference between the two days was at the Cove on Fish Lake. On Saturday we had only 13 species while on Monday we had 36 species. The main factors were that on Saturday there was a cold wind with gusts over 10 mph and a lot of people fishing off the docks and in boats. Both days we saw a large swarm of American Coots right at the boat launch area, busily foraging and seemingly uncaring of our (or others) presence. We all got to see their unique lobed feet. On Monday, seeing the frenzy of Vaux's Swifts, Northern Rough-winged and Violet-green Swallows overhead was quite a treat. They seemed to have just arrived. Having two

male and three female Northern Pintails splash down was exciting; we only wished they had landed a bit closer.

Osprey were busy in the area, and along our route we observed five active nests on both days.

The trip reports can be viewed via eBird:

April 23 (Saturday): <https://ebird.org/tripreport/49769>

April 25 (Monday): <https://ebird.org/tripreport/50391>



Female Downy Woodpecker at Cavity

Book Review

by Susan Sampson and Merry Roy, Wenatchee

***Rosalie Edge, Hawk of Mercy: The Activist Who Saved Nature from the Conservationists.* By Dyana Z. Furmansky (University of Georgia Press, Athens, 2009), 254 pages of text, some photos, plus 40 pages of citations and a bibliography.**

Who was Rosalie Edge? If you have an affinity for hawks or have ever visited the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania, you may know her, but most of us have never heard of her. Mabel Rosalie Barrow Edge (1877-1962) was a New York City socialite who became a bird lover and a rip-roaring, fire-snorting, much reviled, and very successful conservationist. The enemies she took on included the U.S. Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture, the National Park Service, a number of groups like the California Mountaineers and the American Forestry Association, and our own beloved Audubon Society.

As a young woman Edge lived in China, Japan, Malaysia, and Europe with her husband, a civil engineer. At home in the United States, Edge learned her schtick on the (unpaid) job as a publicist for the women's suffrage movement in New York. After women won the vote, and about the time she had a physical altercation with her husband that led to their permanent legal separation, she turned her attention to birds. She began birding in Central Park and was taken under wing, so to speak, by accomplished birders.

Edge was no scientist, but she became the mouthpiece for men in government who were alarmed about harmful environmental practices, yet who had to remain silent for fear of losing their jobs. She created the ECC, the "Emergency Conservation Committee," that issued inflammatory pamphlets that brought attention to crises in conservation. She flooded newspapers and magazines, the public, and members of Congress with her writings. Among other issues, she was alarmed that the Bureau of Biological Survey within the Department of Interior condoned the widespread poisoning of wildlife with thallium, all in the name of preserving commercially viable species and game. She tried to convince the National Association of Audubon Societies (NAAS) to oppose the practice, only to find out that the NAAS had agreed to accept a large donation from the makers of firearms and ammunition and to support the interests of hunters.

Edge became aware of a ridgetop in Pennsylvania where winds channeling down the mountains from Canada propelled literally thousands of hawks on their migratory routes, but so close to the ground that they were easy prey for hunters. When she couldn't get the NAAS to keep its promise to purchase the land, she took out an option on the property and lined up donors to create a preserve. That's when she learned about treachery. Some of her strongest supporters went to work for NAAS and others for the government, coopted her donors, and did nothing to save the hawks. However, the people who read her pamphlets sent donations, many tiny, and she was able to create the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary.

As Edge became well known, she acquired a strong ally in Harold Ikes, the Secretary of the Interior under FDR. She became involved in the political fight to restore parts of Yosemite National Park that had been illegally sold off, worked to create a national park at Kings Canyon in California, and closer to home, helped support the creation of Olympic National Park in Washington State. She eventually got Ikes to dismantle the Bureau of Biological Survey and replace it with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She became a mentor to Roger Tory Peterson. Spin-offs from her ECC included the Wilderness Society, the Environmental Defense Fund, and the Nature Conservancy. The NAAS became the National Audubon Society and adopted her views. The pamphlets that Edge wrote are collected in the University of Washington's library in Seattle.

In his introduction to the book, Bill McKibben tells us that we need Rosalie's courage, forth-rightness, and tenacity for the present day's "high stakes fights" on questions such as climate change. Read the book. While you may find Rosalie abrasive as she was to many, she was foundational in changing the direction of conservation and the environmental movement. Thank goodness!



Evening Grosbeak
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

Conservation Update

Since we last reported, two issues we've been working on for years have taken significant steps forward. Below we address each. For more information on these and other conservation issues we are working on, please visit the Conservation page on the NCWAS website at www.ncwaudubon.org/conservation/.

Fight for Better Wetland Buffers in Chelan County

NCWAS has been working on the issue of Chelan County's Shoreline Master Program (SMP) buffers for approximately three years now. In 2019 the county adopted a much-revised SMP, which among other things, drastically reduced buffer widths applying to streams, rivers, and lakes countywide. It also changed buffer designations at Lake Wenatchee, a "Lake of Statewide Significance," and Fish Lake, which contains an extremely rare bog that's designated a "Research Natural Area" and "Wetland of High Conservation Value." Taken as a whole, these changes substantially reduced protections for the county's natural water systems.

Throughout, we've argued for strong protections for all the county's streams, rivers, and lakes. We've submitted comments to two SMP update processes and met with the Chelan County Commissioners, all to no avail. In adopting the 2019 buffer revisions, the county claimed it met the legal requirements of achieving "no net loss" and the use of "best available science." We disagree. As a result, in February 2022, we took another step, petitioning the county to reconsider and revise the buffer widths it imposes around its streams, rivers, and lakes, and the changed buffer designations made to the shorelines of Lake Wenatchee and Fish Lake.

The county's natural water systems are vitally important resources that should be protected as mandated by applicable Washington State law. Our petition makes it clear that we believe the 2019 SMP changes made to buffer widths in general, and specific buffer designations at Lake Wenatchee and Fish Lake in particular, fall short of offering the protections their values warrant and state law requires.

Going forward, our petition will be considered by Chelan County's Community Development Planning Commission.

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

The Planning Commission will then refer recommendations to the County Board of Commissioners, and the public will be notified and invited to provide input. Finally, the Commissioners will decide the matter.

To read our petition, please visit the Conservation page on the NCWAS website. We'll update the information there as things progress.

Upper Wenatchee Community Lands Plan (UWCLP)

The UWCLP is a project that was established years ago to potentially purchase 30,000 acres of private forest lands between Lake Wenatchee and Blewett Pass for public ownership. It was initially spearheaded by the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, Trust for Public Lands (TPL), The Nature Conservancy, and Chelan County. Since then, ownership of these lands changed hands multiple times and the chance of arriving at a deal to acquire them remained uncertain. Ultimately, TPL took the effort on to see if a deal of some kind might still be possible.

In 2016, NCWAS researched and submitted an analysis to the UWCLP process (available on the Conservation page of our website) prioritizing the parcels potentially available for purchase. We looked at each using Google Earth, paid special attention to water features, considered adjacent U.S. Forest Service management designations, determined whether they had already been logged or not, etc. This allowed us to identify the parcels we felt would have the greatest habitat values for birds.

We are now happy to report that TPL and Chinook Forest Partners recently reached an agreement giving TPL a seven-year option for the purchase of 35,000 acres in the area. With the deal struck, a massive fundraising phase, directed by TPL, has now begun. NCWAS has been asked to play a role in this effort and will do so.

The success of this project, which has the potential to provide great benefit to our region's birds, is now fully dependent upon acquiring the funds needed to implement it. In the meantime, as long as the project meets its financial goals, no one else can step in to acquire these lands for development or other uses. Going forward, we'll update the Conservation web page to reflect new developments.

It's Official! Nason Ridge is Washington State's Newest Community Forest

On April 14, 2022, Western Rivers Conservancy transferred the 3,714-acre Nason Ridge property to Chelan County. Now the county has started "an exciting new chapter for Nason Ridge, ensuring the forest will be prioritized for fish, wildlife and sustainable forestry, while working with Washington State Parks to ensure recreational access."

Over the next several months Chelan County will initiate several projects including reconvening the Stewardship Committee, providing updates on the new acquisition and planned restoration projects for the next year, and beginning Recreation/Aquatic Management Planning with the National Park Service Rivers Trails and Conservation Assistance Program.

by Mary and Tim Gallagher, Lake Wenatchee

Other projects planned include fuels reduction to increase the health and resiliency of the landscape, invasive species management, replanting of conifers in the Nason floodplain, habitat structures in Nason Creek near the confluence of Kahler Creek, and associated road decommission in the floodplain of Nason Creek.

If you are interested in representing NCWAS on the Stewardship Committee or participating in bird surveys on Nason Ridge, please contact Mary Gallagher at 206-650-7511. To see the Chelan County press release, please visit the NCWAS website at www.ncwaudubon.org/conservation/.

Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers

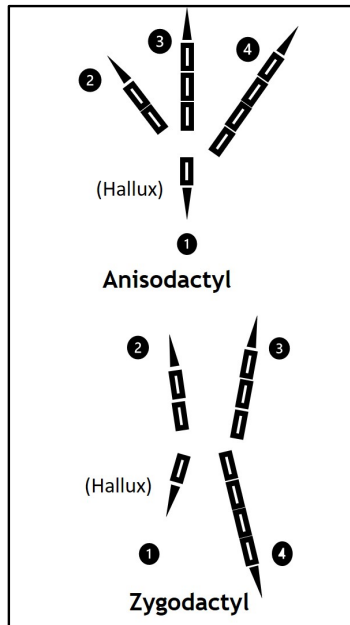
by Patricia Heglund, Lost River

I have a complex relationship with woodpeckers. As a long-time bird bander, I regularly catch a few woodpeckers in mist nets every spring. When I take one carefully, and painstakingly, from a net, I hold it in the cup of my hand, my thumb secures one wing to its side, and my pointer and second fingers gently surround its neck. My remaining fingers carefully wrap around its back and other wing and the stiff tail feathers brace against my hand. With its zygodactyl toes, two on top of my pinky finger and two below, it grips my finger tightly and holds me back. As cute as they are, frustration rises when I try to peel the grippy, sharp nails and toes from my finger so that I can place a numbered aluminum band on its short leg. That zygodactyl grip attaches to me like no other.

In general, birds have four toes. Of the birds I catch, most are songbirds in the order Passeriformes. Songbirds have a typical anisodactyl toe arrangement where toes two, three, and four are forward in a slight fan shape. Their first toe, the hallux, is analogous to our big toe but it is rotated backwards. This arrangement facilitates perching on branches, wires, and fences. Woodpeckers are in the order Piciformes, and most Piciformes species have four toes in a zygodactyl toe arrangement. The zygodactyl arrangement is where toes one and four are rotated backwards, and toes two and three face forward like those of the Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers that hold my pinky during banding.

Woodpeckers spend little time perching and more time on the ground or on tree trunks and large branches foraging for insects on, under, or embedded in tree bark, limbs, and trunks. Some scientists believe the zygodactyl toe arrangement facilitates climbing movements on and about tree trunks. However, several species of songbirds with the anisodactyl arrangement, such as the Brown Creeper and Red-breasted Nuthatch, also spend a lot of time vertically climbing and foraging for food. Do zygodactyl toes give woodpeckers some advantage for moving around or foraging on tree trunks?

Scientists agree that opposing toes are important for gripping. However, those who study woodpecker physiology have evidence that some species may not use the hallux much at all when pecking or drilling, and three species do not have one at all. Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers, which occur in the Methow Valley, are missing the hallux and thus have three toes rather than four. Why would these woodpecker species lose their hallux and forego the standard, four-toed, zygodactyl pinching-grip?



It is hard to say for certain. Both woodpecker species, although uncommon, are often observed in higher densities in conifer forests following a burn, an insect outbreak, or some other disturbance. Based on observations conducted on Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers in the laboratory and in the wild, scientists believe the three-toed arrangement when combined with other physiological modifications (e.g., leg tendon attachments, skull modifications, and foraging behavior) affords these two species more leverage for striking wood during foraging bouts than other woodpeckers. To me, more drilling power makes sense for the Black-backed Woodpecker that specializes in excavating wood-boring beetles in the long-horned beetle (Cerambycidae) family, and for the American Three-toed Woodpecker that primarily forages by flaking bark in search of bark beetles (Scolytidae) but also consumes wood-boring beetles. Other woodpecker species rely on these hard to excavate foods to a lesser degree.

Now is a great time to get out and search for Black-backed and American Three-toed Woodpeckers in the upper Methow Valley. Areas that burned during the 2021 Cedar Creek and Cub Creek fires near Winthrop are where you can expect to find one or both species. Look for Black-backed Woodpeckers in severely burned areas and along edges of severe burns, whereas American Three-toed Woodpeckers may be observed in less severely burned sites. When you do find one, take some time to quietly watch it forage and see if you can view its adaptations in action.



American Three-toed Woodpecker
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

June 2022 Wild Phlox

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1st Wednesday of the month	Horan Natural Area Bird Walks	See our website for details
1st & 3rd Wednesdays of the month	Beebe Springs Bird Surveys	Contact Virginia Palumbo (vypalumbo@gmail.com or 509-682-5969)
June 4	Four-county Bird Count	Contact Joe Veverka (joe_everka@yahoo.com) or Art Campbell (rapakivi@methow.com)
June 6	Nespelem to Goose Lake and Beyond Field Trip	See article on page 4
June 12	Okanogan Highlands Field Trip	See article on page 4
June 15, July 13	Monthly e-Bird Surveys at the Wenatchee River Institute	www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org
June 21	NCWAS Solstice Hummingbird Survey Hummingbird Project Background Paper	Contact ncwahummerproject@gmail.com



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