

# The Wild Phlox

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## 2022 U.S. State of the Birds Report Reveals Widespread Losses of Birds in All Habitats—Except for One

In 50 years, birds have increased overall in wetlands, a singular exception that shows the way forward for saving birds and benefiting people

Editors Note: This October 12, 2022, press release and the accompanying photos are part of a media kit provided by the North American Bird Conservation Initiative.

Ithaca, NY—A newly released State of the Birds report for the United States reveals a tale of two trends, one hopeful, one dire. Long-term trends of waterfowl show strong increases where investments in wetland conservation have improved conditions for birds and people. But data show birds in the United States are declining overall in every other habitat—forests, grasslands, deserts, and oceans.

Published by 33 leading science and conservation organizations and agencies, the 2022 U.S. State of the Birds report is the first look at the nation's birds since a landmark 2019 study showed the loss of 3 billion birds in the United States and Canada in 50 years.

Findings included in the report:

- More than half of U.S. bird species are declining.
- U.S. grassland birds are among the fastest declining with a 34% loss since 1970.
- Waterbirds and ducks in the U.S. have increased by 18% and 34% respectively during the same period.
- 70 newly identified Tipping Point species have each lost 50% or more of their populations in the past 50 years, and are on a track to lose another half in the next 50 years if nothing changes. They include beloved gems such as Rufous Hummingbirds, songsters such as Golden-winged Warblers, and oceanic travelers such as Black-footed Albatrosses.

The rapid declines in birds signal the intensifying stresses that wildlife and people alike are experiencing around the world because of habitat loss, environmental degradation and extreme climate events," said Dr. Amanda Rodewald, director of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Center for Avian Population Studies. "Taking action to bring birds back delivers a cascade of benefits that improve climate resilience and quality of life for people. When we restore forests, for example, we sequester carbon, reduce fire

intensity, and create habitat for plants and animals. By greening cities, we provide heat relief, increase access to recreation, and create refuge for migrating birds."

The report used five sources of data, including the North American Breeding Bird Survey and Christmas Bird Count, to track the health of breeding birds in habitats across the United States.



Rufous Hummingbird

photo by Aidan Brubaker, Cornell Lab | Macaulay Library

"From grassland birds to seabirds to Hawaiian birds, we continue to see that nearly all groups of birds and types of bird habitat have declined significantly," said Martha Williams, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "The one group that is seeing an increase in population size are wetland dependent birds, including waterfowl." "While a majority of bird species are declining, many waterbird populations remain healthy, thanks to decades of collaborative investments from hunters, landowners, state and federal agencies, and corporations," said Dr. Karen Waldrop, chief conservation officer for Ducks Unlimited. *Continued on page 4.*

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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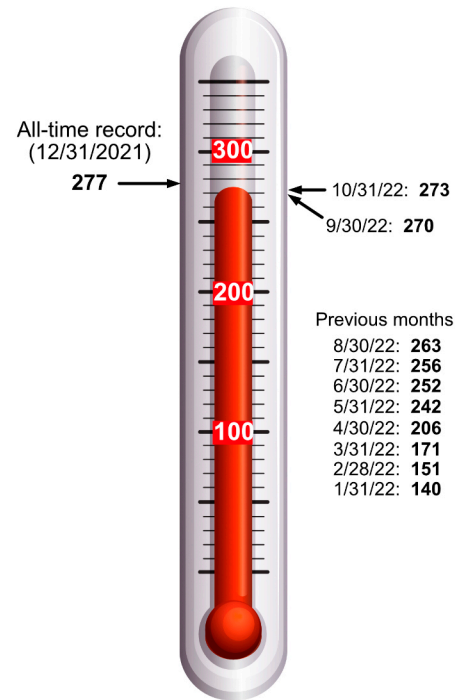
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### 2022 eBird

#### Total Number of Bird Species Entered

NCWAS four-county area End of month counts



#### Jan-Oct 2022 eBird stats

Total observers: 1,193

Total checklists: 16,014

## North Central Washington Audubon Society Wild Phlox Subscription Form

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To join the National Audubon Society, which also includes a subscription to the Wild Phlox, please see our website at [www.ncwaudubon.org](http://www.ncwaudubon.org)



For many of us in north central Washington, winter arrived with a bang in early November. Here in the Methow Valley, the snow started on November 6<sup>th</sup> and ended two days later after dumping approximately twenty-four inches of snow. Although I am excited to be Nordic skiing this early in the season, I am disappointed that fall did not last a little longer. I really enjoy walking with Greta on crisp fall days without the need for a heavy coat, snow boots, and traction cleats. The early snow storm certainly took the deciduous trees by surprise. The ones in my yard seem to be clinging desperately to their leaves, or perhaps they are simply frozen in place. It will be interesting to see how much longer they “hang on.”



Mountain Chickadee  
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

If you feed birds this winter, please remember to keep your feeders and the ground beneath them clean. I don't put up feeders in my yard because they attract too many House Sparrows, which is a problem for the swallows that nest in my bird boxes in the spring. (The House Sparrow is an introduced cavity-nesting species that competes with our native birds for nest cavities.) Thankfully, there are no House Sparrows at my sister's house so I can enjoy the finches, chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers that frequent her feeders when I visit.

The Christmas Bird Count season is almost here (see page 4). There are six counts in our region and lots of birders are needed to cover the circles. Participating is a great way to connect with other birders while collecting data that are used to help track population trends and produce reports like the 2022 U.S. State of the Birds.

## NCWAS Social, November 2, 2022 Speaker: Nolan Campbell

by Merry Roy, Wenatchee

Nolan Campbell was a birder before he was a reader. In fact, birds were what motivated him to read when he was just four years old. Now at sixteen, Nolan is one of the best birders I've met. Walking in the Horan Natural Area with birding groups, he hears and sees birds before the rest of us and quietly points them out so that we can see them.

Nolan and his three siblings are home-schooled, but he runs cross-country with the Wenatchee High School track team. Running and watching birds—a good combination for body, mind, and soul.

This past summer Nolan attended the famed Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine with sixteen other teens (the first person he met there was from Yakima and also runs cross-country) and twice that number of adults. At our NCWAS social in November he shared his experiences.

Nolan told us about birding in marshes and seeing carnivorous sundew and pitcher plants; visiting a fish ladder and watching Herring Gulls fight over migrating alewives; boating to Eastern Egg Rock where hundreds of puffins, terns, and guillemots nest; seeing Leach's Storm Petrels with their tube noses that snort salt; being attacked by terns defending their nests; and bird banding with Scott Weidensaul, author and director of Hog Island's ornithology program, and Charles Duncan, hummingbird bander *par excellence*.

This photo of Nolan shows “Plucky” the Common Tern who gave up his attack to sit on Nolan's head. Nolan said birders often held something over their heads to give the terns something less painful to attack, popsicle sticks on their hats being a favorite deflector.

What will Nolan's future hold? He would like to travel to bird in the Falkland Islands. Who knows, but whatever lies ahead, it is certain to include birds. Nolan inspires hope for us and for birds everywhere. Thanks, Nolan!



photo contributed by Hog Island Audubon Camp  
June 2022

# 2022 U.S. State of the Birds - continued from page 1

“This is good news not only for birds, but for the thousands of other species that rely on wetlands, and the communities that benefit from groundwater recharge, carbon sequestration, and flood protection.”

The report suggests that applying that winning formula in more habitats will help birds and natural resources rebound.

“The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, Federal Duck Stamp Program, grants from the North American Wetlands Conservation Act, and regional Joint Ventures partnerships are all part of a framework that has a proven track record with restoring and protecting wetland-dependent species,” said Williams of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “Now we want to use that precedent to

work with our partners to restore bird populations, conserve habitat, and build a foundation for how we respond to the loss of other bird groups.” Data show that conservation must be stepped up to reverse the biggest declines among shorebirds, down by 33% since 1970, and grasslands birds, down by 34%. Recognizing the need to work at bigger, faster scales, 200 organizations from across seven sectors in Mexico, Canada, the U.S., and Indigenous Nations are collaborating on a Central Grasslands Roadmap to

conserve one of North America's largest and most vital ecosystems—hundreds of millions of acres of grasslands. “People have changed our grassland landscape and people are key to its future,” said Tammy VerCauteren, executive director of the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and a representative of the Central Grasslands Roadmap. “Collectively, we are working to make a movement to save our grasslands and the people and wildlife that depend upon them. Together we can ensure Tribal sovereignty, private property rights, food security, resilient landscapes, and thriving wildlife populations.”



Northern Pintail  
photo by Brad Imhoff, Cornell Lab | Macaulay Library

Given widespread declines, the report emphasizes the need for proactive conservation across habitats and species.

“Despite best hopes and efforts, 70 Tipping Point bird species have a half life of just 50 years—meaning they will lose half their already dwindling populations in the next 50 years unless we take action,” said Dr. Peter Marra, director of The Earth Commons—Georgetown University’s Institute for Environment & Sustainability. “What we’ve outlined in this State of the Birds is a recipe for how conservation biologists can work with communities and use surgical precision to solve environmental problems—blending new technology and data to pinpoint the cause of losses and to reverse declines while we still have the best chance—now, before more birds plummet to endangered.”

The report advises that meeting the tremendous need will require a strategic combination of partnerships, incentives, science-based solutions, and the will to dramatically scale up conservation efforts.

“Everyone can make a difference to help turn declines around,” said Mike Parr, president of American Bird Conservancy. “Everyone with a window can use simple solutions to prevent collisions. Everyone can help green their neighborhood and avoid using pesticides that

harm birds. Everyone who lives in a neighborhood can bring the issues and solutions to their community and use their voice to take action.”

The 2022 U.S. State of the Birds report was produced by a consortium of government agencies, private organizations, and bird initiatives led by NABCI (North American Bird Conservation Initiative).

A copy of the report is available on the NCWAS webpage at <https://ncwaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/state-of-the-birds-2022-spreads.pdf>.

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## Audubon’s 123rd Christmas Bird Count

compiled by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

The Christmas Bird Count season is right around the corner. Here are the dates and leaders for the counts in our area.

Bridgeport: December 14 - Meredith Spencer, [merdave@homenetnw.net](mailto:merdave@homenetnw.net) or 509-686-7551

Chelan: December 17 - Steve Easley, [seasley@nwi.net](mailto:seasley@nwi.net) or 509-682-2318

Okanogan/Omak: December 18 - Matt Danielson, [mattie\\_rubio@hotmail.com](mailto:mattie_rubio@hotmail.com)

Leavenworth: December 20 - Joe Veverka, [joe\\_veverka@yahoo.com](mailto:joe_veverka@yahoo.com)

Twisp: Dec 30 - Peter Wimberger, [phwimberger@pugetsound.edu](mailto:phwimberger@pugetsound.edu) or Jen Fischer, [jenwalsh1219@msn.com](mailto:jenwalsh1219@msn.com)

Wenatchee: December 31 - Dan Stephens, [dstephens@wvc.edu](mailto:dstephens@wvc.edu) or 509-679-4706

# NCWAS and the American Kestrel Nest Box Project

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

At the risk of sounding like a Wikipedia article, let me remind you that an American Kestrel is our smallest falcon. You might mistake it for a robin when you see its rusty breast as it perches on a wire, but not when you notice that it is holding and devouring a mouse. It has a slate blue head and back and a black tear tattooed under its eye, like the bad guys in gang movies. It nests in cavities in trees and in old buildings. It is found all over the United States and is not listed as threatened or endangered, but across the northern part of the United States its population is declining. It finds abundant food in north central Washington, but the area offers relatively few nesting sites.

Since 1980, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife has been involved in placing kestrel nest boxes to help sustain their population. In 1993, Richard Hendrick, an orchard worker, volunteered to help build, install, clean, and maintain kestrel boxes in north central Washington, and to band chicks. By 2020, his network included 250 boxes and he estimated he had banded 7,000 nestlings. Then, in September 2020, wildfires wiped out at least half of his boxes. When he died in December 2020, his last wish was that his work with kestrels be maintained.

In the spring of 2021, NCWAS agreed to lead a project to restore the kestrel boxes. Conservation Northwest, a Seattle-based nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving and restoring wildlands, habitat, and wildlife, offered volunteers and students to help build and monitor boxes. Working through a committee, NCWAS developed a plan for building, installing, and monitoring kestrel boxes. By October 2022, the Committee reported that its volunteers had completed a phenomenal amount of work, involving over 700 visits to kestrel boxes and documenting successful nesting and fledging.

When I read the Committee's report in the October 2022 issue of *The Wild Phlox*, I contacted Richard Scranton for more information about the Committee's work. He sent me a copy of a document with a title you can't say in one breath: "Artificial Nest Boxes to Aid Kestrel Reproduction in Northcentral Washington: The Richard Hendrick Kestrel Conservation Project Implementation Plan," dated February 2022.

According to the Implementation Plan, the Committee established physical boundaries for its work: the project is bounded on the north and west by the Columbia River, on the east by Grand Coulee, and on the south by Highway 2. In addition, it covers Chelan Butte, Swakane Canyon, and the Methow Valley. It covers both public and private land—but only with permission, of course. The project area is over 1,000 square miles.

The first goal of the project is to contribute to the productivity of kestrels in north central Washington to stabilize their population over time (while gathering and sharing scientific information). The second goal is to engage volunteers to do all that work. The third goal is to engage in cooperative research.

Phase 1 includes the historical efforts of the project that began in the 1980s. Phase 2, which extends through the fall of 2023, includes fire recovery, restoring the nest box network, installing new boxes, mapping and documenting box locations, and developing monitoring protocols. And Phase 3, which is already underway, involves ongoing box installation, cleaning and maintaining boxes, recruiting and training volunteers, and monitoring nesting activity.



Kent Woodruff and a Newly Installed Kestrel Box  
photo by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

Appendix A lists best practices for mounting kestrel boxes. Ideally, they shouldn't be so high that you need a ladder to maintain them, yet the bottom of the box should be at least eight feet above the ground. (That means I'd have to put the box on the pole before I put the pole in the ground, unless I could get Shaquille to go out installing kestrel boxes with me.) There should be two holes in the back of the box, one near the top and the other near the bottom, so the box can be attached to a pole with washers and lag bolts. *Continued on page 6.*

# Ken Smith Does Kestrel Nest Boxes

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

Ken Smith wants it to be absolutely, positively clear that he isn't hogging more credit than he deserves for building boxes for the NCWAS American Kestrel Nest Box Project. "This is truly a team effort," he insists. By October 2022, he had built 75 boxes in two years. Other volunteers install the boxes in the kestrel project area.

Ken is a retired industrial electrician who worked with controls and automation for fruit handling and packing facilities. His work took him from Chelan to Yakima, Pasco, and the Columbia River Gorge. Ken's interest in seeing and photographing birds began to grow around 20 years ago. He would see birds during the day on his trips to dark sites to do astronomy. He would see kestrels sitting on power lines along the way to his jobs. At first, he mistook them for American Robins, until he noticed they were intimidating little birds, sitting on lines devouring mice. He identified them from photos.

The October 2020 issue of *The Wild Phlox* reported that wildfires burned 400,000 acres in remote areas of Okanogan and Douglas counties. The fires took out an unknown number of kestrel boxes that had been installed over the years. Ken's wife saw the article and said, "Ken, here is a project I bet you would like to help with." Ken and his wife had been visiting antique stores to find rustic lumber to build custom bird houses. The article redirected Ken from custom boxes to mass production. He contacted Kent Woodruff, who steered him to the internet for plans for building kestrel boxes. After a few attempts and modifications, they had a good design.

The kestrel boxes are roomy enough for nesting and feeding. The entry allows kestrels in but is small enough to keep larger predators out. Ken heard that Richard Hendrick, who maintained and monitored kestrel boxes on the Waterville Plateau for many years, painted his boxes dark, not for reasons of bird behavior, but to make them less conspicuous to shooters. Ken's boxes are not painted.



photo by Ken Smith

NCWAS budgeted \$2,500 for materials for the boxes, according to Treasurer Larry Tobiska. Each box uses eight to ten linear feet of three-quarter inch pine. In 2021, each cost about \$24 including glue and hardware. Since then, Kent Woodruff has found a man who runs a portable sawmill who cuts the lumber to sizes the box builders can use. It is un-planed, rough lumber, but it works and is cheaper.

Ken estimates that it takes him two hours to complete a box. Now that he is confident about working with his plans, he cuts pieces for ten to fifteen boxes at a time. He shares the workspace in the garage with the houseplants his wife overwinters indoors. Each time he cuts pieces, he wheels his table saw and his miter saw outdoors to keep sawdust from coating the garage and the plants. When the boxes are complete, he stores them outdoors.

Ken rightfully takes enough pride in his workmanship to sign it. He finishes each bird box with a brass plaque with his initials on it. He has overheard people talking about finding boxes with his initial tag on them. He has used up his first 75 tags and has ordered 75 more.

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## Kestrel Nest Box Project - continued from page 5

Appendix B lists a monitoring protocol. Typically, a male asserts a territorial claim to a box in April or May, attracts a female, and then breeding activity begins. The female lays one egg every other day. Incubation begins after the last egg is laid and extends for about four weeks. Monitors are encouraged to visit their assigned boxes five times to: (1) clean and repair boxes before nesting begins; (2) look for an established kestrel territory near each box; (3) confirm incubation and count eggs; (4) count and age nestlings and

estimate the fledging date; and (5) count, age, and sex nestlings at 24 days of age, using the age determined in the previous visit. The fifth visit is the final record of the number of young fledged from each box.

Now, I twit people about long titles on documents and instructions that I can misunderstand, but I laud the Committee for its excellent work. I am impressed. I am thankful for people who undertake such work.

# 2022 Birding Surveys at Beebe Springs

by Virginia Palumbo, Chelan

This is the seventh year that NCWAS has co-sponsored a twice monthly bird survey at Beebe Springs Natural Area, led by Virginia Palumbo and assisted by Meredith Spencer. The area is an old orchard along the Columbia River that the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) is restoring to natural habitat (riparian, sage-steppe, and grasslands). As the restoration has progressed, the diversity of bird species has increased. This year's sightings, both from the survey and independently by other birders, have brought the total number of species seen at Beebe up to 166. The data from this survey are shared with Ron Fox and Amy Pavelchek, the WDFW biologists who oversee

Beebe. They use the data for assessing the restoration efforts and in obtaining funding.

In 2022, ten birders participated in the survey, including several regulars. The highest number of species found was 44 on May 18. Highlights of the birding surveys included a Peregrine Falcon, Red-eyed Vireo, Trumpeter Swans, Merlin, Wood Ducks, and Pacific Wren. Along with these surprises were the expected, but still delightful migrants—Warbling Vireo, Spotted Sandpiper, Western Wood-Pee-wee, Bullock's Oriole, Common Yellowthroat, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, Yellow-breasted Chat, and multiple warbler, wren, swallow, flycatcher, and sparrow species.

Additionally, Beebe Springs was the site of a field trip for the Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest. Eight birders participated, finding 39 species. Highlights from the Bird Fest trip included a Townsend's Warbler and Evening Grosbeak, and great views of many of the migrant species.

This year WDFW did extensive clearing of overgrowth around the benches, blinds, and trails to improve visibility at Beebe, aided by many volunteers from the Chelan Lion's Club. WDFW also continually works on maintaining access to the beaver pond area, as the beavers are determined to raise the level of the pond over the trail. Boots are always a good idea!

The final survey for 2022 was on Wednesday, November 16. Please note: there is a SCHEDULE CHANGE for 2023. Next year there will be only ONE survey a month, conducted on the SECOND WEDNESDAY of each month, beginning on April 12, 2023. Contact Virginia Palumbo at [vwpalumbo@gmail.com](mailto:vwpalumbo@gmail.com), or 509-860-2129, for sign-up and start times. We would love to have you come join us!



Black-headed Grosbeak  
photo by Dave Menke, USFWS (Public Domain)

## Snowbird Sighting

a poem by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

This morning I saw a snowbird in my mirror,  
pale faced, browner appendages, sharp beak.  
I saw her en route a well-known migratory path,  
North Central Washington to Arizona.  
She's finding ample forage  
for her obligatory diet  
along the way,  
gluten-free breakfast at Denny's.  
She's pair-bonded and her mate  
hears her characteristic squawk  
as back-seat driving.



Bald Eagles  
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

# December 2022 Wild Phlox

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## North Central Washington Audubon Society Resources and Calendar

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<b>1st Wednesday of the month</b>	<b>Horan Natural Area Bird Walks</b>	See our website for details
<b>December</b>	<b>Christmas bird counts in North Central Washington</b>	See page 4 for dates and contact information
December 14 January 11 February 8	Beginner Bird Walk Wenatchee River Institute	<a href="http://www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org">www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org</a>
<b>December 21</b>	<b>NCWAS Solstice Hummingbird Survey</b> <b><a href="#">Hummingbird Project Background Paper</a></b>	<a href="mailto:ncwahummerproject@gmail.com">ncwahummerproject@gmail.com</a>
February 17-20	Winter Wings Bird Festival	Klamath Falls, Oregon <a href="http://www.winterwingsfest.org">www.winterwingsfest.org</a>



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