

# The Wild Phlox

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## The Basics of Bird Migration: How, Why, and Where

Geese winging their way south in wrinkled V-shaped flocks is perhaps the classic picture of migration—the annual, large-scale movement of birds between their breeding (summer) homes and their nonbreeding (winter) grounds. But geese are far from our only migratory birds. Of the more than 650 species of North American breeding birds, more than half are migratory.

### Why Do Birds Migrate?

Birds migrate to move from areas of low or decreasing resources to areas of high or increasing resources. The two primary resources being sought are food and nesting locations.

Birds that nest in the Northern Hemisphere tend to migrate northward in the spring to take advantage of burgeoning insect populations, budding plants and an abundance of nesting locations. As winter approaches and the availability of insects and other food drops, the birds move south again. Escaping the cold is a motivating factor but many species, including hummingbirds, can withstand freezing temperatures as long as an adequate supply of food is available.

### Types of Migration

The term migration describes periodic, large-scale movements of populations of animals. One way to look at migration is to consider the distances traveled. *Permanent residents* do not migrate. They are able to find adequate supplies of food year-round. *Short-distance migrants* make relatively small movements, as from higher to lower elevations on a mountainside. *Medium-distance migrants* cover distances that span a few hundred miles. *Long-distance migrants* typically move from breeding ranges in the United States and Canada to wintering grounds in Central and South America. Despite the arduous journeys involved, long-distance migration is a feature of some 350 species of North American birds. The pattern of migration can vary within each category, but is most variable in short and medium distance migrants.

from “All About Birds” by the  
Cornell Lab of Ornithology

### Origins of Long-Distance Migration

While short-distance migration probably developed from a fairly simple need for food, the origins of long-distance migration patterns are much more complex. They’ve evolved over thousands of years and are controlled at least partially by the genetic makeup of the birds. They also

incorporate responses to weather, geography, food sources, day length, and other factors.

For birds that winter in the tropics, it seems strange to imagine leaving home and embarking on a migration north. Why make such an arduous trip north in spring? One idea is that through many generations the tropical ancestors of these birds dispersed from their tropical breeding sites northward. The seasonal abundance of insect food and greater day length allowed them to raise more young (4–6 on average) than their stay-at-home tropical relatives (2–3 on average). As their breeding zones moved north during periods of glacial retreat, the birds continued to return to their tropical homes as winter weather and declining food supplies made life more difficult. Supporting this theory is

the fact that most North American vireos, flycatchers, tanagers, warblers, orioles, and swallows have evolved from forms that originated in the tropics.

### What Triggers Migration?

The mechanisms initiating migratory behavior vary and are not always completely understood. Migration can be triggered by a combination of changes in day length, lower temperatures, changes in food supplies, and genetic predisposition. For centuries, people who have kept cage birds have noticed that the migratory species go through a period of restlessness each spring and fall, repeatedly fluttering toward one side of their cage. German behavioral scientists gave this behavior the name *zugunruhe*, meaning migratory restlessness. *Continued on page 4.*



Yellow Warbler  
(a long-distance migrant)  
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

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## Audubon's 124th Christmas Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count season will be here soon. This is the information currently available for the counts in our area.

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

**Chelan:** No date yet. Amy Pavelchek, [amy.pavelchek@dfw.wa.gov](mailto:amy.pavelchek@dfw.wa.gov)

**Okanogan/Omak:** No information yet

**Leavenworth:** December 19 - Tucker Jonas, [tuckersjonas@gmail.com](mailto:tuckersjonas@gmail.com)

**Twisp:** December 16 - 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

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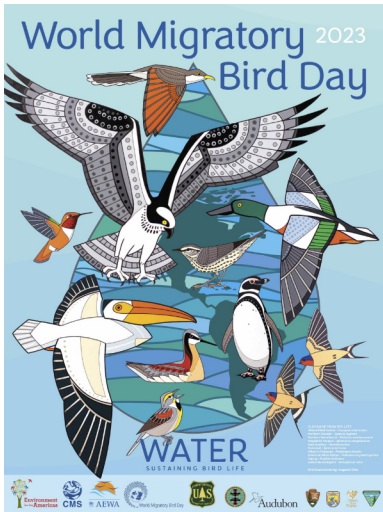
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To join the National Audubon Society, which also includes a subscription to the Wild Phlox, please see our website at [www.ncwaudubon.org](http://www.ncwaudubon.org)



Did you know there is a website called BirdCast that uses radar-based data to develop and maintain tools that predict and monitor nocturnal bird migration in the contiguous United States? The site's tools include migration forecast maps, live-bird migration maps, and a migration dashboard that summarizes, at the county or state level, the number, directions, speeds, and altitudes of migrating birds. There also is a local migration alert tool that predicts if the density of birds migrating in your area overnight will be low, medium, or high. Today (September 29) I used the alert tool to look at the forecast for the Winthrop area and found there was a High Migration Alert for tonight—and a reminder to turn off all non-essential lighting from 11:00 pm until 6:00 am to help protect the birds passing through the area. Very useful information! The forecast maps, live-bird maps, and alerts are produced and maintained by Colorado State University and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Active forecasting for 2023 doesn't end until November 15, so there is still plenty of time to check out the website at <https://birdcast.info/>.

## Editor's Notes



Credit: Environment for the Americas (Public Domain)

At the end of the summer, migratory birds undergo a period of hyperphagia and eat excessive amounts of food in order to store fat needed for fuel. I observed this phenomenon first-hand during a recent visit to a fall migration banding station on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Fat in birds is an orangey-pink color and stored in the furcular hollow (wishbone area), wingpits, and on the abdomen. A young Swainson's Thrush captured twice in one day at the station gained 2.3 grams between its first and second capture just five hours later—and the amount of visible fat on the bird increased dramatically, from moderate to bulging! Swainson's Thrushes winter as far south as Chile and Argentina, so I was glad to see that the bird was bulking up for its journey!

October 14 is World Migratory Bird Day, a global campaign to raise awareness of migratory birds and the need for international cooperation to conserve them. This year's focus is water and its importance to migratory birds. To learn more visit [www.migratorybirdday.org](http://www.migratorybirdday.org).

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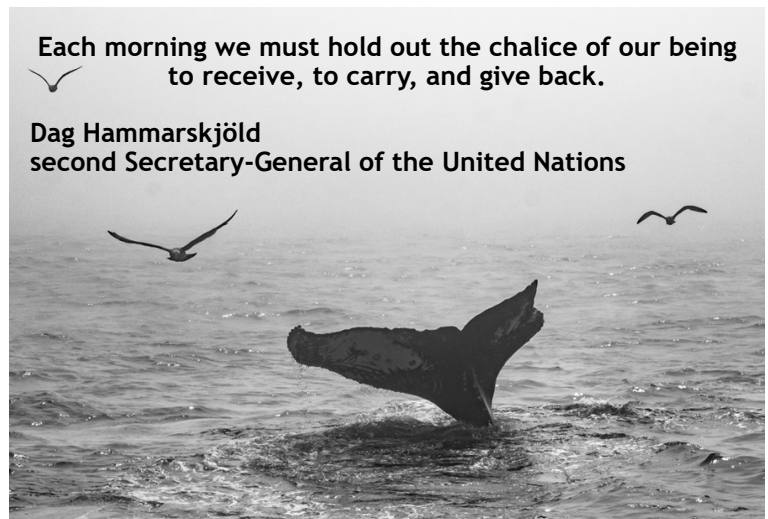
by Mark Oswood, Wenatchee

We watch birds. Sometimes we watch whales, as well. We receive these encounters as gifts. Then we give back, sometimes with our time and efforts, sometimes with money (another kind of energy). NCWAS could not exist without both these forms of generosity.

Our once-a-year donation request fedges in fall. We acknowledge donors twice a year, in the April and October Phloxes. We list below folks who have made donations since mid-March 2023. Donations made from September 2022 to mid-March 2023 were acknowledged in the April 2023 Phlox.

Please know that your contributions are much appreciated, now and always. **Thank you.**

Larry and Penny Tobiska are "first responders" for donations received.



Each morning we must hold out the chalice of our being to receive, to carry, and give back.

Dag Hammarskjöld  
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Plus one anonymous donor, just as appreciated as those named above.

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\* = \$100+ (Great Blue Heron)  
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# Bird Migration Basics - continued from page 1

Different species of birds and even segments of the population within the same species may follow different migratory patterns.

## How Do Birds Navigate?

Migrating birds can cover thousands of miles in their annual travels, often traveling the same course year after year with little deviation. First-year birds often make their very first migration on their own. Somehow they can find their winter home despite never having seen it before, and return the following spring to where they were born. The secrets of their amazing navigational skills aren't fully understood, partly because birds combine several different types of senses when they navigate. Birds can get compass information from the sun, the stars, and by sensing the earth's magnetic field. They also get information from the position of the setting sun and from landmarks seen during the day. There's even evidence that sense of smell plays a role, at least for homing pigeons.

Some species, particularly waterfowl and cranes, follow preferred pathways on their annual migrations. These pathways are often related to important stopover locations that provide food supplies critical to the birds' survival. Smaller birds tend to migrate in broad fronts across the landscape. Studies using eBird data have revealed that many small birds take different routes in spring and fall, to take advantage of seasonal patterns in weather and food.



House Wren  
(a short to medium-distance migrant)  
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

## Migration Hazards

Taking a journey that can stretch to a round-trip distance of several thousand miles is a dangerous and arduous undertaking. It is an effort that tests both the birds' physical and mental capabilities. The physical stress of the trip, lack of adequate food supplies along the way, bad weather, and increased exposure to predators all add to the hazards of the journey.

In recent decades long-distant migrants have been facing a growing threat from communication towers and tall

buildings. Many species are attracted to the lights of tall buildings and millions are killed each year in collisions with the structures.

## Studying Migration

Scientists use several techniques in studying migration, including banding, satellite tracking, and a relatively new method involving lightweight devices known as geolocators. One of the goals is to locate important stopover and wintering locations. Once identified, steps can be taken to protect and save these key locations.

## What Is A Migrant Trap?

Some places seem to have a knack for concentrating migrating birds in larger than normal numbers. These "migrant traps" often become well known as birding hotspots. This is typically the result of local weather conditions, an abundance of food, or the local topography.

For example, small songbirds migrating north in the spring fly directly over the Gulf of Mexico, landing on the coastlines of the Gulf Coast states. When storms or cold fronts bring headwinds, these birds can be near exhaustion when they reach land. In such cases they head for the nearest location offering food and cover—typically live-oak groves on barrier islands, where very large numbers of migrants can collect in what's known as a "fallout." These migration traps have become very popular with birders, even earning international reputations.

Peninsulas can also concentrate migrating birds as they follow the land and then pause before launching over water. This explains why places like Point Pelee, Ontario; the Florida Keys; Point Reyes, California; and Cape May, New Jersey have great reputations as migration hotspots.

Spring migration is an especially good time for those that feed birds in their backyard to attract species they normally do not see. Offering a variety of food sources, water, and adding natural food sources to the landscape can make a backyard attractive to migrating songbirds.

## Range Maps

It's always a good idea to use the range maps in your field guide to determine if and when a particular species might be around. Range maps are especially useful when working with migratory species. However, they can be confusing: ranges of birds can vary year-to-year, as with irruptive species such as redpolls. Also, the ranges of some species can expand or contract fairly rapidly, with changes occurring in time periods shorter than the republication time of a field guide. (The Eurasian Collared-Dove is the best example of this problem.)

These limitations are beginning to be addressed by data-driven, digital versions of range maps. The maps are made possible by the hundreds of millions of eBird observations submitted by birdwatchers around the world. "Big Data" analyses are allowing scientists to produce animated maps that show a species' ebb and flow across the continent throughout a calendar year—as well as understand larger patterns of movement.

# Field Trip Report: Cassimer Bar Wildlife Area

article and photo by Eric Heisey, Yakima

Since my return to Washington, I have found myself inundated with busywork and without a car, itching to get out and do some birding. So, what a great relief it was to lead a field trip on August 31 for NCWAS at Cassimer Bar! I had a few late cancellations which whittled our group down to a nice size of six in total, and we had a great time!

The first thing that we were struck by when we arrived at Cassimer was the sheer number of swallows clouding the sky over the south part of the bar. Most of these were of the Violet-green variety, though we managed to find at least one of each regularly occurring species and one Vaux's Swift swirling around in the swarm. In total, I estimated that the flock consisted of almost 1,500 individuals, with roughly 1,300 being Violet-green Swallows. Funnily, swallows are often quite pish-able, and we were able to call in the swallows until they were flying close over our heads. An amazing spectacle, and perhaps my highlight of the day!



Mountain x Black-capped Chickadee Hybrid

Birding around the parking lot, we encountered our first migrants, noticing Purple Finch, Spotted Towhee, Lark Sparrows, Yellow-breasted Chat, Lazuli Bunting, Wilson's Warbler, and a calling White-breasted Nuthatch (unusual for the location, dispersing in response to poor conifer cone crops in the mountains). We started south towards the southernmost tip of the bar, still being barraged by swallows while Soras called from the marshes. The Russian olives on the south side of the bar are often where I have the best luck with songbirds, and today was no different. We managed to find a Say's Phoebe, Eastern Kingbird, Chipping Sparrow, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, two Steller's Jays (unusual at Cassimer), Hammond's Flycatcher, Pine Siskin, MacGillivray's Warbler, Orange-crowned Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Black-headed Grosbeak. We also managed to track down the Mountain x Black-capped Chickadee hybrid which I have now seen three times at

Cassimer. All of us had excellent looks at this unique individual. Raptors seemed to be moving overhead in small numbers, and we observed a Merlin, Cooper's Hawk, and Northern Harrier through the morning along with the typical residents.

We popped out of the trees along the Columbia River where there were many birds on the water with excellent calm conditions for scoping. We missed very few of the regularly occurring species, with four Blue-winged Teal, two Greater Scaup, a Western Grebe, 19 Red-necked Grebes, and 19 Common Loons (many still in breeding colors) presenting the most noteworthy waterfowl. The rarest bird of the morning was a Great Egret at the tip, mingling with the American White Pelicans. While this species is tending to expand northwards, they are still somewhat unusual in Okanogan County. Also at the tip were a flyover Yellow-headed Blackbird and Red-necked Phalarope.

We looped back to the car, getting better looks at some of the birds listed above, and enjoying the lovely weather. It was a very comfortable temperature (mid 70s) with sun—perfect! As we walked back to the car, I tallied up the list for the morning. We had seen a very good diversity of birds, but still I was shocked to find that the total for the morning was 99 species by the time we made it back to the car! This was the most I have seen in a morning at Cassimer, but it wouldn't be good enough until we reached 100! We searched frantically for a little while, and were eventually able to turn up a Vesper Sparrow along the access road to hit the century mark. What a morning! (Here is the link to the eBird checklist for the day: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S148661523>.)

Afterwards, half of the group split off while the other half of us went to the Douglas County side of the river to scan a huge flock of over 2,000 birds. One of the first birds I put my scope on was an adult male White-winged Scoter. Sweet! It was very evasive, but I believe all three of us got looks at it eventually. Also in the flock were a few Redheads, which we missed at Cassimer Bar. Calling from around where we were scoping was another White-breasted Nuthatch, a Canyon Wren, Mountain Chickadee, Hairy Woodpecker, and a Townsend's Warbler, most of them new for the day.

We ended the trip with 108 species for the day—not too shabby for ending before 3:00 pm in August! It was a great time, and I hope that all of the participants were inspired to bird Cassimer Bar some more.

On my way home to Yakima, I stopped at Getty's Cove in Kittitas County and managed to pish in a Northern Waterthrush, a very nice bird for the county. Also present were a good diversity of flycatchers, including Gray, Dusky, Hammond's and Western Flycatcher; Say's Phoebe; and Western Wood-Pewee. It was a good day for migrants, and clearly it is a good time to be looking for vagrants! Get out there and see what you can find.

Good birding!

# Great Birding Site: Cassimer Bar Wildlife Area

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

I was impressed Eric Heisey reported seeing well over 100 species in a single day at the Cassimer Bar Wildlife Area in August. (See his report on page 5.) I called up my birding buddy Denise and asked, shall we? “Yes!” she said, so we made the trip on September 11, 2023.

Finding It: The Cassimer Bar Wildlife Area is a 500+ acre site at the confluence of the Okanogan and Columbia rivers and their adjacent wetlands near Brewster. From near Wenatchee, we drove 69.7 miles in an hour and 20 minutes. We took Highway 97 the whole way. Just a few miles past the turn-off to Brewster, watch for a sign, “Cassimer Bar Access Road.” Be observant: GPS and cell phone service were spotty in the area.

Access: At the sign for the Cassimer Bar Access Road, turn right onto an unpaved road. The site is cared for by the Douglas County PUD. No permits or fees are required. Where the road forks in maybe a quarter or half mile, turn right. The road was dry, compact, and smooth enough for a passenger car. The single lane road ran under a canopy of trees and shrubs that almost touched the top of my SUV. Go slow—there are some unfenced cattle along the way.

Parking and Getting In: At the end of the road, another half or one mile, I’d guess, there is a parking area large enough for three or four cars. On a Monday, we were the only people there. The area is fenced with barbed wire and posted for no further vehicular access. Look closely at that barbed wire fence and notice the footpath up to the wire. There are obscure openings in the fence shaped into sharp zig-zags that humans can fit through, but cattle can’t.

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## Salmon Festival 2023: 518 Served!

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

Five hundred eighteen visitors! NCWAS treated 518 customers to our hunt for replicas of regional birds, “What’s That Bird,” at the Wenatchee River Salmon Festival on Saturday, September 23. We think it’s our record, but then, we’ve tried counting only about three times. That’s in addition to the troupes of school kids who visited us on Thursday and Friday. We also managed to give away our remaining stock of special photographic editions of *Audubon* magazine from the National Audubon Society. And we handed out all but a few remaining copies of Bruce McCammon’s poster of regional birds that he compiled from his own photographs. He is planning his next version, so watch for it at the spring Leavenworth Bird Fest and the autumn Salmon Festival in 2024.

Walking: Inside the fence, a plainly visible, dry flat footpath on top of a berm parallels the Columbia and offers views of the river on one side and ponds and marshlands on the other. We walked slowly, stopped, looked, and listened in a single loop back to the car for close to three hours.



Double-crested Cormorant  
photo by Bruce McCammon, Wenatchee

The Sightings: We saw 30 species, which we thought was just fine for a single morning late in the summer. We heard the call of a Common Loon—I’d heard recordings before, but I’d never heard that eerie call in person. We saw a tree covered with sizeable stick or straw Double-crested Cormorant nests that were so perfectly cylindrical that they looked artificial. We saw numerous butterflies, a deer wading in the water, and a fuzzy, well-fed coyote dashing down the road ahead of us.

The List: For sure we saw Belted Kingfisher, American Crow, Mallard, White-crowned Sparrow,

Double-crested Cormorant, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Wood Duck, Gadwall, Pied-billed Grebe, Northern Flicker, Bald Eagle, Turkey Vulture, Common Loon, Spotted Sandpiper, Ring-billed Gull, a whole raft of American Coots, Tundra Swan, Downy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, American Pipit, Red-winged Blackbird, American Wigeon, Gray Catbird, Killdeer, Great Blue Heron, teal, and American Goldfinch. We heard a bird that the Merlin app said was a Virginia Rail, but the bird stayed hidden in the reeds. We couldn’t be positive of a few more species: a flock of swallows that scrambled like jet fighters when we drove in, Willow Flycatcher (probably), nuthatch (heard but not seen so don’t know which one), a raptor that was probably a Red-tailed Hawk, and probably a Song Sparrow.



The NCWAS Salmon Festival Team: Mark Oswood, Sue Sampson, Bruce McCammon, Chipmunk (huh?), Dianne McCammon, and Karen Haire. Merry Roy, not pictured, was also part of the team.

# Methow Valley Sandhill Cranes

article and photo by Janet Baur, Winthrop

This past May, it was exciting to hear that a pair of state endangered Sandhill Cranes returned once again to the Big Valley Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area to nest for the third season in a row. Sandhill Cranes mate for life and it is very likely that the same pair is returning to nest each season since studies have shown that Sandhill Cranes have high nest site fidelity. As some of you may recall, in 2021 the pair nested and hatched two colts but neither survived the summer. In 2022, two colts were born again with one surviving the summer. The family of three was last seen feeding at Little Twin Lake near Winthrop in late August before they presumably flew south for the winter.

So...how did the third nesting season go for the Big Valley cranes? With double success!! Two colts hatched again and both survived the summer! As the nesting season ended, retired wildlife biologist Kent Woodruff encouraged the local birding community to stay on the lookout for the whereabouts of the crane family. On September 12, a sighting was reported in a dry marsh area near Winthrop. It was exciting to hear that the crane family had not departed yet. I followed up on the sighting and walked to the marsh area a few days later not expecting (but hoping) to still see them there. I stood on a ridge overlooking the marsh and scanned slowly with binoculars. Lo and behold, the beautiful family of four were there! They were slowly wandering in and out of cattail reeds to feed in the dry marsh grass. The parents were still very attentive with one often standing guard while the other parent and two colts fed. One or both colts would periodically pause to stretch their wings. Perhaps it helps them prepare their new flight muscles for the long trip ahead. I took some pictures with a long lens from a distance so I wouldn't disturb them.



Methow Valley's Sandhill Crane Family

The life span of Sandhill Cranes is reported to be approximately 20 to 30 years in the wild. It is with great hope and anticipation that this pair of cranes will return again next spring to nest in the Big Valley.

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## 2023 American Kestrel Nest Box Project Report

by the American Kestrel Nest Box Project Steering Committee

Our 2023 season of installing and monitoring American Kestrel nest boxes around the Waterville Plateau has come to an end. The NCWAS steering committee team has compiled data collected by our volunteers who visited boxes during the breeding season.

NCWAS both funded and implemented this project started by Richard Hendrick, a local orchard worker, woodworker, and bird enthusiast. He joined the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife back in 1993 as a volunteer working to expand kestrel populations on the Waterville Plateau. Eventually, the project became his and remained that way until his passing in December 2020. Richard established a network of more than 250 boxes. He asked that we find a way to carry on his work.

Due to fires and other natural events, more than half of Richard's original kestrel boxes were either destroyed or rendered unusable. With the help of Ken Smith, a local woodworker, we have put up dozens of new boxes each year.

Data gleaned from the volunteers' work this year include:

- The number of boxes that we monitored increased by 20%, from 156 last year to 187 in 2023.
- We made a total of 905 box visits, from March 14 to August 14, averaging 4.8 visits per box.
- 382 birds fledged, a 54% increase over last season's 247 fledglings.
- Almost half (47%) of the boxes fledged one or more young, an increase from last year's 37%.
- 90% of the eggs laid this year fledged. This is down slightly from last year's 93% success rate.

The most exciting statistic we found from our work this year is that over 382 kestrels fledged, an amazingly high nestling success rate.

Our plan is to build on our success over the last few years and add more boxes to our established routes. We would love to bring in more volunteers to help in 2024. If interested, please contact Richard Scranton at [rscr4350@yahoo.com](mailto:rscr4350@yahoo.com).

# October 2023 Wild Phlox

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October 11 November 8 December 13	Birding by the River Wenatchee River Institute	<a href="http://www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org">www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org</a>
October 14	World Migratory Bird Day	<a href="http://www.migratorybirdday.org">www.migratorybirdday.org</a>
October 25 November 22	Wednesday Wenatchee Birding Wenatchee River Institute	<a href="http://www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org">www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org</a>
<b>2nd Wednesday of the month thru November</b>	<b>Beebe Springs Bird Surveys</b>	Contact Virginia Palumbo <a href="mailto:wvpalumbo@gmail.com">wvpalumbo@gmail.com</a> or 509-682-5969



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.

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

