

The Wild Phlox

Published by the North Central Washington Audubon Society
Connecting People with Nature since 1966



Artwork © 2018 Heather A. Wallis Murphy

Volume 56 #6 December 2023

NCWAS Hummingbird Project: The Results Are In!

article and photo by Bruce McCammon, Wenatchee

Birders in North Central Washington know that hummingbirds are present in the area during all months of the year. Four hummingbird species are seen here: Anna's, Black-chinned, Rufous, and Calliope. We enjoy watching the antics and territorial behavior of hummingbirds in our flower gardens and at our feeders. Of the four, only Anna's stays year-round. The other three species migrate south to Mexico when their biological clock, driven largely by daylength, tells them it is time to head to warmer areas.

Evidence of hummingbird nesting in the NCWAS area is now well established. Successful nesting and fledging were filmed in the Wenatchee area in both 2021 and 2023. A few still photos of empty nests or a female Anna's on a nest predate the 2021 and 2023 videos by one or two years.



Anna's Hummingbird on Nest

These observations are inconsistent with contemporary range maps in established field guides and on authoritative websites. Some maps, like the one on the National Audubon Society website, don't show Anna's Hummingbirds east of the Cascade mountains. The Anna's Hummingbird range map provided on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website shows year-round presence in portions of eastern Washington but does not show breeding populations.

This disparity, along with other questions, inspired the NCWAS North Central Washington Hummingbird Project. The project has a simple goal—to prove that hummingbirds are here and that they are thriving and successfully nesting. The idea was to invite anyone in the area to participate four times each year, on each of the solstice and equinox dates. This Community Science project used a robust sampling protocol. Sampling periods were one-hour long and centered around sunrise or sunset when the birds were most likely to be actively looking for food. Data sheets were customized for each sampling period and provided to anyone on the project mailing list. The results of each person's sampling were, most importantly, recorded in eBird and shared with the Hummingbird Project. Placing the data in eBird is the key to the project's success since eBird is a prominent data source for research or scientific institutions.

In addition to using eBird to record the survey results, we sent observations and photos of six Anna's Hummingbird nests to Cornell's NestWatch site. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) effort also provided a means to document hummingbirds during winter. NestWatch, eBird, and CBC databases now contain all the information we gathered between March 2021 and September 2023.

Our thanks go out to all the individuals who participated in the surveys. Between December 2021 and September 2023, the NCWAS Hummingbird Project data show that 113 people documented 166 birds through shared eBird checklists. The data contain 76 birds in the December surveys, 35 in March, 27 in June, and 28 in September. Many participants provided photos taken during their surveys.

The first-ever Anna's Hummingbird in Twisp was documented during the 2021 Twisp CBC. A hummingbird enthusiast in Colville, Washington, documented a female Anna's that took up lodging in her back yard in 2021. This bird was recorded in the Colville CBC that year—another confirmed winter observation. *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”

North Central Washington Audubon Society

Officers, Chairs, Board Members:

President | Art Campbell | rapakivi@methow.com

Vice President | OPEN

Treasurer | Larry Tobiska | ltobiska@nwi.net

Secretary | Penny Tobiska | ptobiska@nwi.net

Conservation | Mark Johnston | toxostoma495@gmail.com

Education and Outreach | Merry Roy | 2merrybird4@gmail.com

and Mark Oswood | mwoswood@gmail.com

Field Trips | Karen Haire | karenhaire@nwi.net

and Dj Jones | Djtrillium@mac.com

Membership | Mark Oswood | mwoswood@gmail.com

Newsletter Editor | Julie Hovis | jahovis711@gmail.com

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

Social Media | Tucker Jonas | tuckersonas@gmail.com

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

Website: www.ncwaudubon.org

Subscribe to our email list at www.ncwaudubon.org

Email us at ncwaudubon@gmail.com

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

Find us on Facebook and Instagram as ncwaudubon

Field Trip Leaders Workshop Opportunity!

Have you ever thought about being a NCWAS field trip leader or co-leader? We are looking for folks who would be interested in learning the details about being a field trip leader. If there's interest, we will set up a workshop this winter or spring for those interested! For more information contact Dj Jones (Djtrillium@mac.com) or Karen Haire (karenhaire@nwi.net).



Western Grebe
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

North Central Washington Audubon Society Wild Phlox Subscription Form

Subscribe to NCW Audubon Wild Phlox One Year, Six Issues - \$15 Suggested Donation

I prefer to get the Wild Phlox electronically (email address required below)
 Separate subscription to the Phlox NOT needed for NAS members in good standing

Donation: I would like to support NCW Audubon's programs of education and conservation. Enclosed is my additional donation of \$_____

Please do NOT acknowledge my donation in the Wild Phlox

Memorial in the name of: _____



Please mail check and form to Post Office Box 2934, Wenatchee, WA 98807-2934

Name _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone number _____ Email _____

Why do we want your email? We may need to contact you regarding your donation. Also, we occasionally send email notifications about events or opportunities. You can unsubscribe at any time. We will not share your email address with others.

Planned Giving: Please consider giving a planned gift to NCW Audubon to support our education and conservation programs for generations to come. Your charitable gift will be tax deductible. It could go to an endowment fund or to a specific program or as a gift to our general operating fund. Remember, your gift to North Central Washington Audubon will go to fund programs in North Central Washington!

To join the National Audubon Society, which also includes a subscription to the Wild Phlox, please see our website at www.ncwaudubon.org



Great Kiskadee
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop



Tropical Royal Flycatcher
photo by Karen Leavelle, Osa Birds



Blue-gray Tanager
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

Editor's Notes

By the time this newsletter reaches you, I'll be approximately 3,500 miles away (as a bird flies) on the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica. I visited Costa Rica a few years ago on a National Geographic tour and had a great time watching birds and visiting some of the major attractions—Monteverde, Arenal, and Tortuguero to name a few. But as a bird bander, I remember thinking that someday I would like a chance to band birds in Costa Rica. So this spring when I saw an announcement about a banding workshop hosted by Osa Birds, I jumped at the chance to attend.

Osa Birds is a United States 501(c)(3) charitable non-profit corporation dedicated to conserving birds and their habitats on the Osa Peninsula and the southern Pacific coastal slope of Costa Rica. (They also are a registered Costa Rican non-profit.) During the workshop, which is also a fundraiser for Osa Birds, we will be participating in their MoSI program, the Latin American counterpart to the MAPS program I participate in during the breeding season in the Methow Valley. Because the programs follow a similar set of guidelines, I should be familiar with the banding protocols, but the species we capture (like the ones pictured to the left) will be much different—with one possible exception. There is a chance we might capture a Swainson's Thrush, which is one of the most commonly captured species at my MAPS station. Wouldn't it be amazing if we recaptured a Swainson's Thrush during the workshop that was banded here in the Methow!

Speaking of Swainson's Thrushes, I suspect most of you have heard about the American Ornithological Society's (AOS) decision to change all English bird names currently named after people to something more descriptive, like a species' field marks or its habitat. The effort will begin in 2024 and will focus initially on 70 to 80 species that occur primarily within the United States and Canada. A committee will be established to oversee the process and the AOS has made a commitment to involve the public in the selection of the new English names. It will be interesting to see how this develops.

On a final note, I'm always surprised how small the world can be. On page 7 there is an article about an organization called Optics for the Tropics that was founded by Joni Ellis. Years ago, Joni and I both worked for Florida's wildlife agency and her office was just three doors down from mine. It definitely is a small world!

Audubon's 124th Christmas Bird Count

The Christmas Bird Count season is almost here! These are the dates and leaders for the counts in our area. These counts are a great way to make new friends and share a worthy birding experience!

Bridgeport: December 14 - Meredith Spencer, merdave@homenetnw.net or 509-686-7551
NOTICE: This will be Meredith's and Mike Schroeder's final year as the Bridgeport CBC leaders. So come one and come all to their last Bridgeport count! Dinner will follow at the Schroeder residence, and there will be a door prize, as usual. Meredith and Mike are thankful for everyone who has participated over the years. If no one volunteers to take over, this could be the last Bridgeport CBC.

Twisp: December 16 - Peter Wimberger, phwimberger@pugetsound.edu or Jen Fischer, jenwalsh1219@msn.com

Leavenworth: December 19 - Tucker Jonas, tjonas@wenatcheeriverinstitute.org

Chelan: December 28 - Amy Pavelchek, amy.pavelchek@dfw.wa.gov

Okanogan/Omak: December 30 - Matthew Danielson, mattie_rubio@hotmail.com

Wenatchee: December 31 - Dan Stephens, dstephens@wvc.edu or 509-679-4706

Hummingbird Project - continued from page 1

Range Map Modification – the true value of all this work. Survey participants frequently heard project administrators talk about the potential value of their observations when shared in eBird. That belief has been realized. In November 2022, eBird released a new way to visualize bird distributions for 2,267 species (<https://science.ebird.org/en/status-and-trends/species>). One can search for a species to see a dynamic range map with life-stages highlighted. Movies provide animated migration information. These maps confirm that the data submitted through the NCWAS Hummingbird Project was used to create a new range map that aligns with what we know to be true. Figure 1 shows areas with breeding Anna’s Hummingbirds in several areas of eastern Washington.

Hopefully, prominent field guide authors will incorporate new range maps based on eBird science as they update

their guides to show all the anticipated new bird species names.

The project spanned two very cold, harsh winters. Even with heated feeders, many people who were used to seeing hummingbirds on a regular basis were understandably shocked and worried when the birds disappeared after bouts of extreme cold. Naturally, questions arose about whether the birds succumbed or moved out. People worried that their feeding might put the birds in jeopardy. The truth is, we don’t know. While there was confirmed mortality in a few locations, we don’t know if some of the birds migrated to warmer areas. Many questions persist, and there is a true need for additional monitoring. Advances in technology may give us the opportunity to track these tiny birds. Wouldn’t that be a treat?

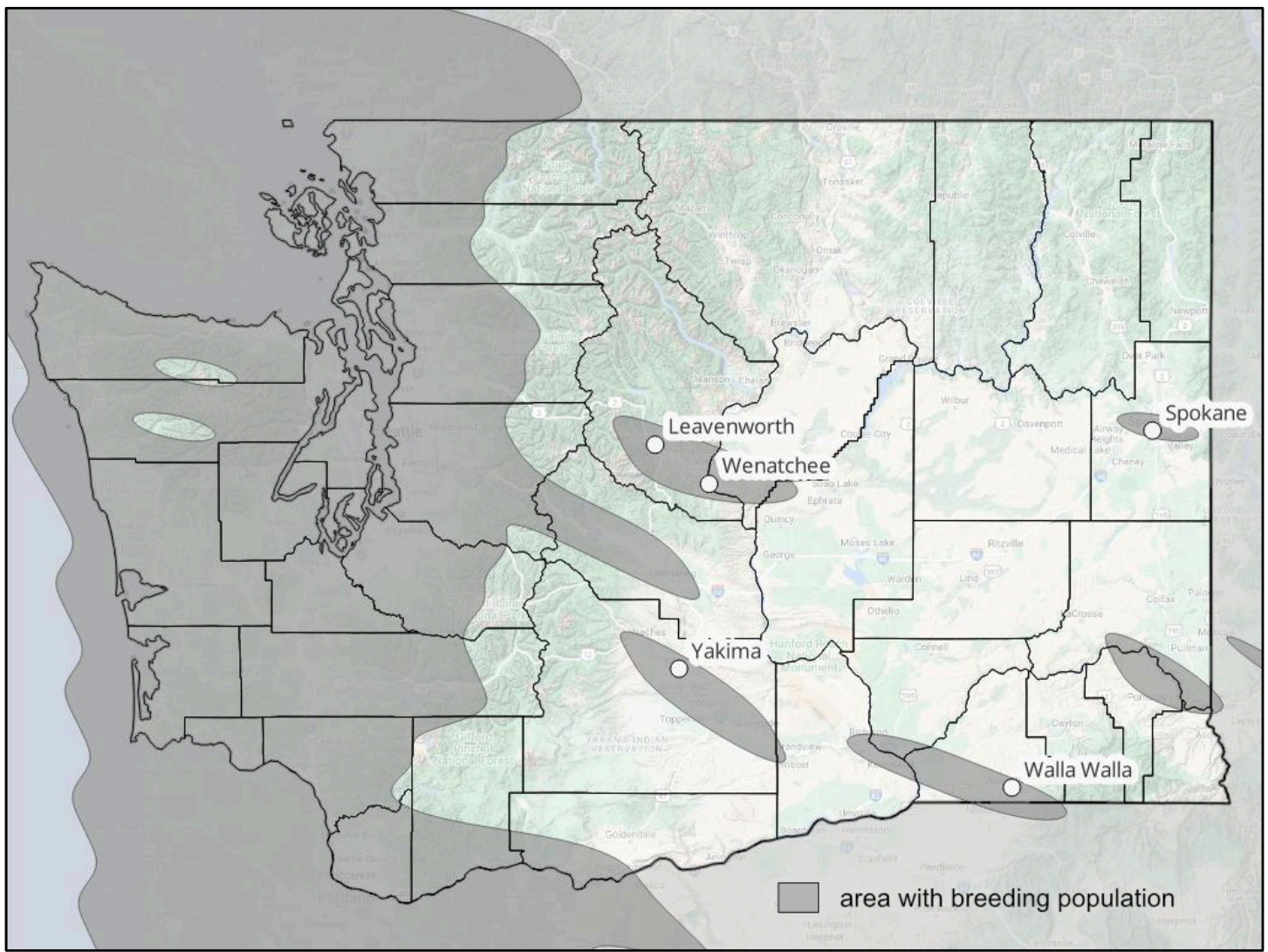


Figure 1

We Help Stalk the Nutcracker Close to Home

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

In September, 2022, NCWAS received a request for money, any money at all, from Taza Dawn Schaming, Ph.D. She needed it to help with some serious science—she is tracking Clark’s Nutcrackers and their relationship to whitebark pine forests.

The work is important because whitebark pine forests are being decimated by a non-native blister rust fungus. Whitebark pines also are being negatively impacted by pine beetle infestations, altered wildfire patterns, and climate change. The issue is so serious that the tree is now listed as “threatened” by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In Washington, the loss of whitebark pine forests adversely affects the watershed, and also all of the organisms that share its semi-arid, montane habitat.

The Clark’s Nutcracker has an especially close relationship with whitebark pine. It gathers and caches thousands and thousands of its seeds. What the bird doesn’t eat can germinate, replanting the tree in a range far vaster than what the wind and rodents carry. Dr. Schaming’s work will help determine whether the nutcracker population is diminishing with the tree, or just relocating; and if the



Clark’s Nutcracker
photo by Bruce McCammon, Wenatchee

birds are relocating, whether those areas are good places for the tree to be planted. She fits the birds with transmitters and tracks their movements by satellite.

Dr. Schaming’s budget was modest. She needed \$3,575, including \$1,900 for travel, and \$1,675 to retrofit 30 overwintering acoustic monitors with 512GB microSD cards plus reusable Tupperware boxes and straps. She and her professional cohorts were essentially working for free. They had one research assistant in the field whose stipend was \$2,000 per month. NCWAS sent her \$900.00.

Dr. Schaming put her grant to work locally on Burch Mountain in Douglas County. Jenny Graevell, David Moscovitz, and Mara Grunbaum were able to trap and band six nutcrackers and

to fit them with transmitters. Mara’s story and David’s photographs will appear in a future issue of *Audubon* magazine. Meanwhile, you can read about the project at <http://www.thenutcrackerecosystemproject.com/>.

Bird Tales from Waterville

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

A team of “What’s That Bird?” volunteers operated a booth at the Waterville Community Festival on August 12. At least three surprising visits came out of the day. First, a vendor selling her home-made perfume, Marie Bond, put out a collection box for donations—for us! Our own fundraising is strictly limited to one letter per year. True to her word, at day’s end, she handed over \$40 in bills and quarters. We’ve never had that happen before! We wrote her a receipt on one of our coloring-book pages for her tax purposes, and then our law-abiding team (paranoid about audit requirements) assured her that the cash would be placed in the NCWAS account.

Second, a woman asked for help identifying the brown, round-headed birds, bigger than robins, that she was seeing on her driveway in remote Douglas County in the evenings. By brainstorming and books, we decided her visitors were probably a type of nightjar, most likely a Common Poorwill. She gave Bruce McCammon

permission to visit her property for a photograph, and promised to restrain her husband in case he was armed against strangers. And if given a heads-up, she would lock up her man-eating guard dogs.

Third, Debbie Bennett of Badger Mountain reported finding a Clark’s Nutcracker dead in her pond. The bird was banded and wore a transmitter on its back. She was able to find the scientist who had banded it, Taza Schaming, Ph.D. We remembered that NCWAS helped Dr. Schaming fund her study. Last autumn, NCWAS gave her \$900 for labor and equipment for monitoring the bird in the North Cascades. (See the above article.)

The What’s That Bird team included Mark Oswood, fearless leader; Bruce McCammon, chauffeur in chief; Dianne McCammon, spouse of birder; Merry Roy, ever-empathetic educator; and Sue Sampson, valuable crew member.

Maximizing Potential at Rock Island Ponds

by Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

A series of ponds and lakes (commonly referred to as Rock Island Ponds), lying a few miles southeast of Wenatchee, offer the possibility of a new high-quality birding site in North Central Washington. The ponds are not naturally occurring. They are the result of decades of gravel mining and increased elevations of the Rock Island Dam Pool. In 2016, NCWAS visited the area and concluded, that while current habitat conditions there are not ideal, it hosts a surprising variety of bird species.

In early 2016, NCWAS submitted a proposal to the City of Rock Island laying out our vision for the ponds. In early 2017, the Rock Island City Council passed a resolution adopting the proposal's central recommendations, and in 2018 folded them into its Comprehensive Plan.



Common Mergansers
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

As our vision paper illustrates, the building blocks for a better future for the ponds are already in place. That said, studies conducted there years ago revealed a variety of issues ranging from high phosphorus levels and summer water temperatures, occasional algal bloom outbreaks, and stunted fish populations. What's needed now are investments in a plan to transition them to a future that makes the most of their potential.

NCWAS's primary goal is to see at least two of the ponds (Big Bow and Hideaway), which we think have the greatest value for birds, enhanced over the next decade or so to maximize their potential as nature reserves, along with compatible passive recreational activities. Beginning in October 2020, under an agreement between NCWAS and the Chelan County Public Utilities District (PUD), which owns substantial land adjacent to and under Big Bow and Hideaway ponds, NCWAS conducted a two-year bird survey designed to confirm species currently using the

area. The final report, which we distributed to the city and PUD earlier this year, documented a total of 118 species. Of particular note, the extremely high numbers of wintering Wood Ducks and Hooded and Common Mergansers the survey found point to the site being a significant regional resource for these species.

The City of Rock Island favors a more typical set of future recreational facilities and activities on much of the site. Fortunately, due to the size of the area and number of ponds involved, we believe there's room to support the interests of both NCWAS and the city.

Progress since 2016 has been sluggish. For the last three years, we've been working on the issue through the PUD's current Relicensing Process for Rock Island Dam, as the Rock Island Ponds area lies within the dam's project boundary. Ultimately, we found this process to be a poor fit for achieving our vision for the ponds. Recently, however, we were informed by the PUD that it has begun working on an "off license agreement" which will remove the area from the dam's project boundary. This is a very positive development, as it will allow planning for the future of the ponds to go forward as a process coordinated by the PUD but now separate from relicensing. The first meeting under this new process is expected to take place in December 2023 and will likely include the City of Rock Island, PUD, NCWAS, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, Douglas County, and others.

After seven years, it seems we finally have a path forward. This too will take several more years to fully play out. If we're successful, North Central Washington will be the beneficiary of a much improved and regionally significant natural area tailored to the interests of birds and birders.



Male Hooded Merganser
photo by Pat Leigh, Mazama

Upcoming Field Trips

Join Mary and Tim Gallagher for winter birding in Chelan County's Nason Ridge Community Forest. During the field trips listed below, we will be conducting eBird survey counts. To be up front, this will be a quality bird experience, not a quantity of birds. The goal of the year-round, monthly survey is to determine baseline bird data and ongoing changes in bird use within identified areas of the Community Forest. This information will assist Chelan County in resource management decisions and the determination of future efforts based on past results.

Trip #1, Friday, January 5: Snowshoe Upper Nason Ridge Community Forest, 9:00 am-1:30 pm

Snowshoe up USFS Nason Ridge Trail #1583 to the top of the Nason Ridge Community Forest survey point. We will bird along the way, see a ±400-year-old ponderosa pine (Big Red), learn how Nason Ridge became a Community Forest, and see fantastic views (weather permitting) of Lake Wenatchee, Fish Lake, Dirty Face, Mount David, Poet's Ridge, and Glacier Peak. Mileage round trip is approximately six miles with a steep 1,000-foot elevation gain. This is not a trip for beginner; experience is required.

We recommend at least one hiking pole. Please bring your own snowshoes, binoculars, snacks, lunch, plenty of water, and dress for exercising in winter weather. (Bring a dry base layer for going back down.) This trip is limited to six participants. To reserve your spot, email trip leader Mary Gallagher at marywillardgallagher@live.com or call or text 206-650-7511 by January 2, 2024. We will meet at the Gallagher's home in Kahler Glen.

Trip #2, Saturday, January 6: Classic Cross-Country Ski Lower Nason Ridge Community Forest, 9:00 am-1:30 pm

Cross-country ski on groomed trails from Kahler Glen to the lower section of Nason Ridge Community Forest. The trail parallels Nason Creek and we will stop at three of the seven monthly survey sites. Mileage is approximately seven miles—depending on trail conditions, we may do more or less. This is not a trip for beginner classic skiers; experience is required. It is generally a flat trail with a few steep hills.

Please bring your own ski equipment, wax for your skies, binoculars, snacks, lunch, plenty of water, and dress for exercising in winter weather. (Bring a dry base layer for when we turn around.) This trip is limited to six participants. To reserve your spot, email trip leader Mary Gallagher at marywillardgallagher@live.com or call or text 206-650-7511 by January 2, 2024. We will meet at the Gallagher's home in Kahler Glen.

Unable to make these field trip dates? If you would like to participate on a monthly survey, please contact Mary at the email address or phone number listed above. Thanks!

A Chance to Bird in Cuba!



In November 2023, NCWAS donated \$400 to Optics for the Tropics to support bird conservation in Cuba. Optics for the Tropics is a nonprofit organization that builds capacity for bird conservation in the Western Hemisphere by providing quality binoculars for ornithologists, birding clubs, and conservationists in the Caribbean and Latin America. Since 2001 their work has enhanced the careers of thousands of biologists and guides, inspired youth to consider careers in conservation, and assisted in finding species in previously undocumented locations. The money NCWAS donated was used to purchase four pairs of binoculars that were given to birding clubs in Cuba for use as loaners to encourage bird watching.

Optics for the Tropics, in partnership with Environment for the Americas, is hosting an eight-day adventure to Cuba in February 2024. Participants will learn about Cuba's conservation issues with regard to the environment, endangered species, birds, and nature in general. The delegation also will bring optics, feeders, books, and educational materials to be donated to Cuban educational groups. For more information about this trip contact Joni Ellis at Joni@OpticsfortheTropics.org or 352-262-7300.

December 2023 Wild Phlox

North Central Washington Audubon Society
Post Office Box 2934
Wenatchee, WA 98807

NON-PROFIT
US POSTAGE
PAID
WENATCHEE, WA
Permit No. 21

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



North Central Washington Audubon Society Resources and Calendar

Items in **bold text** are sponsored or co-sponsored by NCWAS

December	Christmas Bird Counts in North Central Washington	See page 3 for dates and contact information
December 13 January 10 February 14	Birding by the River Wenatchee River Institute	www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org
January 5 January 6	Nason Ridge Community Forest Field Trips	See page 7 for details
January 24 February 28	Wednesday Wenatchee Birding Wenatchee River Institute	www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org
April 11-14	Olympic BirdFest Sequim, WA	www.olympicbirdfest.org
May 16-19	Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest	Look for information in future Phlox issues



You can find the Wild Phlox online at our website - 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