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NCW Christmas Bird Count Reports

compiled by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

Bridgeport, reported by Michael Schroeder

Meredith Spencer and Michael Schroeder organized and conducted the Bridgeport Christmas Bird Count for the 28th consecutive year. The count was run on December 14 and resulted in the detection of 87 species with an estimated count of 18,526 birds. This was close to average, even though conditions were unusually warm and snowfree. The average number of species observed in the Bridgeport count circle is higher than 16 of the 17 other circles in eastern Washington. Notable increases for this count were Trumpeter Swan, Wild Turkey, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Common Raven, and White-breasted Nuthatch. Decreases included Canada Goose, Northern Harrier, California Quail, Northern Shrike, White-crowned Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco. Forty-three species have been observed every year and 164 species have been observed at least once on count day (not including nine species only observed during count week). After 28 years of organizing and running this count, Meredith and Michael have decided to bow out. They are hoping to participate in the future, but they no longer want the responsibility of compiling data and organizing participants. They have worked with 107 volunteer bird counters over the years, and they really appreciate the willingness of volunteers to brave the cold weather.



Trumpeter Swans cell phone photo by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley

Chelan, reported by Amy Pavelchek

The 35th Chelan Christmas Bird Count happened on December 28, a day which started out being discouragingly foggy. Despite the fog, everyone headed out looking forward to a good day of birding. And the fog did lift, eventually. We had several new participants, and our reliable group of long-timers, all of whom did a great job with their counts. Thank you to everyone who participated. The most numerous species were Canada Goose, Mallard, Lesser Scaup, and European Starling. There were no hummingbirds seen on count day, although an Anna's Hummingbird was spotted during the count week window. Generally, bird numbers were lower than in past years. Very little snow on the ground meant the birds were more dispersed, and probably accounted for the lower count. Our historic average is 74 species, and this year we counted 67 species. However, the lack of snow did enable participants to get out and walk a lot, which I appreciated. A total of 8,292 birds was counted. It was a fairly unexceptional bird count, but even so there are always some special sightings. In the Chelan Gorge there was a Lewis's Woodpecker. The mild winter must be enabling enough flying insects for it to continue foraging. Several Northern Pygmy-Owls also were seen.

Leavenworth, reported by Tucker Jonas

Thanks to all who participated in the 22nd Leavenworth Christmas Bird Count on December 19. Although the weather wasn't ideal again this year, we had 30 field observers out in the rain and snow, and four feeder watchers providing data from their homes. The temperatures ranged from the upper 20s to the upper 30s and we had anywhere from zero to twelve inches of snow throughout the count circle. Our most abundant species was once again Dark-eyed Junco, with a count of 680 individuals. We hit a new high count for Canada Goose (203), and new low counts for Song Sparrow (23) and House Finch (99). Two American Wigeons in the Cashmere area were an exciting find and a new species for the Leavenworth count. Other, less frequently encountered species that we found were Lesser Goldfinch, Hooded Merganser, and Ring-necked Duck. 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-theground conservation to promote the welfare of birds in North Central Washington"

North Central Washington Audubon Society

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Leavenworth Spring **Bird Fest Dates** Announced!

The Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest is coming up in just a few months! Mark your calendars for May 16-19, 2024, for another exciting weekend of birding and camaraderie. Wenatchee River Institute and NCWAS are developing new field trips and programs now. Family Day will be on Saturday, May 18, from 10:00 am-2:00 pm. Our keynote speaker will be Rebecca Heisman, author of Flight Paths: How a Passionate and Quirky **Group of Pioneering Scientists** Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration. The NCWAS Bird Fest committee is seeking volunteers for Bird Fest 2024. Whether you are an expert birder or a person who plays Wingspan, we have a need for your help to make this festival a continued success. Please contact Jane Zanol at janezanol@me.com if you would like to volunteer.

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photo by Christy Stebbins, Methow Valley

On January 11, when the temperatures had just started to fall, Christy Stebbins photographed this little owl through the window of her house. It had taken refuge on one of the

Editor's Notes

rafters of the Stebbins' wraparound porch. When Christy's husband texted the photo to my bird banding buddies, it set off quite a debate about whether it was a Northern Pygmy Owl or a Northern Saw-whet Owl. The group ultimately decided it was a Northern Saw-whet Owl. What do you think? Did they get it right?

In the December issue of the Phlox, I mentioned I was going to the Osa Peninsula in Costa Rica for a bird banding workshop. I'm planning to write a blog for the NCWAS website (actually I've been procrastinating), but I thought I'd share a little bit about my experience here. When I think about the logistics of banding birds on the Osa Peninsula, two words come to mind: MUDDY and HOT! Although we were told to bring rubber boots, I almost didn't because they took up so much room in my suitcase. But am I ever glad I brought

them because sometimes the mud on the trails was so deep it was over our ankles. And then there was the heat and humidity. To keep the birds we captured (and ourselves) from overheating, we stopped banding when the temperature reached 85 degrees Fahrenheit, which meant we only banded for three or four hours each morning. I'd hoped to get more practice removing birds from nets, but the humidity was so high my glasses kept fogging up and I couldn't see what I was doing! So, I ended up watching some of the other workshop participants (who didn't need glasses) do a lot of the extractions, which was disappointing but much safer for the birds. If it sounds like I'm complaining, I'm not! Banding birds in Costa Rica was an exceptional experience, despite the mud, heat, and humidity. I learned a lot, met some amazing people, and got to band some beautiful birds. Probably my favorite was the Blue-capped Motmot we caught near the end of the workshop, but there were many others you will be able to read about in my NCWAS blog, once I get it written...



Blue-capped Motmot photo by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

Tropical Wildlife and Conservation: Peru and Kenya

Speaker: Eric Heisev February 24, 5:30-7:00 pm Winthrop Library Community Room

An eastern Washington native, Eric Heisey is a contract biologist and photographer who specializes in working with birds, increasingly in the world's tropics. In fall 2023, Eric spent three months working in Peru, collaborating with a local nongovernmental organization to survey the birds of a dynamic, human-impacted landscape in the Amazon Rainforest. After working hard in Peru, Eric ventured to Kenya to visit a bird-watching friend and explore the fantastic country for a month. Over the course of this incredible four-month adventure, Eric observed almost 1,200 species of birds, watched lions herd zebras into a flooded river, saw the coolest frog on the planet, took part in two excellent big day efforts, and considerably deepened his knowledge and perspective of tropical conservation. In this talk, Eric will present his photography, stories, and lessons learned from four months living in some of the world's most fascinating environments. If you are interested in the tropics, conservation, wildlife, or just like pretty pictures, please join us on Saturday, February 24 at the Winthrop Library Community Room from 5:30-7:00 pm. We hope to see you there!



Gray-crowned Crane photo by Eric Heisey

Christmas Bird Count Reports - continued from page 1

Hooded Mergansers and Ring-necked Ducks are quite common in winter just down the valley in Wenatchee, but surprisingly hard to find in the Leavenworth area. Our biggest misses for the day were Fox Sparrow, Golden Eagle, Cassin's Finch, and Red Crossbill. All in all, it was a great day to be out looking for birds, and we ended it with a nice potluck held at the Wenatchee River Institute.

Okanogan/Omak, reported by Matt Danielson

This year's Okanogan/Omak Christmas Bird Count occurred on December 30. Seventy bird species were observed, including a new species for the count, Northern Shoveler. I need to dig through past records, but 70 species might tie or break the existing record. We also had a great turnout of folks! A big thank you to Steve Quick for hosting and providing snacks this year, and to everyone who helped count while weathering the cold and fog. Although temperatures were warmer than usual, I didn't feel very warm! I think the warmer winter could have been a reason why Northern Shoveler made the list this year and some species from higher elevations or latitudes did not. Canada Goose was the most abundant species (1,177) followed by California Quail (564), and House Sparrow (547). In addition to the Northern Shoveler, other notable species included Trumpeter Swan, Killdeer, Anna's Hummingbird, Canyon Wren, Pacific Wren, Bewick's Wren, American Dipper, Merlin, Brown Creeper, and Brewer's Blackbird.

Twisp, reported by Peter Wimberger and Jen Walsh Fisher

Jen and I want to thank everyone who made the 36th Twisp Christmas Bird Count, held on December 16, such a success. Despite many of the record 62 participants noting that the overcast and mild day felt slow, the 80 species recorded was only one less than the count day record of 81 species, and the 86 species noted during count week broke the old count week record of 84. We were a little lucky because for 17 species only a single individual was seen or heard. Some of these species, like Spotted Towhee and Red Crossbill, are count regulars, but two were new to the count—Rusty Blackbird and Long-eared Owl. For other species it was only the second time they had been seen (Mountain Bluebird, Canada Jay, and Brown-headed Cowbird). We saw 5,006 birds on count day, slightly more than last year, and a bit above the average of the last ten years. (Prior to that the numbers were lower.) Seventeen species (including the two new species) tied or saw their highest numbers ever: Canada Goose (160 vs. 59); Trumpeter Swan (9 vs. 1); American Wigeon (38 vs.18); Eurasian Collared-Dove (185 vs.78); Belted Kingfisher (18 vs.11, a lot of open water may be a contributor); Cooper's Hawk (13 vs. 12); Canada Jay (2 vs. 1); Steller's Jay (56 vs. 51); Pygmy Nuthatch (60 vs. 58, interestingly they were only noted once in the first 13 years of the count!); European Starling (351 vs. 339); Pine Grosbeak (93 vs. 70, reflecting the irruption that is resulting in their occurrence

in far-flung places along the West Coast); White-crowned Sparrow (44 vs. 32); Golden-crowned Sparrow (5 vs. 3); and Marsh Wren and Brown-headed Cowbird (both tied their previous high count of 1). There were a few misses. For the second year in a row, no Northern Pygmy-Owls were seen or heard on count day; however, one was spotted during count week. And not a Goshawk or Roughlegged Hawk was to be found, even during count week. Red-breasted Nuthatches and Dark-eyed Juncos were strikingly less abundant than recent years. Duck numbers, especially the goldeneyes (but not wigeons or mallards), were down this year relative to the past few years because the duck night roost on Big Twin Lake is on hiatus, likely due to a fat and happy otter terrorizing the ducks that decide to spend too much time there. Many of us finished the day eating delicious chili at Jen and Richard Fisher's warm and inviting home, exchanging stories and making connections. Thank you! Perhaps the most remarkable tale of the day was Jamie and Bryan's wolf sighting up Lookout. In keeping with the Twisp Christmas Bird Count tradition of rotating compilers every one or two years, Steve and Melinda Pruett-Jones and Wendy Sims kindly agreed to take on compiling for 2024. Thanks so much! We have had a great time compiling the last two years and want to thank all of the amazing folks without whom this fun, edifying, and long-term community science thing wouldn't be a thing. We also want to thank the Cinnamon Twisp Bakery for kindly opening their warm, aromatic space for us to gather in the dark; the Puget Sound Museum for printing and copying count materials; and Kent Woodruff, who provides so much historical perspective, local knowledge, and indefatigable enthusiasm.

Wenatchee, reported by Dan Stephens

The 63rd Wenatchee Christmas Bird Count was held on December 31. Twenty-one birders enjoyed a cloudy day with little wind, temperatures reaching 42 degrees, and a few inches of snow at the higher elevations. Seventy-seven species were observed, which is above the 63-year average of 70, and 7,222 individuals were recorded, with an average of 10,000 over the count history. No records were broken. Some fairly common species missed were Pine Siskin, Rough-legged Hawk, and Golden-crowned Sparrow. This was the sixteenth year Eurasian Collard-Doves were recorded and the third highest count of 441 individuals. Lesser Goldfinches have been recorded for the past nine years, with only one year of absence, and this year's count of six was the second highest. Peregrine Falcons have been recorded for the last eight years, with one observed this year.

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

Northern Shrikes Egest Pellets!

article and photo by Pat Leigh, Mazama



Northern Shrike Egesting a Pellet

I always watch for birds as I drive on Highway 20 from Goat Creek Road to Winthrop. In the winter I expect to see raptors, primarily Red-tailed Hawks and Bald Eagles, but I keep a sharp eye out for the American Kestrel and the Northern Shrike. Each have a particular area where I see them, roughly one mile apart. The kestrel is generally on a power line or pole. The shrike prefers the very top of a snag. Neither appeared last winter and I was afraid I might not see them again, but in the past month I've had regular sightings of the kestrel. And on December 19 I was thrilled to have a little quality time with the Northern Shrike, including a rare opportunity to snatch a couple of photos which revealed the shrike egesting a pellet. We are all familiar with owls discharging undigested matter as pellets but I had no idea that shrikes do the same!

More Fun Northern Shrike Facts

from Birds of the World and All About Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology

- Since the Northern Shrike lacks a crop and has a small-capacity gizzard, pellet formation and egestion occurs several times daily, probably as soon as 30 to 60 min following a meal.
- Shrikes have a toothlike spike on either side of the upper bill and a corresponding notch on either side of the lower mandible. Known as a "tomial tooth," this feature allows them to kill prey with a quick bite to the neck.
- Northern Shrikes are stealthy hunters. They skulk through dense brush, patiently watch mouse holes and pathways, and monitor nests of other birds carefully to determine the best time to raid them.
- The nest of the Northern Shrike is an open cup, but it is so deep that while incubating, the female is completely out of view except for the tip of her tail.
- Both male and female Northern Shrikes sing throughout the year. The male sings especially in late winter and early spring. Their songs sometimes include imitations of other species.

Upcoming Field Trips

Pateros to Bridgeport Birding Loop 8:00 am-3:00 pm. Saturday February 17

Meet trip leaders Richard Scranton and Mark Johnston along Lakeshore Drive behind the Sweet River Bakery in Pateros at 8:00 am (day of trip phone number is 253-297-0705). Beginning at Pateros, we'll spend several hours birding areas between there and Bridgeport in search of passerines, raptors, waterfowl, and more. Please bring liquids, lunch/snacks, and dress for the weather. Participants must be able to walk at least two miles over uneven and likely snowy ground. Potential carpool drivers will need a Discover Pass. Carpool cost \$25 to be shared equally by passengers. Limit 10 participants. To register, email Mark at toxostoma495@gmail.com.

Winter Birding with Dan Stephens 8:00 am-4:30 pm Saturday February 24

Join Dan Stephens for an exciting trip to the Waterville Plateau and Bridgeport area. A wide variety of waterfowl and some late winter birds will be seen, with possibilities including Lapland Longspur, Northern Pintail, Snow Bunting, and Short-eared Owl. Meet at 8:00 am at the Easy Street Park and Ride in Wenatchee. We should return by 4:30 pm. For more information contact Dan Stephens at 509-679-4706.

East Wenatchee Porter's Pond 8:00-10:00 am Saturday March 2

Join Joe Veverka for a couple hours of birding at Porter's Pond in East Wenatchee. We will meet at the Apple Capitol Loop Trail 19th Street Trailhead (https://goo.gl/maps/jifHKGoFYi58QiNd6) at 8:00 am and walk along the Apple Capitol Loop Trail and side trails looking for waterfowl and grebes on the river. We expect to find several species of waterfowl as well as wintering sparrows and perhaps even some early arriving Violet-green Swallows. Walking should be fairly easy, not exceeding two miles at a birder's pace. Bring binoculars, good shoes or boots, plenty of water, and snacks. Don't forget a camera. All skill levels are welcome and no sign up is necessary. If you have any questions email Joe Veverka at joe veverka@yahoo.com.

Wisdom Is Back!

Widsom, a Laysan Albatross, has returned to Midway Atoll. She was first seen during the 2023/2024 breeding season on December 1, 2023, by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) volunteer Nick Minnich, who identified her by her red color band Z333. Two days later, USFWS Supervisory Wildlife Biologist Jon Plissner spent his usual off-duty time looking for banded birds through his binoculars in anticipation of recording a band number not in a study plot. Many of the albatrosses have metal bands that are often hard to read and take meticulous time, patience, and the right natural lighting. As fate would have it, Jon was double checking a metal band number on a bird that he had sighted earlier in the day when he witnessed the bird he was looking for dancing with Wisdom! The dance went on and on and, according to Jon, Wisdom didn't miss a beat! Until then, no one seemed sure a 73year-old plus Wisdom had it in her to ever dance again. Well, this Grandest of Grandmas has proved us humans wrong.

Wisdom's former lifelong mate, Akeakami, has not been seen for three breeding seasons and is therefore believed to not have survived his voyaging time at sea. Because it is so late in the season, Wisdom will probably not nest this year, but it is not for lack of trying! Last year she was observed very briefly and then was never seen again. However, this year she has been hanging out for weeks since she was first sighted on December 1, and on December 7 she was seen near her former nest site.

On December 13 USFWS Biologist Selena Flores captured photos of Wisdom around sunset, and noted that Wisdom appeared to be flirting with other birds and indulging in some pair bond activities, but was still acting a bit aloof. She observed another albatross preening Wisdom while he

was sitting and Wisdom was standing. Wisdom reciprocated the preening briefly, then walked away to go sit on her own, and promptly went to sleep!

(Editor's Note: Wisdom is the world's oldest-known wild bird. She was first banded by Chandler Robbins on Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge in 1956 when she was at least five years old. Since then her band has been replaced six times, due to excessive wear, and it is estimated she has fledged as many as 30 chicks and flown over 3,000,000 miles!)



Wisdom photo by Keegan Rankin, USFWS (Public Domain)

Join the Great Backyard Bird Count! from The Cornell Lab

of Ornithology

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) is a global event that gets people excited about birding in the winter by creating a winter snapshot of birds. For four days, people unite to observe, learn about, count, and celebrate birds! In 2023, the outcome was once again incredible—approximately 334,000 people counted 7,727 species of birds in 253 countries. This year, the GBBC is happening February 16-19. For information on how to participate visit www.birdcount.org.

Choices: A Poem by Tess Gallagher

submitted by Mary Gallagher* (*no relation to Tess!)

I go to the mountain side of the house to cut saplings, and clear a view to snow on the mountain. But when I look up, saw in hand, I see a nest clutched in the uppermost branches. I don't cut that one. I don't cut the others either. Suddenly, in every tree, an unseen nest where a mountain would be.

Conservation Update: Nason Ridge Community Forest (NRCF)

by Tim and Mary Gallagher, NRCF Stewardship Committee Members

Monthly eBird surveys by NCWAS volunteers continue to be conducted at seven sites that characterize the varied habitats of this once industrial forest land. The results of these surveys will be used by Chelan County to inform decisions prioritizing areas best suited for improved habitat and wildlife conservation and to gauge the results of the work.

This winter has been a challenge. Monthly bird surveys continue to be completed despite the severe weather, although the January field trips were cancelled.

The Stewardship Committee continues to meet quarterly. The Northwest Community Forest Coalition conducted a field visit this summer to the NRCF. Additionally, members of the NRCF Stewardship Committee were involved in a site visit to the nearby Coulter Block currently owned by Chinook Forest Partners. The Trust for Public Land has an option to purchase this property south of NRCF. For an assessment of this visit go to https:// www.co.chelan.wa.us/natural-resources/pages/nasonridge-community-forest.

New this year is a warming hut, provided by Lake Wenatchee State Park (LWSP), at the top of the ridge. It can be accessed by both snowshoe trails and cross-country trails from the Nason Ridge Sno-Park at Kahler Glen or the LWSP South Sno-Park. Both routes are steep and challenging but are well worth the effort.

A forest health project is ongoing within privately owned Nason View properties, adjacent to the NRCF. This project will help with fuels reduction and forest health. While the project limited the use of some winter cross-country ski trails, it is critical that forestry operations such as this do not occur in the spring and early summer when our resident and neotropical bird species are busy nesting. We humans have so many opportunities for recreation, but birds continue to have diminished habitats for nesting. It is challenging for the forestry professionals to get their work

done, as there are fire hazards in mid to late summer and into the fall, and working in winter conditions is not easy.

Access and signage are ongoing works in progress. A new gate with information signs and a sign-in registry have been put closer to the start of the property boundary on the west side. This was a priority for the Stewardship Committee. NRCF is continuing the policy of previous timber companies by not allowing motorized use. The only exception is the long-standing USFS Trail #1583 (on the northeast side) that allows motorcycle use.

At the Butcher Creek entrance to NRCF, consideration is being given to a trail counter and possibly cameras to monitor use. The feasibility of a Sno-Park at this location also is continuing to be investigated. Some residents of Butcher Creek Road (6910) have expressed concerns about increased traffic due to the NRCF, gate placement, and future road maintenance.

Upcoming forest projects include completing the Recreation and Access Supplement; developing fuels reduction/forest health units with funding from the Washington Department of Natural Resources and the Natural Resources Conservation Service; helping with the Nason watershed NEPA process; continuing Kahler Creek restoration design with the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust; and continuing to look into biochar feasibility for NRCF treatments as well as carbon financing for reforestation efforts.

For Stewardship Committee meeting notes, future meeting dates, and more information go to https:// www.co.chelan.wa.us/natural-resources/pages/nasonridge-community-forest. If you would like to be involved with monthly bird surveys or have questions about the NRCF, please contact Mary or Tim Gallagher at marywillardgallagher@live.com or timothy.gallagher53@gmail.com.

NCWAS Does SunButter and Birdseed at the Museum

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

On December 2, a team from NCWAS took part in a "Holiday Family Fun Day" at the Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center. Birders helped kids smear ponderosa pine cones with SunButter or lard, roll them in birdseed, and then attach a string to hang them outdoors for birds to eat.

SunButter was a revelation to some of us elders. It has the color and texture of peanut butter, but it's made from sunflower seeds, which are hypoallergenic. It turns out that institutions no longer use peanut butter where sunflower butter suffices, because peanuts and tree nuts cause too many severe allergic reactions.

Snow fell throughout the area and we wondered whether anybody would attend. We needn't have worried. One hundred seven kids, each with one or more adults in tow, made seed balls to feed birds. Some accidentally licked their fingers; zero anaphylactic shock resulted. A lot more wiped fingers on their pantlegs faster than we could hand them paper towels and wet wipes.

The NCWAS team included Merry Roy (who gathered and oven-dried pine cones the days before), Karen Haire, Mark Oswood, Penny Tobiska, Sue Sampson, Chuck Warner, and Nancy Warner. Some of us are still cleaning SunButter and bird seed out of our day's clothing. The Wild Phlox February 2024 7

February 2024 Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Resources and Calendar

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February 14, March 13, April 10	Birding by the River Wenatchee River Institute	www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org	
February 16-19	Great Backyard Bird Count	See page 6 for more information	
February 17	Pateros to Bridgeport Field Trip	See page 5 for more information	
February 24	Winter Birding with Dan Stephens Field Trip	See page 5 for more information	
February 24	Tropical Wildlife and Conservation Presentation	See page 3 for more information	
February 28, March 27, April 24	Wednesday Wenatchee Birding	www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org	
March 2	East Wenatchee Porter's Pond Field Trip	See page 5 for more information	
March 22-24	Othella Sandhill Crane Festival	www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org	
April 11-14	Olympic BirdFest	www.olympicbirdfest.org	
May 16-19	Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest	www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org	



You can find the Wild Phlox online at our website - www.ncwaudubon.org
The beautiful photos are even nicer in color.

