

The Wild Phlox

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Conservation Update: The Upper Wenatchee Watershed Project Is Showing Promise

article and photo by
Mark Johnston, Leavenworth

In the December 2024 issue of the Phlox, we covered our work on the Shoreline Master Program, which we put years of work into without success. In this issue, we cover our involvement with the Upper Wenatchee Watershed Project (UWWP), which is progressing much more positively.

Multiple efforts to acquire former Longview Timberlands in Chelan County have been made in the last 20 years. The most recent effort began in late 2014 as the Upper Wenatchee Community Lands Plan (UWCLP). The purpose of the UWCLP is to identify priorities for conservation and to build public support for the purchase of numerous private forest parcels. Those parcels total approximately 30,000 acres and are scattered between the south end of Lake Wenatchee and upper Blewett Pass. This effort was led by Trust for Public Land (TPL), The Nature Conservancy, Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, and Chelan County with the active participation of numerous organizations and community members.

In 2016, NCWAS conducted a comprehensive assessment of all involved parcels, with a primary focus on their value as bird habitat, and subsequently submitted the results to the UWCLP process. In addition to providing insight into the ecological benefits that public ownership of these lands would bring to the area's landscape connectivity and wildlife, it also highlighted the importance of finding a way to make acquisition of them possible.

Over the next few years, implementation of the UWCLP languished because there was not a willing seller. Finally, in 2022, it was reborn as the UWWP under the leadership of TPL, which obtained an option to purchase all the

remaining former-Longview lands identified in the original UWCLP, plus some additional ones in the Entiat Mountains, for a total package of 35,000 acres.

Beginning in 2025, as long as TPL successfully conserves portions of the property each year, it will have until 2030 to complete its acquisition of all 35,000 acres. TPL is partnering with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) on the first four phases, with the USFS currently making good

progress on securing the necessary funding from the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. At this time, the funds (\$7,000,000) for the purchase of Phase 1 lands, totaling approximately 5,650 acres in lower Blewett Pass, have been received. Funding (\$8,000,000) for Phase 2 covering another 5,959 acres in upper Blewett Pass is in the President's current budget request which is pending approval by Congress. Most recently, an application has been submitted for the \$12,000,000 needed for acquisition of the 8,485 acres included in Phases 3 and 4.

TPL's partners for future phases are still to be identified, but like phases 1 to 4, the USFS will likely be involved. It's also possible that a local entity, such as Chelan County, could acquire some of these parcels. *Continued on page 6.*



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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Great Backyard Bird Count February 14-17, 2025

Spend time in your favorite places watching birds—then report your observations to The Cornell Lab of Ornithology! In as little as 15 minutes notice the birds around you. Identify them, count them, and submit your counts to help scientists better understand and protect birds around the world. If you already use eBird or Merlin, any submissions you make over the four days will be included in the Great Backyard Bird Count. For more information visit www.birdcount.org.



Black-capped Chickadee
photo by Pat Leigh, Mazama

North Central Washington Audubon Society Wild Phlox Subscription Form

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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



In the October 2024 issue of the Phlox, I included an article about changes to the taxonomic classification of redpolls. The American Ornithological Society (AOS) had approved a proposal to lump the three previously recognized redpoll species (Common, Hoary, and Lesser) into a single species called “Redpoll.” Although I thought the change was interesting, I didn’t spend much time thinking about it. But I was more curious when I heard about another change the AOS approved in 2024: Cooper’s Hawks were transferred out of the genus *Accipiter* and into the genus *Astur*, but Sharp-shinned Hawks stayed in the genus *Accipiter*. Although I don’t doubt the science behind this change (it’s way over my head!), I do find it interesting that two species that can be so hard to tell apart in the field can be so different taxonomically. Some of the other changes approved by the AOS in 2024 include changing the common name of Northern Goshawk to American Goshawk and moving it into the genus *Astur*; splitting barn owls into three species and naming the one that occurs in North America the American Barn Owl; and splitting house wrens into seven different species, with six occurring in the tropics and naming the one in North America the Northern House Wren. It’s enough to make your head spin!

Editor’s Notes



Cooper’s Hawk
photo by Bruce McCammon,
Wenatchee



Wisdom (left) and Her New Partner
photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Public Domain)

In other news, I was excited to learn that Wisdom has once again returned to Midway Atoll National Wildlife Refuge—and she has a new partner and they are incubating an egg! Wisdom is a Laysan Albatross that was first banded in 1956 when she was at least five years old. She is now at least 74 years old and has become famous as the world’s oldest-known wild bird. Wisdom’s long-term mate, Akeakamai, disappeared several years ago, and although Wisdom had been seen “flirting” since then, she has not had a partner or laid an egg until now. Albatross chicks start to hatch in late January, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is urging us all to send Wisdom and the other nesting seabirds at Midway Atoll good vibes in hopes of a successful nesting season.

Tales From Costa Rica Presentation

Speakers: Pat Leigh and Nancy Kuta
Friday, March 14, 4:30-6:00 pm
Winthrop Library Community Room

Join us as we follow Pat Leigh and Nancy Kuta through their eight-day tour of the birds of Costa Rica. Pat and Nancy, along with six other birders visited three areas, each known for particular species of birds. In one week on the ground, they saw over 220 bird species and 28 of the 53 hummingbird species known to inhabit Costa Rica. We hope you will enjoy seeing photos and hearing the stories from their trip.

The Winthrop Library is located at 112 Norfolk Road. All are welcome and there is no cost to attend. We hope to see you there!



Black-cowled Oriole
photo by Pat Leigh, Mazama

NCW Christmas Bird Count Reports

compiled by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

Chelan, reported by Amy Pavelchek

The 125th Chelan Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 21. It was not the best weather. A gray morning gave way to rain earlier than expected, starting around 10:00 am, and in some places turned to snow, but at least there was very little wind. Despite the less-than-ideal weather, we had a turnout of 14 people and 1 feeder watcher, and I want to thank everyone for participating. We saw a total of 78 bird species, and an estimated 4,736 individual birds. Due to the usual winter snow, the majority of the count was performed by vehicle, but there were still several opportunities to get out and walk. It was a fairly unexceptional count. Western Grebes and Western Meadowlarks set record high counts and there were very large rafts of grebes on Lake Chelan. California Quail, Chuckar, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Golden Eagle, Bald Eagle, and European Starlings all set new low count records. Canada Goose was the most reported species this year. The most notable species was a Swamp Sparrow at Beebe Springs, where it had been documented for a few weeks. Even though winter birding has its limitations for access, I still like to find the moments that make it exciting. I saw two Townsend's Solitaires chasing each other at Lake Chelan State Park—they were in the tops of the trees and chattering away to each other. It is seeing bits of behavior and hearing different bird calls that make me relish being outside, even on a winter day. Some birds are sure to put a smile on my face, like an American Dipper bobbing on a mid-stream rock, or a noisy mixed flock of nuthatches, chickadees, and creepers in the Ponderosa pines.



American Dipper
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop



Bald Eagles
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

Leavenworth, reported by Tucker Jonas

Thanks to all who participated in the 23rd Leavenworth Christmas Bird Count on December 18! We had some less-than ideal weather conditions once again, with nearly a foot of snow falling the night before in some areas of the count, and heavy rain first thing in the morning in other areas. By late morning, however, the skies cleared and we enjoyed some sunshine to finish out the day. We ended the day with 64 species total, which is one fewer than our total from last year. We hit new high counts for a number of species including Golden Eagle (8), Bald Eagle (45), Hairy Woodpecker (11), Pileated Woodpecker (4), Black-billed Magpie (27), and White-crowned Sparrow (195). Our biggest misses were Fox Sparrow, which had been seen on 20 previous counts, and Townsend's Solitaire, seen on 17 previous counts. The "rarest" species observed this year was Peregrine Falcon (1), which had only been seen on three previous counts. Other rarities were Canada Jay (1), seen on five previous counts, and Canyon Wren (1), seen on six previous counts.

Twisp, reported by Steve Pruett-Jones and Wendy Sims

Sixty-two birders braved icy and snowy roads and several others monitored backyard feeders on Saturday, December 14 for the 37th Twisp Christmas Bird Count. Having 16 routes, after splitting two of the former routes, this largest-ever turnout made covering the whole circle easier. Results were better than expected for a cloudy and snowy day. Birders saw 6,020 individual birds of 78 different species, and two additional species were observed during count week. The most abundant species were California Quail (811), Dark-eyed Junco (405), and House Sparrow (380). Other common birds included Mallard, Wild Turkey, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Black-billed Magpie, American Crow, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, House Finch, Pine Siskin, and American Goldfinch. Several birders were delighted to find Horned Larks and Snow Buntings. Bohemian Waxwings and Spotted Towhees were the most notable absentees. Twelve species have been seen in all 37 years of the Twisp count: *Continued on page 5.*



Varied Thrush
photo by Trevin Leon, Winthrop

Christmas Bird Counts - continued from page 4

Mallard, California Quail, Bald Eagle, Belted Kingfisher, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Steller's Jay, Black-billed Magpie, Common Raven, Mountain Chickadee, Pine Siskin, and American Goldfinch. Species that have been spotted three or fewer times include Ring-necked Duck, Ruffed Grouse, Pied-billed Grebe, Virginia Rail, Great Blue Heron, American Goshawk, Northern Pygmy-Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, White-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Marsh Wren, Varied Thrush, Red Crossbill, Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird, Rusty Blackbird, and Western Meadowlark. A delicious and very crowded potluck (another record with 37 attending) was



Eurasian Collared-Dove, Ringed Turtle-Dove, and Mourning Doves
photo by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley

held at the home of Wendy Sims to celebrate the successes of the day. The organizers are grateful to all who turned out for this event, especially the first-time route leaders who made it possible to cover the subdivided routes. And, if you are missing a pet Ringed Turtle-Dove we might know where it has been hanging out.

Wenatchee, reported by Jenny Graevell

Seventeen people celebrated Wenatchee's 64th annual Christmas Bird Count on January 4th. The eleven teams counted 9,376 birds of 80 different species. Interesting finds included a Red-breasted X Red-naped Sapsucker hybrid, a Say's Phoebe, and zero American coots. Wild Birds Unlimited generously donated a big basket of bird goodies for a door prize.

Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest: It Approaches!

All this sunshine is making us think about springtime—and that means we're thinking about Bird Fest! Planning for the 23rd Annual Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest is underway and we are excited to see all you bird nuts May 15-18. Hosted by the Wenatchee River Institute and NCWAS, this weekend unites bird enthusiasts, families, and nature aficionados from all over to celebrate the mesmerizing beauty of birds and the diverse ecosystems of North Central Washington. Birders of all ages and experience levels are sure to find an activity to celebrate the return of migratory birds.

Attendees can expect fresh takes on some favorite Bird Fest activities. From new birding trips to a revamped Bird

by Mason Powers, Wenatchee River Institute

Fest Community Fair on Saturday May 17, everyone will have the opportunity for some avian appreciation with their fellow birders. We're especially looking forward to this year's Keynote Address from local author and naturalist, David Lukas. Keep an eye out for the full Bird Fest Schedule set to be published in early March.

Registration for all trips and the Keynote Address will open on March 18. Secure your spot at the Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest and join us for an unforgettable weekend of exploration, education, and birdwatching. For more information and updates, please visit www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org/bird-fest/.

Holiday Family Fun Day at the Museum

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

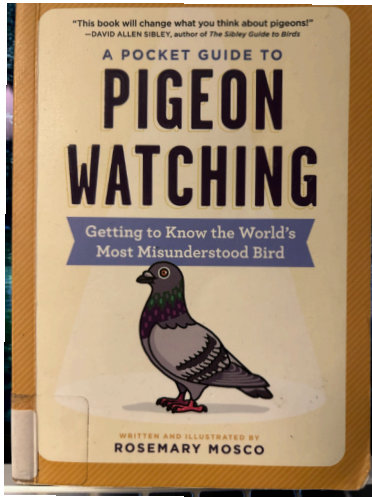
NCWAS set up a craft table at the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center on December 7, 2024. It was Holiday Family Fun Day, enticing families with young children to construct crafts and pose for photos with Santa. Audubon helped kids make bird feeders in the form of pine cones with yarn hangers. Kids slathered the cones with sunflower butter then rolled them in sunflower seeds and took them home to hang outdoors. Audubon's team stood

by ready to intercept sticky hands with paper towels and wet wipes before kids could wipe them on holiday party dresses or sibling-matching shirts. Sixty-two visitors finished pine cones, and only two of those were adults. Mark Oswood coordinated and Merry Roy furnished pine cones she'd collected from the Steamboat Rock area. Karen Haire, Bruce McCammon, and Sue Sampson also volunteered.

Book Reviews

A Pocket Guide to Pigeon Watching: Getting to Know the World's Most Misunderstood Bird. By Rosemary Mosco (Workman Publishing, 2021), 240 pages. submitted by Merry Roy, Wenatchee

Rosemary Mosco is a gleefully clever cartoonist. You might have seen her work in the National Audubon magazine and in Cornell Lab's *Living Bird* magazine. Her book, *A Pocket Guide to Pigeon Watching*, is full of her birdy cartoon illustrations and youthful chatty style conveying incredible amounts of information. This book will definitely attract young birders, beginning birders, the ornithologically curious, and non-birders too. Her accessible style includes pronunciation guides, definitions of birding terms, questions (answered and unanswered), and creative, sometimes irreverent, word usage. Mosco describes the necessity of pigeon preening: "pigeons are covered in tiny zippers that need to be zipped." She delights in describing pigeon poop, its composition and uses.



Mosco describes the thousands of years of history that humanity has shared with pigeons. Pigeons have been status symbols for aristocrats, messengers during sieges, and of course, food. Their popularity changed when pigeons lost their usefulness to people. After World War II, technology replaced pigeon message carriers for quick communication, and factory farms produced cheaper and more convenient meat. This is the point at which some people and the media began to call pigeons "rats with wings."

But pigeons are smart, and people may appreciate them once again after reading Mosco's entertaining book. Researchers have taught pigeons to distinguish benign from cancerous human breast tissue on microscope slides and diseased heart tissue from non-diseased tissue in images. They can also play table tennis and recognize the difference between Indian dance and martial arts. These latter skills might not prove as useful for changing the pigeons' image as their potential medical skills. However, we may change our minds about pigeons after reading this book.

The Serviceberry: Abundance and Reciprocity in the Natural World. By Robin Wall Kimmerer, illustrated by John Burgoyne (Scribner, 2024), 128 pages. submitted by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

Because Robin Wall Kimmerer is one of our preeminent nature writers, I expected her new book to treat birds, and to some extent, it does. She treats plants, insects, birds, and other animals as constituting a gift from the Earth. They should be received with gratitude, shared, not hoarded. That's her model for a new society that protects the environment, unlike the commercialism that ravages it. The Saskatoon serviceberry is her metaphor for gifts from the Earth that give back to the Earth. Unfortunately, as she admits, she is not trained in economics and she can't explain how her ideal world could be scaled up to affect society. Her theory reminded me of a friend during the hippie era, a sociology professor who advocated a society based on trading rather than on cash. When he found out he had nothing to offer the dentist, his wife had to get a job to get his daughter's teeth fixed. As a fan of Kimmerer's earlier books, *Gathering Moss* and *Braiding Sweetgrass*, I was disappointed. It's a short book, only 128 pages.

Upper Wenatchee Watershed - continued from page 1

The next six months are a critical juncture for the project. TPL is still waiting for the USFS appraisal to be completed for Phases 1 and 2, and then will determine if the landowner approves the value. If yes, and the USFS secures all necessary funding, TPL would aim to acquire Phases 1 and 2 and convey them to the USFS later this year.

If these and future phases are successful, the area's public land ownership pattern between Lake Wenatchee and upper Blewett Pass will be much better connected, allowing for more efficient and effective habitat management for the benefit of wildlife and the recreational public. Moreover, a hodgepodge of habitat fragmenting development, which would otherwise occur in the landscape, will be avoided.

Overall, this is a very complicated rolling process that includes not only the funding aspects (and the politics related to the new administration), but also parcel appraisals, ongoing negotiations, etc. However, the prospects for success look promising. While we'll soon know, for now our fingers are crossed for a positive outcome.

NCWAS remains fully engaged and is working closely with TPL as the process moves forward. For a more detailed explanation of the project, including links to maps and NCWAS letters supporting acquisition funding, please visit the conservation page on our website at www.ncwaudubon.org/conservation/ and click on the link for the Upper Wenatchee Watershed Project issue.

Gracias! from Cuba

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

NCWAS recently received a thank-you email (shown below) from Ailén Anido Escalona in Gibara, Cuba. It is addressed to Joni Ellis, Director of Optics for the Tropics, and to Mark Johnston, representing the NCWAS Board. The thanks is for a gift of binoculars NCWAS made to a conservation and education program that tries to teach

children: “Please don’t cage the songbirds!” Ms. Ellis explains that a long-standing cultural practice in Cuba has been to capture and cage songbirds to sell them as pets. The practice reduces the number of breeding pairs and the songbird population. Ailén is starting with children, to educate them to discourage the practice.

From: Ailén Anido Escalona
Date: Sun, Jan 19, 2025 at 2:38 PM
Subject: Gratitude for the Support Received
To: Joni Ellis
CC: Mark Johnston

Dear colleagues,

My name is Ailén, I live in Gibara, Cuba, and I was fortunate to receive binoculars thanks to Joni Ellis and Optics for the Tropics. I am deeply grateful to the Audubon Society for granting me this scholarship, as this equipment is of vital importance for our conservation work.

Unfortunately, in my community, the capture and trafficking of songbirds, both endemic and migratory, is a harmful practice that has led to a decline in their populations. In response to this situation, we have been working closely with local authorities and the forest ranger corps to implement concrete actions to address this issue.

For approximately three years, I have been leading a project called Guardians of Nature, focused on children in rural schools. This project aims to teach them to protect birds and to "swap the cage for binoculars." Through educational games, recreational activities, and birdwatching, the children have learned to value the protection and preservation of these species, helping to mitigate this harmful practice.

This initiative, which began in the community of Los Hoyos, has now expanded to six additional communities, filling us with satisfaction as we witness the positive impact we are achieving.

Once again, I would like to express my deepest gratitude for your support and for providing us with the tools needed to enhance our work.

Kind regards,
Ailén

So, what is Optics for the Tropics and how is NCWAS related to it?

Optics for the Tropics (Optics) is a program that partners with Environment for the Americas (Environment) out of Boulder, Colorado, to carry out its primary mission of making binoculars available to those who can do the most to protect birds in Latin America and the Caribbean. Optics provides Environment with binoculars to distribute, in exchange for publicity and for processing requests for binoculars.

Optics is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit organization in Florida. Ms. Ellis told me that Optics is funded by donations and from the proceeds of trips that it organizes to Cuba for birding, culture, and the arts. It also has income from an investment fund.

Optics provided roughly 100 binoculars annually before the Covid pandemic and is now donating about 50 binoculars per year. It also passes on used, but working, binoculars to birding clubs. It enjoys the support of Vortex Optics, which gives it a substantial discount on the equipment it needs. (NCWAS also has a good working relationship with Vortex. Their binoculars are very good, and we pay about \$100 for each pair that we use at our

“What’s That Bird” and other educational events.)

Optics patrons frequently hand-carry an extra set of binoculars on their trips into Cuba and leave them behind upon returning home. Thus, Optics works in small numbers, reducing commercial import and export complications. Environment uses “travel ambassadors” to deliver binoculars to some locations.

Optics and Environment, like NCWAS, recognize that many of our local birds are commuters, spending summers here and winters nearly three thousand miles away. To survive, they need protection on both ends of their commute, as well as along the way. That’s a goal of the international Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and that’s why NCWAS donated \$500 to Optics in 2023 and another \$500 in 2024, or the equivalent of ten binoculars over the past two years.

Ms. Ellis sends her thanks to NCWAS for our donations, and we thank her for helping to protect our long-distance migrants!

For more information visit these websites:

www.opticsforthetropics.org and
www.environmentamericas.org/programs/optics-for-the-tropics/

February 2025 Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Resources and Calendar

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February 14-17	Great Backyard Bird Count	See page 2 for more information
March 14	Tales from Costa Rica Presentation	See page 3 for more information
March 21-23	Othello Sandhill Crane Festival	www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org
April 10-13	Olympic BirdFest 2024	www.olympicbirdfest.org
May 15-18	Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest (Registration opens on March 18)	See page 6 for more information



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