

The Wild Phlox

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Study Reveals Factors Driving Range Expansion in Lesser Goldfinches

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

New research published in the journal *Ornithology* shows that Lesser Goldfinches, a small songbird traditionally found in the Southwest, are expanding their range northward through the Pacific Northwest at an unprecedented rate, providing insights into how species adapt to environmental change. Researchers from Washington State University and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology analyzed data from birdwatchers participating in two initiatives from the Cornell Lab—Project FeederWatch and eBird—to track the species’ movement. The study found that Lesser Goldfinch populations increased dramatically in Washington (110.5%), Idaho (66.3%), and Oregon (16.9%) between 2012 and 2022.



Lesser Goldfinch

photo by Mason Maron, Cornell Lab, Macaulay Library

“When I first arrived in eastern Washington I was pretty new to birding and Lesser Goldfinches were new to me. I was seeing groups of 30 or 40 at a time and I sort of assumed that was normal, until I started meeting local birders who said, ‘10 years ago we never had Lesser Goldfinches,’ so I started to investigate what was going on,” said Mason Maron, lead author and graduate of Washington State University.

“What’s fascinating is how these birds are adapting to human-modified landscapes,” said Maron. “They’re not just moving north randomly—they’re following specific corridors, particularly along rivers and through urban areas

where temperatures are warmer and where both native and non-native plants provide food.”

The research identified maximum annual temperature, annual rainfall, urban development, and proximity to major rivers as key factors associated with the northward expansion. Although the authors noted Lesser Goldfinches appear at backyard bird feeders often, when they looked at how bird feeders might affect establishment, surprisingly, bird feeders played a minimal role in establishing new populations.

“There wasn’t really a significant association with bird feeders,” Maron said. The first individuals to arrive in a new area might go to feeders because they provide easy to access food, but Maron explained, “it’s not going to be enough to sustain a whole population.”

Rivers emerged as crucial corridors for expansion. “These rivers carry weedy plants and seeds really well,” said Maron. “We, as people, like to live along the river, so we disturb the soil and that really creates this sort of chain of the perfect conditions for them.”

Once established in new areas, the goldfinch populations remain stable. “Our results are suggestive of this species being able to pretty rapidly colonize new environments,” said Jordan Boersma, co-author and research associate at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. “It’s not just that Lesser Goldfinches are exploring these new areas...they are moving in and typically turning into stable populations or even increasing populations.”

The Lesser Goldfinches might be shifting north in response to climate and habitat changes reported by this study, and indeed, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s eBird Status and Trends project indicates that Lesser Goldfinches are declining in the southern parts of their range.

While this expansion shows some species can adapt to environmental change, Maron cautions against broad generalizations: “What it really shows is that we know a lot of species are declining and struggling because of these changes. Some species can survive and adapt and do better, but it’s not necessarily a trade-off.” *Continued on page 7.*

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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A Close Encounter!

Earlier this year, Janet and Peter Bauer were lucky enough to witness this interaction between an American Kestrel and a Peregrine Falcon near their home in Winthrop. It was unclear if the kestrel was trying to steal a meal or possibly defending a nearby nest. After making several passes, the kestrel gave up and the peregrine was able to finish it's meal in peace.



photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

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As usual, I can't believe it is August and that summer is rapidly slipping away. The woods and fields seem eerily quiet in contrast to just a few weeks ago, birds are already on their way south, and the MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding season has ended. With the exception of 2021, when we didn't complete the MAPS season because of wildfire smoke, we have always captured over 100 birds. This year we were at 92 birds going in to the last banding session, and amazingly, we managed to capture exactly eight birds to bring the season total to 100!

Editor's Notes



Cooper's Hawk
photo by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

One of the highlights of this year's banding season was recapturing our old friend, Swainson's Thrush 2691-30879. Originally banded in 2019 when he was one year old, he has now made the round trip between the Methow Valley and his wintering grounds in Central or South America an impressive eight times! Other banding-season highlights included hosting a beginner banding class sponsored by NCWAS and capturing a Cooper's Hawk in one of our nets. In all my years of bird banding, I have never captured a hawk so I was extremely grateful that one of my volunteers knew how to safely handle it. (And the experience has inspired me to take a beginner raptor handling/

banding class at the Intermountain Bird Observatory in Idaho next month.) Another surprising bird that found its way into one of our nets was a beautiful female Say's Phoebe. Although phoebe's typically nest in a building near the MAPS station, this is the first time we have been lucky enough to capture and band one. Now that she is banded, we'll be watching to see if she nests in the same location next year.



Say's Phoebe
photo by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

Okanogan Highlands Field Trip Report

by Todd Thorn, Okanogan Highlands

On June 15, our group of three met at the ball fields in Tonasket and quickly headed out of town. While the throng of Killdeer at our meeting place was mesmerizing, the Highlands beckoned and it wasn't long until we were knee deep in birds. Stops along the Havillah and Fancher roads netted Bobolink, nesting Golden Eagles, White-throated Swift, Chukar, Horned Lark, Common Yellowthroat, and snipe among others. Then we headed up the mountain to pine and fir forests and their suite of birds including Cassin's Finch, Lazuli Bunting, Common Raven, Clark's Nutcracker, nuthatches, and nesting Williamson's Sapsuckers. There also were Cassin's and Warbling Vireos; Yellow, Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, and MacGillivray's Warblers; and Western, Willow, and Olive-sided Flycatchers.

With a small group we moved efficiently, enjoying leisurely stops. The pond and wetlands along the Grange Road provided numerous species to add to the list: Redhead, Cinnamon Teal, Mallard, Gadwall, American Wigeon, Greater Yellowlegs, and the first of many Yellow-headed Blackbirds! Then it was on to Beaver Canyon, where we found Common Loons, including one with a chick riding along; Spotted Sandpipers; a whinnying Sora; and a Virginia Rail that occasionally sounded off in the cattails nearly at our feet!

Along Mary Ann Creek, we checked successive ponds and wetlands for additional avian treasures and found Wilson's Phalarope, Pied-billed Grebe, and an additional duck species or two. Then we headed over the hill and down to Molson's wetlands and Sidley Lake, where Ring-necked Duck, Northern Shoveler, and Lesser Scaup awaited, along with Eared Grebe and an active Bald Eagle nest. Being just over half a mile from the international border, of course Canada Geese were lounging around the lakeshore.

We returned to town via Dry Gulch, where we missed seeing some hoped-for species, but did find a singing Gray Catbird and finally a Lewis's Woodpecker while descending back through sagebrush country. It was a very fun day of birding with 91 bird species observed along with some deer, elk, and bighorn sheep!



Common Yellowthroat
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

Meet Our Newest Board Member: Christy Nielsen

Although I was born near Boston, Massachusetts, I was raised in the Pacific Northwest moving between eastern Washington and Oregon as my dad was transferred for his work with the U.S. Forest Service. I have had the privilege to live in Mazama and Omak in Washington and in Burns and Klamath Falls in Oregon. I am truly a product of the sagebrush steppe.

I attended Washington State University (Go Cougs!) where I earned a Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy. My early career took me to Alaska where I had the privilege to work with the Alaska Native Health Service in Kotzebue, Sitka, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. After 10 years I returned to Washington, living in Spokane. There I raised my daughter, continued my education, and earned a Doctor of Pharmacy degree. I had no real intentions to return to North Central Washington, but serendipitously I took a position at Sacred Heart Medical Center, designing and implementing a telepharmacy program tasked with supporting underserved rural hospitals in our region. One of my client hospitals was Lake Chelan Community Hospital. In 2008, they offered me a position as the Director of Pharmacy, bringing me back to where I began.



Through all my life adventures I have had a strong interest in photography. I was given a cast-off folding camera when I was eleven years old. As a kid, I dreamed of working for National Geographic. Since then, a camera has always been my ticket to the outdoors and a reason to get out and explore. Nature is my primary subject, be it landscapes or the creatures that inhabit it. I came to birding via photography. I couldn't really "see" birds. I considered them silhouettes, background noise that lurked in those landscapes, that I mostly ignored. Then I went to Namibia in 2012 for the geology and landscapes. There I encountered a Lilac-breasted Roller—a vivid, multicolored splash against a stark desert—lilacs, pinks, greens, metallic blue flashing wings and a helping of attitude. When I came home, I refocused my lens on those "silhouettes," using my camera to "see" them, thus discovering a world that had been around me the whole time. Maybe nothing as vivid as the Lilac-breasted Roller flies about our sagebrush steppes, but I haven't stopped looking, admiring, and learning about these feathered denizens that now have names, histories, and best of all recognition.

I came to recognize that taking pictures of birds was all well and good but realized I knew nothing about how all these pieces fit together: the birds, the plants, the landscape, the rocks, the water, the weather, and the seasons. I had a bunch of pieces to a puzzle. My high curiosity quotient led me to try to put all those "data points" into context. I enrolled in the naturalist program at Wenatchee Valley College. I met Kent Woodruff at the Chelan Ridge Hawk Watch site, learning about the river of raptors streaming overhead in the spring and fall. I became involved in the NCWAS American Kestrel Nest Box Project, and now monitor two routes on the northwestern section of the Waterville Plateau. I've watched too many of our beautiful habitats give way to development and catastrophic fires. Now I'm trying my hand at nature journaling, inspired by Heather Wallis Murphy and others to further focus on how all the pieces make up the whole—an interconnected world we ignore at our peril.

I support whole-heartedly the educational, conservation, community science, and advocacy work of NCWAS and its partners in our region. I'm proud to serve as a board member to advocate for the natural world that has brought me so much joy and wisdom.

A Winning Season for "What's That Bird?"

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

After our season opener for Earth Day, where we taught 90 children at Chief Joseph Dam a bit about birding and binoculars, NCWAS played for four days at Confluence State Park in Wenatchee. We set up our "What's That Bird?" scavenger hunt for replicas of birds and challenged 201 children and 51 accompanying adults to find and identify them.

Where the scavenger hunt wasn't feasible, we displayed our realistic carved birds at our exhibition tent, and again, challenged people to identify them. We also distributed our poster of local birds, gave out our last copies of National Audubon's magazine with photos of the year, enticed young children to squeeze toy stuffed birds to make bird

calls, and offered trial subscriptions to our Wild Phlox newsletter.

On Saturday of Earth Week at the Wenatchee Valley College we had at least 100 visitors; at the Methow Park in Wenatchee at "Be Well-Stay Well: A Festival of Health on El Dio Del Nino" we had 108 visitors to our tent; and at Bird Fest in Leavenworth we had 181 visitors. That's a grand total of 641 visitors, counting all venues.

During the season our team consisted of our leader Mark Oswood, Judy Oswood, Karen Haire, Bruce McCammon, Dianne McCammon, Merry Roy, Sue Sampson, Ken Smith, Larry Tobiska, and Penny Tobiska.

Opinion: Developing the Offshore Wind That Birds Need

by Merry Roy, Wenatchee

In the past, I was not in favor of offshore wind turbine projects for many reasons, but after watching the February webinar from the National Audubon Society on the subject, I have changed my mind.

Audubon's *Survival by Degrees* report (www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees) tells us that two-thirds of North American bird species are at risk of extinction. Climate change and habitat destruction are the main culprits. The good news is that three-fourths of those birds can be saved, and reducing CO2 in the atmosphere is essential for that to happen.

We need renewable energy generation that is rapid and responsible, and offshore wind development has vast potential for being both. The capacity of offshore wind energy generation along the coasts of the United States is greater than three times the total electricity generated nationwide in 2023. Offshore turbines are much larger than terrestrial ones (a 12-acre sweep as opposed to a 3-acre sweep) and as a result, offshore turbines generate more energy.

Certainly, there are negative impacts from offshore turbine generation of energy. Bird collisions occur when birds fly at the level of the turbine blades, and if birds detour around the projects, they may miss important food sources. But there are solutions to these problems. Turbine placement must avoid specific locations such as nesting areas important to birds. Collisions can be minimized by painting alternate turbine blades black and adding blinking lights and by monitoring for the peaks of migration and

turning off turbines at those times. Conservation offsets such as improving the condition of nesting areas and other habitats can help ameliorate the unavoidable impacts on birds. Monitoring the projects using technologies such as radar, cameras, range finders, and thermal detection will provide important feedback on how to improve safety measures.

It is essential that new projects be sited near large human populations to minimize the distance needed to transport the electricity generated and to avoid protected areas for breeding birds and other wildlife. More study is needed to understand the impact of sound waves above and below water.

Good rapport with wind project developers is important, and Audubon needs to be involved early in planning conversations. It can take ten years between planning and the production of energy from offshore turbines. That's a long-term relationship.

Audubon is similarly involved in siting other renewable energies like solar and geothermal. Each project is unique; there is no cookie-cutter template that applies to all. Tenacity, vigorous research, and community involvement for the long haul are key.

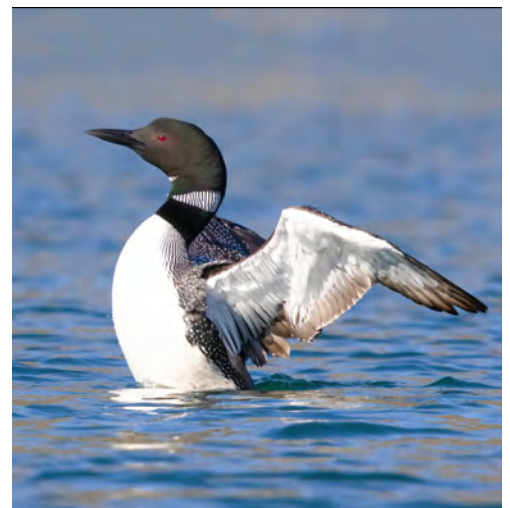
Even when government policies are volatile, Audubon's mission is the same and will continue: conservation, community involvement, and agencies working together to plan and monitor the projects that will protect our birds.

Conservation Update: Protect Mission Ridge Against Urban Development

by Bill Deters, NCWAS and
Mike Rolfs, Friends of Mission Ridge

Many issues that the NCWAS Conservation Committee address go on for years. The proposed "Mission Ridge Ski Area Expansion" (a 4,000-pillow real estate development adjacent to the ski area) is one of them. Several years ago, we voiced our objections to this proposed development. Besides having a huge carbon footprint, it would threaten the Colockum Elk Herd, place a heavy additional burden on the area's already over-allocated water budget, and add year-round activity to a high fire-hazard basin. Not only does it make human-caused fire starts more likely, but the significantly larger year-round population would increase human intrusion into currently pristine and quiet areas. The project also would reduce bird and other wildlife habitat, degrade dark skies, threaten surface water with pollution from runoff, bring increased bird strikes on the glass of almost 900 housing units, and interrupt priority habitats including an aspen grove, basalt clearings, old-growth and north-facing forests, and cliffs below 5,000 feet. These are all reasons we are concerned about this proposed development. When the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is released, we will be submitting comments.

Publication of the project's Draft Environmental Impact Statement is imminent. After it is released, if you are interested in reviewing and/or commenting on it, you can visit Friends of Mission Ridge's website at www.friendsofmissionridge.org for detailed information about the proposal and its potential impacts. The comment period will be limited to 45 days.



Common Loon
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

Honduras Birding Adventure

In March, my husband Paul and I traveled to Honduras for a week of conservation-focused birding led by free-lance bird guide Olbin Bejarano, an early 30's self-taught bird guide and university-educated biologist. Olbin has developed friendships with people who reside in Mabita, an Indigenous community near the Nicaragua border in a region called Mosquitia. Olbin is committed to supporting community-led conservation and investing tourist dollars in the community of Mabita in far northeastern Honduras.

We first met Olbin in March 2024, as our guide for a short birding trip near La Ceiba, and were impressed with his terrific birding skills and commitment to conservation education. He is a co-founder and volunteer for Artesanos y Guías de El Pino Empresa, a youth after-school program in his hometown of El Pino where kids ages six to twenty learn art through learning birds and English. In 2024 and again in 2025, we delivered an *Optics for the Tropics* donated scope, tripod, and binoculars for his program.

Olbin devotes his free time to be a volunteer bird guide trainer for five young adults who graduated from the Artesanos program, intentionally growing the next generation of in-country Honduran bird guides.

Mosquitia is the largest and least explored tropical region in Central America, with extensive pine and savanna plains surrounded by lagoon systems and important extensions of low broadleaf rainforest. We were hosted by leaders of the Indigenous community of Mabita, on the Rus Rus River. For two decades, the community has operated a parrot and macaw protection and rescue center called the Rescue and Liberation Center of Mabita, La Moskitia. This work is supported by One Earth Conservation, a scrappy U.S. non-profit that creatively collaborates with U.S. agencies for funding. The organization runs parrot protection projects in seven countries (<https://www.oneearthconservation.org/values-and-vision>).

We met Olbin in La Ceiba, and flew out of a small airport to Puerto Lempuri, a city of 20,000. There, Olbin worked with a local restaurant owner, Nellie, whose daughter, Connie, organized the logistics of our trip. Nellie closed her restaurant and traveled with us to Mabita.

Our drive to Mabita took four hours on a dirt two-track road, and we had to stop for inspection by the military, a group of very young men with large guns! Upon arrival at Mabita, we were greeted by our host, Alicia. Nellie prepared three delicious meals each day over a clay, wood-fired oven in Alicia's open-air kitchen, where we also ate. We were served at least five different types of plantains and black beans grown in the village farm plots, and Olbin had fruits, vegetables, and meats flown in that were not available in Puerto Lempuri. We each had a room in The Village Center, consisting of open stilted wood tree-house rooms, with a single solar light, a mosquito net over the

article and photo by Susan Ballinger, Wenatchee

bed, and an outhouse nearby. The village has no electricity and uses solar power for a cell tower that can recharge batteries and gets limited Internet.

We were next door to noisy enclosures for dozens of Scarlet Macaws, a Great Green Macaw, and Red-lored and Yellow-naped Amazon parrots. All day, dozens of pairs of formerly released macaws flew across the sky, looking like kites. We learned that two days after we departed, the juvenile birds (about one-year-olds) in the enclosure were released.

A smaller enclosure had young birds that are hand-fed by villagers until they are weaned at about three to four months of age. After they are weaned, they are placed in a flight cage so they can be trained for release. To date, there are 300 pairs of Scarlet Macaws, with 150 active nests, and perhaps another 300 nonbreeding juveniles and adults inhabiting about 300,000 hectares that are protected by members of four different villages.



Scarlet Macaw

Each morning, Olbin led us as we walked from the village with Freddy, a skilled machete-wielding guide, into small farm plots with bananas, plantains, and beans, connected by narrow trails inside the primary rainforest. In the late afternoons, we enjoyed the community's swimming hole to cool off and clean up. Freddy showed us tapir and jaguar footprints, and cautioned us to be on the lookout for venomous snakes. Freddy was a terrific bird spotter and paddled us in a wooden dugout canoe for river crossings. One day, we were driven to the town of Rus

Rus to bird on the edge of town and along the river, under a steel bridge built in 1981 that provides the only vehicle river crossing for a large area.

The last evening, by headlamps, Santiago, the head ranger and village leader who was our age, spent an hour answering our questions about the rescue program. Except for the military, no one in Honduras owns a gun, yet we learned that some employees of the rescue program are permitted to be armed. The men and women guard known nesting trees and do continual forest "cleanup" to keep wildfires from damaging nesting trees. They also monitor the nests for success and reasons for failure. The village's location on the ecotone where pine savannah meets lowland tropical rainforest provides nesting trees for macaws with adjacent fruits in the rainforest. Santiago expressed need for funding to purchase another truck, to supplement the two motorcycles and one 2005 Toyota Hilux truck. Upon return, I learned more about One Earth Conservation and read their recent annual report. We were pleased to make a donation to specifically support the Honduras program.

The week we spent with graceful Scarlet Macaws as winged neighbors is an experience I will treasure.

Upcoming Field Trips and Other Birding Opportunities

Methow Community Trail: Saturday, October 11

Join Dj Jones for a fall bird walk on the Methow Community Trail. We will spend two to three hours walking from the Suspension Bridge parking lot on Goat Creek Road down the trail towards the Suspension Bridge and beyond as the birds entice us to go as far as we want! We can see or hear kinglets, chickadees, woodpeckers, nuthatches, thrushes, jays, creepers, kingfishers, ravens, wrens, goldfinches, flickers, siskins and other species as well. Meet at the Suspension Bridge parking lot at 8:30 am. The trip is limited to six birders. To reserve your space or for questions, email Dj at djtrillium.birder@gmail.com.



Cassin's Finch
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

Wenatchee Bird Walks at Walla Walla Point Park: Thursdays, August 14, September 11, October 9

Enjoy a guided one-mile bird walk with knowledgeable Wenatchee River Institute staff along the Columbia River at an easygoing pace. Meet near the north parking lot bathrooms at 8:00 am at Walla Walla Point Park (1351 Walla Walla Avenue in Wenatchee). These walks are free and there is no registration. Just show up and get ready to bird! For more information email Virginia Shoup at vshoup@wenatcheeriverinstitute.org.

Birding by the River at the Wenatchee River Institute: Thursdays, August 28, September 25, October 30

Go birding with knowledgeable Wenatchee River Institute staff at their campus by the Wenatchee River (347 Division Street in Leavenworth). Meet outside the River Haus at 8:00 am. All birding skills are welcome and loaner binoculars are available. These walks are free and no registration is needed. For more information email Virginia Shoup at vshoup@wenatcheeriverinstitute.org.

Book Review

What An Owl Knows: The New Science of the World's Most Enigmatic Birds. By Jennifer Ackerman (Penguin Press, New York, 2023), 293 pages of text plus bibliography, acknowledgments, and index. Illustrated.

If you want to see owls, travel to Kikinda, Serbia, where hundreds of Long-eared Owls have taken up residence in the city. Driven in by environmental changes, the older birds are teaching the younger ones not to shy away from bicyclists and pedestrians.

What An Owl Knows is stuffed with information about what owls know, but also what humans know, or do not know, about owls. The book encompasses owls from the Arctic to Australia, including those Long-eared Owls in Serbia and the Burrowing Owls occupying the decommissioned nerve gas bunkers near Hermiston, Oregon. Author Jennifer Ackerman discusses what science tells us about the extraordinary abilities of owls, not only to see, but to hear. Their flat faces and specialized feathers become high-fidelity microphones.

Ackerman notes that we know less about owl migration than about the migration of other birds because we can't see them at night. Surprises emerge when we do learn something: male Snowy Owls stay behind to protect

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

nesting territory while females migrate.

Owls are also important cultural icons. Ackerman reports on their images, from ancient cave drawings in France to present-day children's art contests. She discusses how they are viewed, as seers or omens of luck to some, but as bad luck to others.

Endangerment of owls due to loss of habitat, and perhaps due to climate change, is a necessary part of Ackerman's discussion. The Norfolk Island Morepork Owl was reduced to one female until two New Zealand Morepork males were brought in to try to save the species. The Norfolk Island Morepork is back, but dangerously interbred.

Ackerman's book tells engaging stories—it's no mere Wikipedia report. She describes an interesting activity for community scientists to help count owls: night-time field trips called "Owl Romps." It struck me that when I did my Christmas Bird Count this winter, I did not start early enough to count the number of Great Horned Owls hooting in my backyard. If her book inspires me to such action, then I guess it's an ultimate success in inspiring community science in the interest of owls.

Lesser Goldfinches - continued from page 1

"This species has proven remarkably adaptable to environmental change," said Boersma. "Understanding how birds like the Lesser Goldfinch respond to climate change and urbanization helps us predict how other species might also be impacted."

"When we understand how wildlife responds to environmental change, we're better equipped to make informed decisions about urban planning, conservation, and climate adaptation," said Maron.

The research was made possible by thousands of participants who contributed observations through Project FeederWatch and eBird. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada. These participatory science programs provide researchers with valuable long-term data about bird populations across North America.

August 2025 Wild Phlox

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3rd Wednesday of the Month	Bebee Springs Bird Surveys	Contact Virginia Palumbo vwpalumbo@gmail.com or 509-628-5969
August 14 September 11 October 9	Wenatchee Bird Walks, Wenatchee River Institute	www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org See page 7 for more information
August 28 September 25 October 30	Birding by the River, Wenatchee River Institute	www.wenatcheeriverinstitute.org See page 7 for more information
September 6	Swifts Night Out Monroe, Washington	www.pilchuckaudubon.org/swifts-night-out
October 4	BirdFest & Bluegrass Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge	www.ridgefieldfriends.org/birdfest-bluegrass
October 11	Methow Community Trail Field Trip	See page 7 for more information

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