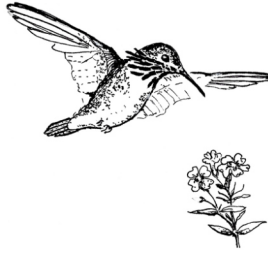


The Wild Phlox

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Richard Hendrick Kestrel Project 2025 Season Report

submitted by Richard Scranton, NCWAS
photos by the Richard Hendrick Kestrel Conservation Project

Our 2025 season of installing and monitoring American Kestrel nest boxes throughout our chapter's area ended in September. Stu Smith, our data and mapping specialist, compiled data collected by our volunteers who visited boxes during the breeding season.

Fledgling Production

A total of 358 kestrels fledged this year. Fledging success was down from the all-time high in 2023. This decrease may (or may not!) be attributable to starlings and/or egg failures, both discussed below. Here are the results from the past four seasons:

Year	Number of Boxes Monitored	Number of Fledglings	Average Number of Fledglings Per Box
2022	156	226	1.4
2023	187	368	2.0
2024	196	357	1.8
2025	215	358	1.7



Ten-Day-Old American Kestrel Nestlings

Late Season

The 2025 season was delayed by several weeks, compared to the previous three years. One interesting tidbit: viable eggs were observed as late as July 24.

Second Clutch

After experiencing the loss of their first clutch, one nesting pair had a second clutch and successfully fledged three young. This was the only 2025 box with a second clutch.

European Starlings

The previous two seasons each saw a doubling in the number of reported European Starlings, culminating in a near 20% infestation of all boxes in 2024. This year, the starling occurrence dropped to 15% (33 boxes). Importantly, six of those 33 boxes went on to produce fledglings, which indicates that starling infestations can be managed by early and repeated nest clearing.



Female (Left) and Male (Right) American Kestrels

Number of Banded Nestlings

In our first year of banding kestrels, raptor expert Sue Cottrell led our effort in banding 269 nestlings.

Unhatched "Dud" Eggs

The number of eggs that didn't hatch has increased over the four years that we've collected data, from 16 in 2022 to 75 in 2025.

If you would like to help with this project or any of our other Community Science projects, please contact Richard Scranton at rscan4350@yahoo.com.

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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We’re Changing How We Thank Our Donors!

Traditionally, we’ve thanked donors twice each year, in the April and October issues of the Phlox. However, we’re transitioning to an Annual Report, incorporating a list of donors for each calendar year. So, instead of a thanks-to-donors article in this issue, we’ll list 2025 donors in our new annual report, coming in early 2026.



Sora
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

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Your gift to the North Central Washington Audubon Society will go to fund programs in North Central Washington. Every dollar helps us promote and protect birds in our area.

Editor's Notes

An article on page 6 of this newsletter is about my recent trip to Boise, Idaho, to attend a raptor workshop hosted by the Intermountain Bird Observatory. If you've never heard of IBO, it's worth checking out. IBO was founded in 1993 as a non-profit academic research and community outreach program of Boise State University. The mission of IBO is to impact lives and contribute to bird conservation through research, education, and community engagement. And from what I've seen and read, they do just that! IBO's list of research and monitoring projects is vast and includes breeding and migrating songbirds, migrating diurnal raptors, Long-billed Curlews, Anna's Hummingbirds, American Goshawks, Short-eared Owls, Northern Saw-whet Owls, and Flammulated Owls to name a few. They also conduct hands-on learning experiences for students and the public at their Lucky Peak and Boise River Research Stations. When I was in Idaho in July, I visited their Boise River songbird banding station and witnessed the depth and popularity of one of their educational programs first-hand. Over forty people came to watch and learn about songbirds, and at least 20 trained volunteers were there to band birds and interact with the public. That was by far the largest group of people I had ever seen at a banding station, and at first, I thought it looked like a recipe for disaster. But I soon realized this was not an unusual occurrence, and it was impressive to observe how organized and prepared IBO's staff and volunteers were.



Flammulated Owl
photo by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

This brief introduction to IBO doesn't begin to scratch the surface of all they do for birds and conservation. If you ever get a chance to attend one of their educational events or to volunteer for one of their projects, I highly recommend it. You can learn more about IBO by visiting their website at www.boisestate.edu/ibo/ and by watching this excellent video <https://vimeo.com/90987481?fl=pl&fe=sh>.

Because I camped while I was at the raptor workshop, I was able to observe IBO's fall migration owl monitoring project at Lucky Peak. From sunset until sunrise, they do what's called targeted mist netting by playing an endless loop of recorded Northern Saw-whet Owl and Flammulated Owl calls near the nets. They weren't catching many owls, so instead of staying up all night and not getting any sleep, I asked the crew to wake me up if they caught an owl. (This was somewhat of a challenge, because I was using ear plugs to muffle the never-ending, recorded owl calls.) Thankfully, they were able to wake me and I got to watch them band and process both owl species. I had seen Northern Saw-whet Owls before, but the Flammulated was a lifer so that was extra special!

Meet Our Newest Board Member: Jennifer Dolge

Currently, I am the Marketing Manager for Link Transit, a position that lets me bring my passion for community engagement and strategic communication to public transportation. Prior to this role, I was the Director of Marketing at the Community Foundation of North Central Washington for 14 years, where I helped elevate the foundation's mission and impact throughout the region.

I have a degree in English from Western Washington University, and I strive to combine my storytelling skills with my deep marketing expertise. In recent years, I have developed a keen interest in birding, especially exploring the rich bird diversity of North Central Washington. My growing passion for nature and conservation has fueled my enthusiasm for contributing to local initiatives that protect the environment.

I am excited to bring my marketing, social media, and public engagement experience to the NCWAS Board and to support an organization that aligns with both my professional skills and personal values.

Outside of work, I enjoy hiking, walking with my dog Ollie, cheering on the Seahawks, exploring craft beers, and watching independent films. I also am the proud parent of my daughter Gwen, who is currently attending Central Washington University.



Birding By Kayak

by Pat Leigh, Mazama

Have you noticed? Fall migration is on! Along the Pacific Flyway, there are many key rest stops where many migratory bird species gather, sometimes by the millions, to feed and regain their strength before continuing on their journey south. Some birds may remain at these rest stops for the winter, but most stay just a few days before moving on. Waterways and lakes are a key attraction.

A kayak (or canoe) can be a great way to expand your birding experience in your patch (or beyond). A few days ago, while kayaking on a local lake, I noticed small flashes of light, in clusters of 30 or more, landing on the water. I was able to paddle over and get quite close, and was thrilled to find they were Red-necked Phalaropes! I could never have identified them from shore without a high-powered spotting scope. Our beloved Sandhill Cranes were there as well. I counted at least 50! Fellow kayaker Jane Ramberg of Twisp recently told me, "I've walked along my neighborhood lake a thousand times and thought I knew all of the birds that were possible there. So, I was surprised and delighted to discover more species, more activity, and more habitats when I explored the lake with my kayak."

What kayak might be best for you? I suggest you think about how you will transport your watercraft before you buy it. If it requires too much effort, you will be less likely to use it. If you hope to photograph birds from your kayak, be sure to look for a hull shape that offers stability and remember that an ultra-light kayak will be vulnerable to wind and currents. Try to take any boat you are considering for a test paddle, or make sure you can return it if it doesn't meet your needs.

My 10-foot kayak weighs 47 pounds and I'm able to hoist it in and out of my Toyota 4Runner without assistance, though I appreciate help when I can get it. A passenger can join me in my kayak if they're willing to sit behind me! I can also carry my kayak on top of the car, thanks to my Yakima ShowDown kayak rack. It drops down on the side of the car for loading. You then lift the boat and slide it across the top of your vehicle. Jane's 10-foot, 36-pound Pelican Trailblazer 100 NXT kayak fits easily into her 2016 Subaru Outback, the bow nestled into the glovebox (not the windshield!). The down side for her is that passengers aren't possible, so caravanning is necessary when kayaking with friends.

Fall migration in our area is August-October, so it's not too late to get on the water and look for our feathered friends as they pass through North Central Washington!



Virginia Rail
photo by Jane Ramberg, Twisp



Great Blue Heron With A Prize Catch!
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

Nature Journaling

by Jane Zanol, Wenatchee

NCWAS collaborated with the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust in late August to offer a beginning nature journaling workshop at the Wenatchee Public Library. Audubon board member Jane Zanol and CDLT Community Inclusion Coordinator Ayla Medina Ulloa co-taught the class. We had eighteen participants who were excited to gather and learn how to begin nature journaling. Some had trepidation about the idea of writing and drawing, but they learned techniques to overcome fear and focus on the experience. The class exercises in writing and drawing were simple and effective in helping people get started with recording their thoughts and perceptions about the natural world. The class was held from 5:00-6:30 pm on Thursday, August 28, in the large meeting room at the library downstairs. We ended the class outdoors in Memorial Park adjacent to the library, where we practiced the exercises we had learned inside and then morphed into each person drawing and writing about what they were seeing, hearing, and feeling. The class reviews were positive, and we hope to offer another nature journaling class in the future.

So What Should We Call This - a Grue Jay?

by Marc Airhart, The University of Texas at Austin

Editor's Note: Used with permission. Originally published 18 September 2025 by The University of Texas at Austin, College of Natural Resources.

Biologists at The University of Texas at Austin, who have reported discovering a bird that's the natural result of a green jay and a blue jay's mating, say it may be among the first examples of a hybrid animal that exists because of recent changing patterns in the climate. The two different parent species are separated by 7 million years of evolution, and their ranges didn't overlap as recently as a few decades ago.

"We think it's the first observed vertebrate that's hybridized as a result of two species both expanding their ranges due, at least in part, to climate change," said Brian Stokes, a graduate student in ecology, evolution and behavior at UT and first author of the study.

Stokes noted that past vertebrate hybrids have resulted from human activity, like the introduction of invasive species, or the recent expansion of one species' range into another's – think polar bears and grizzlies – but this case appears to have occurred when shifts in weather patterns spurred the expansion of both parent species.

In the 1950s, the ranges of green jays, a tropical bird found across Central America, extended just barely up from Mexico into south Texas and the range of blue jays, a temperate bird living all across the Eastern U.S., only extended about as far west as Houston. They almost never came into contact with each other. But since then, as green jays have pushed north and blue jays have pushed west, their ranges have converged around San Antonio.

As a Ph.D. candidate studying green jays in Texas, Stokes was in the habit of monitoring several social media sites where birders share photos of their sightings. It was one of several ways he located birds to trap, take blood samples for genetic analysis, and release unharmed back to the wild. One day, he saw a grainy photo of an odd-looking blue bird with a black mask and white chest posted by a woman in a suburb northeast of San Antonio. It was vaguely like a blue jay, but clearly different. The backyard birder invited Stokes to her house to see it firsthand.

"The first day, we tried to catch it, but it was really uncooperative," Stokes said. "But the second day, we got lucky."

The bird got tangled in a mist net, basically a long rectangular mesh of black nylon threads stretched between two poles that is easy for a flying bird to overlook as it's soaring through the air, focused on some destination beyond. Stokes caught and released dozens of other birds, before his quarry finally blundered into his net on the second day.

Stokes took a quick blood sample of this strange bird, banded its leg to help relocate it in the future, and then let



From left to right: a Blue Jay (photo credit: Travis Maher/Cornell Lab of Ornithology/Macaulay Library), the hybrid jay (photo credit: Brian Stokes), and a Green Jay (photo credit: Dan O'Brien/Cornell Lab of Ornithology/Macaulay Library)

it go. Interestingly, the bird disappeared for a few years and then returned to the woman's yard in June 2025. It's not clear what was so special about her yard.

"I don't know what it was, but it was kind of like random happenstance," he said. "If it had gone two houses down, probably it would have never been reported anywhere."

According to an analysis by Stokes and his faculty advisor, integrative biology professor Tim Keitt, published in the journal *Ecology and Evolution*, the bird is a male hybrid offspring of a green jay mother and a blue jay father. That makes it like another hybrid that researchers in the 1970s brought into being by crossing a green jay and a blue jay in captivity. That taxidermically preserved bird looks much like the one Stokes and Keitt describe and is in the collections of the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History.

"Hybridization is probably way more common in the natural world than researchers know about because there's just so much inability to report these things happening," Stokes said. "And it's probably possible in a lot of species that we just don't see because they're physically separated from one another and so they don't get the chance to try to mate."

The scientists' work was supported by a ConTex Collaborative Research Grant through UT System, the Texas EcoLab Program and Planet Texas 2050, a University of Texas at Austin grand challenge initiative.

The researchers did not opt to name the hybrid bird, but other naturally occurring hybrids have received nicknames like "grolar bear" for the polar bear-grizzly hybrid, "coywolf" for a creature that's part coyote and part wolf and "narluga" for an animal with both narwhal and beluga whale parents.

Raptor Workshop “101”

In mid-September, I spent four days at the Intermountain Bird Observatory’s Lucky Peak Research Station. Located outside of Boise, Idaho, at the southern end of the Boise Ridge, Lucky Peak is IBO’s longest-running research station, and in the fall they use banding to monitor migrating songbirds, owls, and diurnal raptors. It’s a 24-hour-a-day operation: songbird banding in the morning, diurnal raptor banding during the day, and owl banding at night.



The Lucky Peak Raptor Blind

I was at Lucky Peak to attend a raptor handling/banding workshop that I signed up for after we caught a Cooper’s Hawk at my MAPS banding station this summer. I’ve been banding songbirds for about 19 years, and although most songbird banders occasionally capture hawks, I never had until this year. Thankfully, one of my volunteers knew what to do, but the experience was a wake-up call that I needed to be better prepared for the next time!

Our workshop instructor was “Raptor Rob” Miller, a long-time IBO staff member and American Goshawk expert. I was one of six students, and none of us had any raptor handling experience. On the first day of the workshop, Rob took us to the raptor blind, showed us how to set up the different types of traps, and warned us repeatedly to not trip over any of the lines used to trigger the traps or to

article and photos by Julie Hovis, Winthrop manipulate the lure birds. (Non-native birds are used as lures to attract raptors flying near the blind.) Then, after Rob taught us the various ways to hold a raptor, we went into the blind and started scanning the sky for hawks with our binoculars.

It was a slow week for migrating raptors, but we did manage to capture 9 American Kestrels, 8 Cooper’s Hawks, 13 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 1 Red-tailed Hawk, and 1 Peregrine Falcon. When a bird was trapped, Rob had us take turns extracting and banding so everyone would get experience. My first bird was a Sharp-shinned Hawk. We also caught some Cooper’s Hawks and an American Kestrel when it was my turn, but, by far, “my” most exciting (and challenging) birds were the Red-tailed Hawk and the Peregrine Falcon!

Overall, the workshop met my needs and I now believe I can safely extract a hawk from a mist net, although I would prefer to have help when it’s available. When I got home, someone asked me if I wanted to become a permitted raptor bander, and my answer was a resounding “no.” The workshop was an enjoyable and worthwhile experience, but I’m content to stick with banding smaller and meeker songbirds. And in case you’re wondering about all those lines we were warned about, everyone tripped over them at least once, including Raptor Rob!



“My” Peregrine Falcon

Smoke Doesn’t Stop Salmon Fest

The Wenatchee River Salmon Festival is a generational tradition. This year, the festival was held on September 18-20, at Rocky Reach Dam when smoke from wildfires blanketed much of central Washington, including Rocky Reach Dam. School Days (Thursday and Friday) brought classes of elementary school students, although air quality concerns led to some school cancellations. NCWAS provided our outdoor birding simulation (*What’s That Bird?*) for 178 students. Saturday (Community Day) brought 453 kids and adults (and a few dogs, not counted) to our NCWAS doings. We talked birds, signed up prospective members, helped families do *What’s That Bird?*, showed off our chapter’s Kestrel Project, and entertained the youngest visitors with Audubon plush birds. A third-grade girl, whose school had canceled due to smoke, brought her parents to do *What’s That Bird?* family-style. Our hardy Salmon Fest crew included Karen Haire, Bruce McCammon, Dianne McCammon, Caitilin Newman, Judy Oswood, Mark Oswood, and Merry Roy.

by Mark Oswood, Wenatchee



Black-capped Chickadee
A *What’s That Bird?* Replica Bird
photo by Bruce McCammon, Wenatchee

Birding While Blind

by Merry Roy, Wenatchee

Editor's Note: This is a summary of an online article by H Conley published on 5 June 2025 by Audubon Magazine (www.audubon.org/magazine/first-its-kind-event-helps-blind-birders-build-community).

In May of this year more than 150 blind and visually impaired birders participated in the first nationwide Blind Birder Bird-a-Thon. The organizers of this event, held at the peak of spring migration, aimed to celebrate legally blind birders and to help them build community. The participants shared the challenges they face and the joy they find in the outdoors. They also proved to other blind people who had never birded before that birding is for everyone, including them.

“Just because you can't see or you can't see well doesn't mean you can't bird,” said a Birdability organizer of the event. “I think that's a misconception all the way around.”

Birdability is an organization that works to ensure birding is inclusive and accessible for people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. It was through this group's conversations that the Blind Birder Bird-a-Thon was born. The event was a rousing success. Participants submitted checklists from across 34 U.S. states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico.

Michael Hurben, a birder who lost his vision as a young person, tallied 66 species. He had been a birder before he started to lose vision. It took him a long time to accept his inability to see birds and to get serious about birding by ear. Sighted birders who couldn't find birds singing in the canopy were impressed that Hurben could hear and identify them.

Transportation is a near-universal problem for blind birders. Getting to good birding spots that are not accessible by walking or via public transport poses difficulties. Sometimes rideshare drivers express frustration that the rider can't find them at the pick-up point. Sometimes visually impaired riders are denied service because of their guide dogs or are dropped off along a highway and not next to the birding spot.

Despite the obstacles, blind birders emphasize the mental health benefits of birding. Among the blind and visually impaired, depression and social isolation levels are quite high. Birding gets them outdoors, connected to other people, and connected to nature and the earth.

There are plans to make the Blind Birder Bird-a-Thon an annual event. The organizers want to coordinate groups in more places to bird together and to help blind birders build connections with each other. They remind us, however, that you don't have to wait. Just go outside and listen!

For further information visit www.birdability.org/blind-birder-birdathon.

Note: In the Wenatchee area, the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust is planning a Saddle Rock Accessible Trail that will be flat and wide enough for wheelchairs. They are hoping to include a braille trail guide rope, tactile signage, and sensory stations. This will take time and funding. In addition, they are interested in community input regarding tactile signage and where signs should be installed throughout the Sage Hills trails.

Book Reviews

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

***The Outermost House.* By Henry Beston. (Originally published in 1928 by Doubleday, Doran, and Company; later editions have been published by various publishers through 2013.)**

The Outermost House by Henry Beston is a classic of American nature writing. It was first copyrighted in 1928, and renewed most recently in 2013, yet somehow I overlooked it until now. The book reports on Henry Beston's experience of living for one year in a cabin in the sand dunes on the Atlantic Coast of Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

Beston was a close observer of nature and wrote gracefully about what he saw. He comments on sights, sounds, and smells—making a particular point about the latter. He observes sky, water, and sand. In an interesting historical passage, he reports on how the Coast Guard operated at the time. Coast Guardsmen walked a foot patrol, day and night, up and down the beach, and reported sightings of vessels in distress over a primitive telephone line.

Naturally, Beston describes the birds he sees. He mixes his chapters on birds throughout his text, as chapters move through seasons.

Having grown up on the Oregon coast, close enough to the ocean to hear the surf pound, I could appreciate Beston's lyrical descriptions. However, I'm not sure I agree with his describing the calls of migrating geese as “bell-toned.”

***The Field Guide to Dumb Birds of North America.* By Matt Kracht (Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 2019), 176 pages.**

Yeah, you read that right. The book is called “...Dumb Birds...,” not “dumb” as in “voiceless” at all. Kracht complains about bird noise. He uses “dumb” disparagingly, the way a teenager does. He complains that birds are raucous neighbors, messy eaters, and prodigious poopers. He assigns unflattering names to the birds he describes, the same way we call Yellow-rumped Warblers “Butter Butts.” He illustrates the birds he describes with what looks like a felt-pen sketch with a dab of felt-pen color added. The drawings are no Audubon's or Sibley's or even Amy Tan's, but you know, you get the point.

The book is profane and not nearly comprehensive enough to be a field guide, but it is amusing and I thanked my grandsons for sending it.

October 2025 Wild Phlox

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3rd Wednesday of the Month	Beebe Springs Bird Surveys	Contact Virginia Palumbo vvpalumbo@gmail.com or 509-628-5969
Nightly through November 15	BirdCast Washington State Bird Migration Dashboard	https://dashboard.birdcast.info/region/US-WA
October 30	Birding by the River Wenatchee River Institute	https://wenatcheeriverinstitute.org/

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The beautiful photos are even nicer in color.