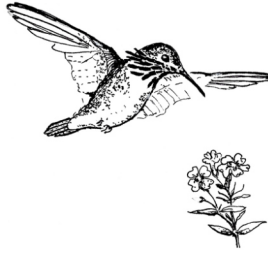


The Wild Phlox

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Connecting People with Nature since 1966



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Volume 58 #6 December 2025

History of Audubon's Christmas Bird Count

by the National Audubon Society

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They would choose sides and go afield with their guns—whoever brought in the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won.

Conservation was in its beginning stages in that era, and many observers and scientists were becoming concerned about declining bird populations. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-nascent Audubon Society, proposed a new holiday tradition—a "Christmas Bird Census" that would count birds during the holidays rather than hunt them.

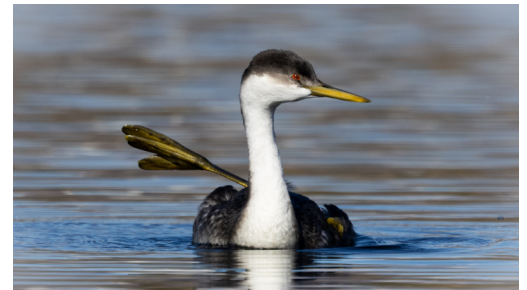
So began the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to the inspiration of Chapman and the enthusiasm of 27 dedicated birders, 25 Christmas Bird Counts were held that day. The locations ranged from Toronto, Ontario to Pacific Grove, California with most counts in or near the population centers of northeastern North America. Those original 27 Christmas Bird Counters tallied around 90 species on all the counts combined.

CBC in the Modern Era

Each November, birders interesting in participating in the CBC can sign up and join in through the Audubon website. From December 14 through January 5 each year tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas brave snow, wind, or rain and take part in the effort. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this long-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations, and to help guide conservation action.

How the Christmas Bird Count Helps Protect Species and Their Habitat

The data collected by observers over the past century allow Audubon researchers, conservation biologists, wildlife agencies and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations across North America. When combined with other surveys such as the Breeding Bird Survey, it provides a picture of how the continent's bird populations have changed in time and space over the past hundred years. The long term perspective is vital for conservationists. It informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat, and helps identify environmental issues with implications for people as well.



Western Grebe
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

Participate in the 126th Audubon Christmas Bird Count!

Please consider participating in the Christmas Bird Count this year. No experience is necessary and it's a great way to meet people and share a worthy birding experience! Here are the dates and information on who to contact to sign up for one (or more!) of the counts in our area.

Twisp, December 15: Steve Pruett-Jones (spruettjones@gmail.com); Kent Woodruff (kentwoodruff@gmail.com)

Leavenworth, December 16: Tucker Jonas (tuckersjonas@gmail.com)

Bridgeport, December 17: Peter Wimberger (phwimberger@pugetsound.edu); Kent Woodruff (kentwoodruff@gmail.com)

Chelan, December 20: Amy Pavelcheck (amy.pavelchek@dfw.wa.gov)

Okanogan/Omak, January 3: Matt Danielson (mattie_rubico@hotmail.com)

Wenatchee, January 3: Jenny Graevell (wrenjen527@gmail.com, 509-846-3392); Bonnie Orr (509-881-0661)

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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January 15th Game Night!

NCWAS will partner with the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust on Thursday, January 15, to host a free nature-themed game night at Yonder Cider in Cashmere, located on The Side Street (111 Railroad Avenue). This event is open to all ages from 4:00-6:00 p.m. Jane Zanol and Mary Gallagher of NCWAS will host tables of the popular board game Wingspan. Come and learn to play or enjoy watching a game with us. There will be other games and activities for adults and children. We thank Yonder Cider and CDLT for making this evening possible for nature-loving game players to gather together.



Hooded Merganser
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

North Central Washington Audubon Membership

Yes, I want to support bird conservation and education efforts in North Central Washington. Please accept my tax-deductible gift of:

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- Enclosed is a U.S. check payable to “North Central Washington Audubon Society”
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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 is tax deductible. It could go to an endowment fund, to a specific program, or to our general operating fund.



North Central Washington
AUDUBON SOCIETY

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.

November has been a rather wet and dreary month here in the Methow Valley, and although I welcome the rain, it would be nice to see the sun a bit more often! Regardless of the weather, I still get out once or twice a day for a long walk with my dog Gretta. We don't have snow in the valley yet, so we've been able to continue walking in some of our favorite places that will be inaccessible once winter fully arrives. I'm not encountering many birds on our walks, and the species I have seen are the usuals for this time of year: Dark-eyed Juncos, Black-capped Chickadees, Northern Flickers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and White-crowned Sparrows.

Editor's Notes

Being indoors so much lately motivated me to finish entering this year's bird banding data and to catch up on organizing the photos I take on banding days. (I take a lot of photos!) Given the gray skies and shorter days, it was nice to spend time looking at pictures of colorful birds. And since I am struggling to find something meaningful to write about for this newsletter, I'll share some of my photos instead. Hopefully they will brighten your day. Happy Holidays!



American Goldfinch



American Redstart



Lazuli Bunting



Purple Finch



Red-naped Sapsucker



Western Tanager

Meet Our Newest Board Member: Stu Smith

Born and raised in a small Oregon logging town, the outdoors has always been a part of my life. My mother's interest in birding was an early introduction to nature's beauty. Since then, travels through a variety of wild places have helped form my understanding of the intricate perfection found in the wild.



Eight seasons in a variety of wildland fire-fighting positions allowed me to experience everything from harrowing lightning storms on a mountaintop fire lookout tower, to stepping out of a perfectly good airplane as a Forest Service smokejumper.

Following a doctorate in plant ecology, I began my GIS (Geographic Information System) career with the U.S. Geological Survey, which subsequently led to managing a GIS program for 12 years with Washington State's Department of Natural Resources. I then spent the following 16 summers as a bush pilot, flying float planes in Washington State and Alaska. The interspersed winters were busy with GIS projects as an independent consultant.

For the last six years, I have lived in the mountains above Wenatchee, spending time skiing, mountain biking, and enjoying craft beers with friends. I remain busy doing volunteer GIS work with a variety of nonprofits, from Alaska to Rwanda. I adhere to the notion that "data is knowledge and knowledge is power," wherein mapping technology can be used to help preserve the sublimity of an untrammelled nature.

Thank You Harriet and Minna!

This past fall I noticed on eBird that Great Egrets were being seen near Pateros and in the Methow Valley at some beaver ponds near Twisp. Now I'd seen these birds before in more southerly locations, but not in my home territory. So, in early October I went to the beaver ponds and there they were...a beautiful trio of Great Egrets preening, feeding, and resting. So wonderful to see them up here!

Seeing these egrets made me start thinking about their past history and how they were doing in today's world. Were they expanding their range? Were their numbers increasing?

Let's go back in time to the late 1800s. Great Egrets and Snowy Egrets were being hunted to near extinction. Their long delicate breeding plumes were in high demand for use in women's hats and other accessories. Plume hunters were killing millions of egrets, often slaughtering entire colonies and leaving their hatchlings to starve. In

1896, a Boston socialite named Harriet Hemenway read an article about the slaughter and decided to team up with her cousin, Minna Hall, to revolt and put a stop to it. They launched a series of tea parties for the wealthy women of Boston urging them to stop wearing feathered hats. They also sent out circulars asking women to join a society for



Great Egret

article and photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

the protection of birds, especially the egrets. More than 900 women joined the feather boycott and Hemenway and Hall went on to organize our country's first Audubon Society in Massachusetts. It was this initial work done by Harriet and Minna that eventually led to the enactment of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918. This act officially made it a crime to pursue, hunt, take, capture, kill, or sell a migratory bird or any of its parts, including nests, eggs,

and feathers unless authorized under a permit issued by the Secretary of the Interior.

So, thanks to Harriet and Minna, Great Egrets are doing well today with stable populations. In recent decades their breeding range has been expanding gradually northward due to successful conservation measures and a warming climate. The first record of them breeding in Washington State was in 1979 at Potholes Reservoir in Grant County. Since then, they have expanded their breeding range in Washington, with more sites

being established along the Columbia River between Benton and Franklin counties. Perhaps it won't be long before nesting Great Egrets are discovered in NCWAS' large four-county region!

Vote for Audubon Washington's 2026 Bird of the Year

Four candidates are on the campaign trail to become the 2026 Audubon Washington Bird of the Year. The Swainson's Thrush, American Barn Owl, Common Nighthawk, and Leach's Storm-Petrel each want your vote to represent Audubon Washington in the coming year. The 2026 bird of the year will act as a "spokesbird" for Audubon's work in Washington, raising awareness for conservation.

Voting is open until December 31 by visiting <https://wa.audubon.org/news/bird-year-2026>. You must enter your email address in order to vote and email addresses will be added to the Audubon Washington email list so they can provide you with updates on the election.



Swainson's Thrush
photo by Rangeley Lakes
Heritage Preserve,
USFWS Public Domain



American Barn Owls
photo by Bruce McCammon,
Wenatchee



Common Nighthawk
photo by Peter Bauer,
Winthrop



Leach's Storm-Petrel
photo by Mael Glon,
USFWS Public Domain

The Future of Water in the Horan Natural Area: An Update

by Bruce McCammon, Wenatchee

Great news! The City of Wenatchee, after many years of coordination, grant applications, permitting, design, and implementation opened the North Wenatchee storm drain system to deliver treated storm runoff to the Horan Natural Area. While it remains to be seen just how much water will find its way to the Horan this way, this reintroduction of water is a significant step in the possible revitalization of wetland habitats in the Horan.

The Chelan PUD released the results of several studies as part of the Rock Island Dam relicensing effort. A voluminous report was submitted to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and is available on the Chelan PUD's Rock Island [Relicensing website](#). On that website, follow the links under "Documents" to the report dated October 24, 2025, which is named "Rock Island Relicensing ISR–Public."

One study in the report looks at alternatives to return water to the Horan area. Three of the seven alternatives are deemed feasible: (1) existing conditions, (2) Number One Canyon Creek natural flows, and (3) the use of Wenatchee stormwater. As noted above, the use of stormwater has already been implemented by the City of Wenatchee and the PUD.

Two of the rejected alternatives proposed the use of seasonal irrigation water provided by the Wenatchee Reclamation District (WRD). These alternatives were dismissed primarily because the service boundary of the WRD does not include the Horan area. The study, however, did not consider the option to formally annex the Horan area into the WRD service area. NCWAS believes that it is possible for the PUD, in cooperation with Washington State Parks, to request formal boundary adjustment by the WRD. NCWAS is providing written input to FERC requesting that any new license for the Rock Island Dam hydropower project require the PUD to initiate a process to work with the WRD to adjust the service boundary, thereby potentially making irrigation water available for use in the Horan area.

Historically, irrigation water from the Pioneer Water Users Association (Pioneer) flowed freely to the Horan ponds. NCWAS applauds the water conservation efforts made by Pioneer but regrets that these efforts mean that irrigation water no longer flows to the Horan. Based on historic permission to use irrigation water in the Horan, it is reasonable to request that all efforts be made to look at future use of irrigation water. Until the PUD and Washington State Parks engage with the WRD to consider the possibility of boundary expansion, the feasibility study released to the public is largely incomplete. Because the Horan is such a valuable and heavily used area, all efforts to reintroduce irrigation water should be thoroughly explored before dismissing this valuable, predictable, and reliable water source.

You can help! FERC is accepting input about the studies until December 24, 2025. If you can, postmark your comments to FERC by December 15, 2025. As a possible model for your use, a draft NCWAS letter to FERC can be [found here](#). You can also submit comments electronically through the FERC eComment website. You can access that page by [clicking here](#).

We hope you will comment to FERC to let them know how much it would mean to you to have the Horan ponds full and providing valuable habitat once again. The use of both irrigation and storm water is critical to the successful reestablishment of wetland and riparian habitats in the Horan.

Referenced links to this article:

Rock Island Relicensing: <https://www.chelanpud.org/hydropower/licensing-and-compliance/rock-island-relicensing>

Draft NCWAS letter to the FEER: https://ncwaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/NCWAS_FERC_study_plan_comments.pdf

FERC eComment: <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/QuickComment.aspx>

A Poet Among the Birders

Washington State's present Poet Laureate is Derek Sheffield, who is a member of NCWAS. He is a resident of Leavenworth and teaches English at Wenatchee Valley College. He also teaches "Northwest Nature Writing," a class that takes students on field trips up to Stevens and Blewett Passes, down to the Leavenworth Fish Hatchery, along the Columbia River at Walla Walla Point Park, and into the Horan Natural Area. Derek is a skillful birder-by-ear and alerts his students to the birds they encounter along the way. When I took his class, a student played sounds of common local birds from the app on his phone. Derek identified nearly all of them.

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

Although Derek is a nature writer and an avid birder, his poetry does not emphasize birds. One exception, called "Ornithology," opens his book *Through the Second Skin*. However, he is also co-editor of the *Cascadia Field Guide: Art, Ecology, Poetry*, a book that features brief essays, drawings, and poems of local birds, among other living things.



Wow! What Drama!

by Larry Tobiska, Wenatchee

Recently, I was out rowing on the Columbia just upriver from the Confluence State Park boat launch and suddenly became aware of a mature Bald Eagle wheeling and diving on a duck about 100 feet away from me. Have you ever seen this drama where one or two eagles dive on a duck? Penny and I observed this at Banks Lake, and I also saw it happen on the Clark Fork River. What may happen is that the eagle dives at the duck, the duck dives under the water, and this repeats until the duck comes up at the wrong time and the eagle nabs the duck. On the Clark Fork River, I watched two eagles repeatedly diving on one unfortunate American Coot that eventually was nailed by one of the eagles.

What I observed recently on the Columbia was one magnificent eagle attempting to grab its meal over and over again. Of course I stopped rowing and drifted with the current to see what would happen. The eagle's maneuvering was wonderful, and at times it seemed it would surely nail the duck. (I couldn't tell the species, but it was a dabbling duck and smaller than a Mallard.). The eagle seemed to wait until after the duck submerged and then hit the water just where it was likely to surface. It barely missed several times, but woe unto the eagle, after many minutes of this intense effort, the eagle retired to a nearby tree and the duck survived.



Bald Eagle
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

2025 Summary of Birding the Beebe Springs Natural Area

by Virginia Palumbo, Chelan

Beebe Springs Natural Area is a 276-acre former orchard that is being restored by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to include four habitats: **riparian** (along the Columbia River); **wetlands** (along the Columbia's side channels and two forks of Beebe Creek, and amidst the beaver pond); **grasslands**; and a small section of **sagebrush steppe**. Restoration began in 2005 and, after 20 years of work, Beebe Springs now hosts 176 identified bird species along with mule deer; yellow-bellied marmots; river otters; and numerous small mammal, reptile, amphibian, and fish species, including spawning salmon in Beebe Creek.

I have been conducting monthly NCWAS bird surveys at Beebe for ten years. (The surveys originally were done twice a month.) The survey data are shared with WDFW to assist in their assessments of improving bird habitat and species diversity, and have been used in yearly evaluations and grant applications. This year eight other participants helped with the survey. Some of our more exciting winter finds included a Great Horned Owl, Townsend's Solitaire, Marsh Wren, and Wilson's Snipe. Spring and summer brought all of the colorful tropical migrants that are abundant throughout North Central Washington, but nothing unexpected except for a lone Bank Swallow seen on June 18 among five other swallows, and the always welcome Wood Duck. Autumn saw the return of the occasional American Dipper, presumably feasting on salmon roe, and a Great Egret in October that was a new species for me at Beebe. Another fun find was hearing the White-throated Sparrow that had been photographed by Matt Brown earlier in the week. We only heard a truncated "Poor Sam Peabody" with only one Peabody repetition, but this is a song beloved and unmistakable from my childhood in North Carolina.

Our high count for one survey was 39 species on May 21. However, Matt Brown, another Beebe regular, tallied 51 species on May 17! Matt covers the main body of Beebe Springs Natural Area and also the trails that originate at the Chelan Fish Hatchery, which adds to the extensive cliff/talus habitat. As the director of music programs for the Manson schools, Matt cannot participate in many of our weekday bird surveys, but he faithfully birds Beebe on Saturdays. This year he saw five species of wrens in one day! He also observed a Peregrine Falcon, a Merlin, a Snow Goose, a Western Grebe, a Virginia Rail, and White-throated Swifts.

Three new species were observed at Beebe in 2025: a Gray Partridge by Matt in January, a Yellow-headed Blackbird by Darcy Mitchem in June, and a Canada Jay by Nick Ratcliff in July. Other birders have also had exciting finds, such as Debbie Sutherland's American Pipit in October.

One final observation is that the Red-wing Blackbird population has decreased significantly over the past 10 years, probably due to the eutrophication of the beaver pond and overgrowth of phragmites (Common Reed), an invasive species. However, the Yellow-breasted Chat has increased from not being seen in the early years, to as many as six on territory on a count this year. They seem to favor the willows, cottonwoods, and other hardwood saplings further removed from the beaver pond.

Beebe will stay open through the winter, unlike the past two winters. If you would like to join us for the monthly survey on the third Wednesday of each month, please contact me by phone (509-860-2129) or email (ywpalumbo@gmail.com) for start times, as it varies with the sun coming over the Plateau. Whether you join the survey or bird on your own, Beebe Springs Natural Area has a lot to offer for both birds and birders. Come and see!

Book Reviews

***The Comfort of Crows: A Backyard Year.* By Margaret Renkl (Spiegel & Grau, New York, 2023), 288 pages.**

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

When I saw that Margaret Renkl had written *The Comfort of Crows*, a collection of essays about her yard and garden during the Covid shutdown, I knew I had to read it, because I had written one too—*A Yard Long*. I wanted to compare and contrast. The difference is that Renkl is a columnist with the *New York Times* and I am an amateur writing in the NCWAS newsletter.

Like most contemporary nature writers, Renkl is a close observer of an ecotone, that area where subdivisions encroach upon undeveloped land. Working from her home in Tennessee and her childhood home in Alabama, she observes the crows, redbirds, wrens, and bluebirds, but also the plants and other animals that form their habitat. Her short essays offer some gems: “You might see him (the Redbird) bringing his mate a seed or grub... In the avian world, a grub is an engagement ring.”

Renkl offers nature as an antidote to depression: “The microbes in freshly turned soil stimulate serotonin’s production, working on the human brain the same way as antidepressants do.” I wish she’d included a citation for that.

Renkl brings the outdoors inside more than most of us would. She composts kitchen waste indoors, generating fruit flies for her hummingbird feeder and relies on an indoor resident spider to dispose of any fruit flies that escape her compost container.

Renkl is sentimental to the point of being silly at times—read about her worry over a snail—but her short essays express a heartfelt concern for the natural environment.

***Field Guide to the Birds of the United States and Canada, 8th Edition.* By Ted Floyd (National Geographic Partners, LLC, 2025), 591 pages.**

from the November 2025 Birding Community E-Bulletin (www.refugeassociation.org/birding-community-e-bulletin)

If you’ve been wondering when the “next edition” of the popular *Field Guide to the Birds of North America* would be released, wonder no longer. The eighth edition of the field guide combines fresh new text, updated taxonomy, expanded art including 240 new illustrations, and valuable data-derived maps, organized in a user-friendly format.

The first edition was published in 1983 by the National Geographic Society. There have subsequently been seven additional editions, mostly relying on the same team of experts. (The seventh edition was edited by Jon L. Dunn and Jonathan Alderfer, with map editing done by Paul Lehman.)

The new guide covers a total of 1,150 bird species, including for the first time all the species of Hawaii. (Mixing the Hawaiian birds with the species on the mainland may be a bit of a confusing distraction for some birders.)

Written by Ted Floyd, well-known editor of the American Birding Association's *Birding* magazine, this new edition features larger pages than previous Geo guides and a flexible yet durable paperback binding, with thumb tabs and a visual index inside the covers for rapid reference. Despite the larger page size, the font size in the new text will probably seem painfully small for some users.

Still the final product presents important features, including the following:

- ◆ Convenient page layout, with maps and text on the left and matching art on the right combined with up-to-date taxonomic organization
- ◆ New maps developed with eBird data from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology
- ◆ Key statistics in bulleted lists
- ◆ New text, emphasizing not only bird IDs but also habitats and evolution images by excellent bird illustrators, including important and detailed annotations on the images, highlighting field marks critical for identification
- ◆ New features combined with tried-and-true traditions

This new edition of a valued field guide should satisfy birders of all skill levels.

Editor’s Comment: I recently purchased this field guide and agree with the above review—the font size is painfully small! I also was disappointed to find that the subspecies maps are no longer included. Nonetheless, the guide is a welcome addition to my library.



Northern Harrier
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

December 2025 Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Resources and Calendar

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3rd Wednesday of the Month	Beebe Springs Bird Surveys (see article on page 6)	Contact Virginia Palumbo yvpalumbo@gmail.com or 509-860-2129
December	Christmas Bird Counts in North Central Washington	See page 1 for more information
February 13-16	Great Backyard Bird Count	www.birdcount.org/
March 13-15	Wings Over Water Northwest Birding Festival	www.wingsoverwaterbirdingfestival.com/
March 20-22	Sandhill Crane Festival	www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/
May 14-17	Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest	Look for information in future Phlox issues

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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.