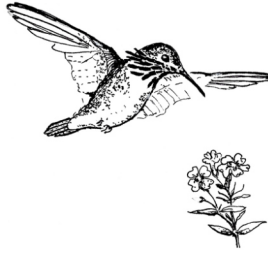


The Wild Phlox

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Volume 59 #1 February 2026

NCW Christmas Bird Count Reports

Bridgeport, reported by Peter Wimberger

The Bridgeport Christmas Bird Count is back, baby! After a one-year pseudo-hiatus, the Bridgeport count, arguably one of the most habitat-diverse counts in the state, returned. (Mike Schroeder and a hearty couple of others did an impromptu count in 2024 to keep the streak alive.) Our small but mighty group of 24 birders assembled at the Brewster McDonalds on December 17 for final instructions and fortifications, unaware that history was in the offing. The Bridgeport count's 30th year was greeted with a portentous, blinding sunrise. The day was clear and windy, temperatures ranged from 33-55° Fahrenheit, and winds in the morning gusted to 45 mph keeping the birds hunkered down. Unlike every previous year, there was no snow on the ground, even in the highest elevations, making usually inaccessible areas drivable. Post-count, the group collected at a meeting room at Chief Joseph Dam kindly provided by Matt McHugh and his Army Corps of Engineer colleagues. We found that we had managed to find most of the regularly seen birds. The number of unusual species was high, probably due, in part, to the lack of snow. Some of the notable finds this year included a Yellow Warbler, Lewis's Woodpecker, White-headed Woodpecker, an unidentified swallow, Osprey, Glaucous-winged Gull, and Greater White-fronted Goose. We found almost all the usual and unusual sparrows. And Victor and Libby managed to find Sharp-tailed Grouse despite the absence of snow. The most abundant species, unsurprisingly, was American Coot, which made up over half the 28,000 plus birds counted. When the lists, photos, and recordings were checked and double checked we discovered that we had seen 104 species, breaking the old record of 101 species set 20 years ago. Please think about joining us next year!

Chelan, reported by Amy Pavelchek

The Chelan Christmas Bird Count happened on December 20. We had wonderful weather with clear skies, and the day yielded some surprising birds. Six Western Bluebirds were seen in the Chelan Falls area, which is unusual for this time of year, but it has been unseasonably warm and the lack of snow made some areas more accessible. The Swamp Sparrow evaded birders at Beebe, but one was spotted at Dry Lake in the Manson area. The Manson lakes proved fruitful, as there was a Winter Wren at Roses Lake, as well as a Wilson's Warbler. In Union Valley the team

spotted a Black-backed Woodpecker—it's always a treat to see some of our less common woodpeckers! The Chelan River was flowing fast and strong after our recent heavy rains, limiting the number of birds on the river, but there were Long-tailed Ducks in the middle of Lake Chelan. (Apparently, spotting scopes were required to see them.) Overall, it was a good day of winter birding. We saw many of our usual species and had a good turnout. There were 16 birders and several were participating in their first-ever Christmas Bird Count.

Leavenworth, reported by Tucker Jonas

Thanks to all who participated in the 24th Leavenworth Christmas Bird Count on Tuesday, December 23! It was an interesting count this year with severe windstorms and floods hitting the count circle area just a few days before the originally scheduled count, which caused us to push the date back by a week. Even so, some areas were still inaccessible (like Tumwater Canyon up Highway 2). The date change caused us to lose a few regular participants so we were not able to cover the count area as thoroughly as in the past. However, we still had over 20 people out counting birds and the weather was favorable. Despite the participation and route challenges, we ended the day with 61 species, which was only slightly lower than our usual (64 and 65 the previous two years), and we totaled about 200 more individual birds than last year. We also had a couple of exciting finds including White-throated Sparrow, Bewick's Wren (a new species for the Leavenworth count!), and a new high count of 43 for Spotted Towhee. *Continued on page 4.*



Wenatchee River Institute Christmas Bird Count birders
photo by Angela Crampton, Leavenworth

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”

North Central Washington Audubon Society

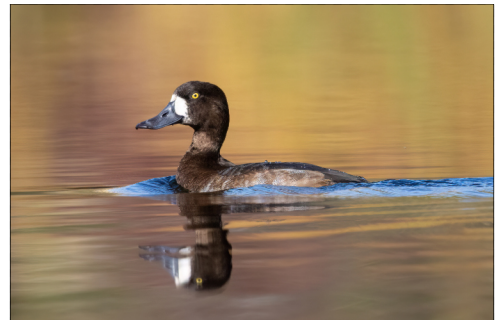
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**Great Backyard
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 February 13-16, 2026**

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.



Greater Scaup
 photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

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North Central Washington
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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



Western Warbling Vireo
photo by Julie Hovis, Winthrop

For the listers in the audience, you may be able to add another species to your life list without even lifting your binoculars! In 2025, the Warbling Vireo was split into two distinct species: Eastern Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) and Western Warbling Vireo (*Vireo swainsoni*). Subtle differences in plumage, morphology, genetics, and song between the eastern and western populations have been the subject of intensive research for many years, and this past summer the American Ornithological Society and eBird finally separated them. Luckily, their ranges don't overlap, except for a small area in the Great Plains, because I read that even David Sibley has trouble distinguishing between the two species!

I know I write about this almost every year, but like many others I am always excited to learn that Wisdom, the Laysan Albatross, has once again returned to Midway Atoll. At approximately 75 years old, she is the oldest known-age bird and has laid an estimated 50-60 eggs and fledged as many as 30 nestlings in her lifetime! Wisdom laid an egg during the 2024/2025 nesting season, but sadly the chick that hatched did not survive. Wisdom's mate from last year has also been seen at Midway Atoll this season, but as of this writing I haven't been able to find any additional information about the pair.

If you're looking for some free entertainment this winter, check out the Friends of Midway Atoll's live cam at (<https://friendsofmidway.org/experience-kuaihelani-midway-atoll-live/>). Although Wisdom isn't visible, it's a fascinating (and noisy!) window into the world of nesting seabirds.

Fighting Against the Rising Tides: Hybridization of Saltmarsh and Nelson's Sparrows in the Face of Sea-level Rise

Speaker: Logan Maxwell
March 5, 4:30-6:00 pm
Winthrop Library Community Room

Salt marshes provide breeding habitat for a community of uniquely adapted birds that are threatened by climate change and increased tidal flooding regimes due to rising sea levels. The Saltmarsh and Nelson's Sparrows are two ground-nesting species that depend on this tidal marsh ecosystem and hybridize where their ranges overlap on the East Coast of the United States between Maine and Massachusetts. Being endemic to saltmarshes, these sparrows face threats of habitat loss and shoreline development.

They are also uniquely threatened by sea-level rise because they nest mere centimeters above the marsh surface and tidal marsh flooding is their main source of nest failure. Population and nest monitoring have documented dramatic declines in both species, and the Saltmarsh Sparrow is currently a candidate for protection under the Endangered Species Act. In this program we will learn about the remarkable adaptations it takes to survive in this harsh environment, what makes these species particularly vulnerable to climate change, and what the sharing of genetic material through hybridization means for adaptive capacity and resilience in the face of environmental change. This talk is for anyone interested in learning about the role of natural hybrid zones in conservation, a day in the life of a field scientist, or a close encounter with a cryptic bird species you've likely never seen.



Saltmarsh Sparrow
photo by Logan Maxwell

Logan Maxwell recently moved to the Methow Valley from the East Coast, where she spent the better part of the last decade studying tidal marsh sparrows through the completion of her master's degree and as a lab manager/research scientist at the University of New Hampshire. Join us for a virtual trip to the salt marshes of the Eastern Seaboard where we will learn what makes these little sparrows so unique and what it takes to study these small, secretive birds—without the bugs and muck boots!

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!



Saltmarsh Sparrow Nest
photo by Grace McCulloch

A Legacy Rooted in Conservation and Connection

by Jennifer Dolge, Wenatchee

Mike Gies has spent most of his life in Western Washington, yet it was the wide-open landscapes of Eastern Washington that truly captured his heart. Spending time in the region with a longtime birding friend and coworker of 40 years, Mike discovered a deep love for birdwatching amid the shrub-steppe's warmer climate and expansive horizons. Together they explored numerous corners of the region—identifying birds along quiet trails and savoring moments of peace and connection in nature.

These shared experiences became cherished memories and ultimately inspired Mike to make a generous bequest to NCWAS. His hope is that the special places he grew to love will remain protected, and that conservation, education, and research will continue so future generations can experience the same sense of wonder and belonging he found there.

Mike's gift will open new opportunities for NCWAS to expand programs, outreach, and educational efforts throughout North Central Washington. Guided by dedicated local volunteers, NCWAS works to ensure that birds and their habitats are known, valued, and protected. We are deeply grateful for his generosity and honored to steward his legacy—one that will inspire a growing, lasting appreciation for the birds and landscapes that depend on these collective efforts.



Mike Gies
photo by Eddy Renstom, Sequim

Christmas Bird Count Reports - continued from page 1

Okanogan/Omak, reported by Todd Thorn

The Okanogan/Omak Christmas Bird Count is centered on the Oak Street bridge in Okanogan, and encompasses a diversity of habitats including shrub steppe; coniferous forest; the Cameron Lake plateau; rocky bluffs; urban habitat; portions of the Okanogan River, Omak Lake, and Salmon Creek and their shorelines; and even the county dump! Our count occurred on January 3 and birders' spirits remained high through the morning rain. Mild temperatures left the river and other waters generally free of ice, but dense fog hindered bird finding at higher elevations. Sixty-five species were counted on count day (and night). Highlights included sightings of 57 Cackling Geese (a new species for our count), dueling songs of Canyon Wrens in the rock slopes above Omak Lake, a crowd of 19 Pygmy Nuthatches, and a strong showing of most raptor species. Single individuals of Horned Grebe, Killdeer, Pileated Woodpecker, American Dipper, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Townsend's Solitaire, Cedar Waxwing, and Cassin's Finch bolstered the species count. Our crew of 17 strove valiantly to count every bird within the circle. Though it's possible we missed a few, we had a great time birding together!

Twisp, reported by Wendy Sims

Pouring rain and lack of snow cover made for unusual birding conditions on Monday, December 15, for the 38th annual Twisp Christmas Bird Count. A total of 63 participants split into 16 groups and headed out to find birds throughout a 7.5-mile radius of downtown Twisp. The rain was an inconvenience, but the lack of snow allowed the group to survey higher canyons that are normally snow bound and inaccessible. Several local students and other new birders teamed with experienced birders for the day, and several residents in the count circle provided additional data by monitoring their

feeders. Results were better than expected for such a rainy and unseasonable day. Birders saw 5,361 individual birds, about 10% fewer than last year. During the count 74 species were seen, and three more were noticed during count week. There was speculation that some species' migrations into the area from further north may have been delayed by the lack of snow. European Starlings and Wild Turkeys were the most abundant species, with 535 and 437 individuals, respectively. Over 100 individuals of many other species were counted: California Quail, Mallard, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Northern Flicker, American Crow, Common Raven, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin, Red-winged Blackbird, House Finch, Cassin's Finch, Red Crossbill, Redpoll, Pine Siskin, House Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco. Species with one to three individuals included Trumpeter Swan, Dusky Grouse, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, American Coot, Great Horned Owl, White-headed Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Anna's Hummingbird, Barn Swallow, Canyon Wren, Marsh Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Western Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, and an unexpected Harris's Sparrow. And twelve species were seen in this and every previous count: 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.

Wenatchee, reported by Jenny Graevell

This year 28 people participated in the Wenatchee Christmas Bird Count on January 3. Eighty-one species and 13,935 birds were counted within the circle. The most common species observed were European Starling, Rock Pigeon, and American Robin, and the most unusual was a lone White-throated Sparrow. Next year's count will take place on January 2, 2027.

Meet Our Newest Board Member: Marilyn Hedges



Growing up on the outskirts of Seattle, when there were still woods, creeks, and swamps to explore, I came to love being immersed in these natural spaces. My mom was the first birder in my life to impart an early appreciation for wildlife. By the time I headed off to Washington State University, I was determined to become a wildlife biologist. At WSU I joined the Audubon Society, participated in the first Earth Day, took Ornithology, and worked in the zoology museum preparing study skins. My advisor at the time tried to dissuade me from declaring a wildlife major, insisting it was no field for women. Fortunately, this advice did not age well with others, but in my case, I took a hiatus from school to have my kids, Zoe and Colin. I then returned to WSU to complete my zoology degree and pursue a long nursing career as a critical care nurse, educator, and Family Nurse Practitioner.

Many vacations along the way were spent traveling by bicycle. This led to my involvement in organizations supporting nonmotorized trails and bicycle infrastructure. I have been on the volunteer boards of the local Complete the Loop Coalition and the statewide Palouse to Cascades Trail Coalition where I built websites, designed graphics, gave presentations, and managed social media accounts. Both organizations gave me experience working with Washington State Parks and other local and state entities.

Retirement has allowed me time to circle back to my past passions. A few years ago, I took up bird photography and set out to work on my birding skills, which had been neglected since the days I learned to identify “Sparrow Hawks” and “Marsh Hawks.” My husband Mike and I now run a few winter raptor survey routes and enjoy involvement in the kestrel nest box project. I look forward to serving on the board of NCWAS and supporting Audubon, an organization I have always valued.

Book Review

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

Grinnell: America’s Environmental Pioneer and His Restless Drive to Save the West. By John Taliaferro (Liveright Publishing, New York, 2019), 606 pages.

A good biography needs a worthy subject, a person whose life was interesting and instructive. It needs to be accurate and documented; and it needs to be told in a clear, accessible prose style. John Taliaferro’s biography of George Bird Grinnell meets those criteria.

George Bird Grinnell (1849-1938) lived a life like Forrest Gump’s, involving him with an amazing number of adventures and encounters with influential people of his day. Spoiler alert: He was born to privilege and grew up on the Audubon Estate as a neighbor to Audubon’s widow. He joined an exclusive social club at Yale, where he met future bankers, railroad men, and editors who would support his ventures throughout his life. He dug dinosaur bones with famous paleontologist Othniel Marsh. He was a civilian associated with the U.S. 7th Cavalry and survived the Battle of Little Big Horn. He exchanged gunfire in a skirmish with Native Americans, then became an anthropologist who documented the culture of several tribes. He became an advocate and lobbyist for Native Americans despite using terms for them like “savage.” He befriended novelist Hamlin Garland, photographer Edward S. Curtis, and preeminent forester Gifford Pinchot. He was

a member of the Harriman Alaska Expedition, together with John Burroughs and John Muir. He became a strong conservationist before the term “environmentalist” came into vogue. As editor of *Forest and Stream*, founder of the Boone and Crockett Club, and an organizer of the Audubon Society, he used his bully pulpit to work for the creation and preservation of national forests, wildlife refuges, and parks (especially Glacier National Park, which he explored).

Taliaferro deals with the contradictions in Grinnell’s life—a conservationist who hunted big game and collected birds and a sympathetic anthropologist who called his subjects savages. Grinnell was secretive about his relationship with other men, even warning one to never write about certain “events” they had shared. Grinnell was in his 50s when he married a woman in her 30s, but correspondence with her or descriptions of her do not seem to exist among the 40 boxes of letters and other materials that his widow donated to educational institutions. Taliaferro draws no overt conclusions about whether Grinnell was gay; that isn’t a conclusion that is critical to this book.

Taliaferro also identifies the forces opposing Grinnell’s efforts at conservation, illustrating that the same persist today.

Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest 2026

The Wenatchee River Institute (WRI) and NCWAS are pleased to announce the 24th annual Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest, taking place May 14-17, 2026, during peak spring bird migration in North Central Washington. An annual celebration of birds, conservation, and community, Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest brings together birders of all experience levels, families, artists, educators, and conservationists. The festival offers guided field trips, educational workshops, art, music, and hands-on activities, while highlighting the importance of land and bird conservation across the region.



Festival Highlights

Bird Fest programming begins early with free, beginner-friendly birding trips from Monday through Wednesday, May 10–13, open to participants of all experience levels.

The festival officially kicks off on Thursday, May 14, with guided field trips throughout the region and a possible film screening (to be determined). Friday, May 15, will feature additional field trips and an evening Bird Fest Happy Hour, including Wingspan, trivia, and other interactive games. Saturday, May 16, marks the centerpiece of the festival and includes:

- ◆ Guided field trips throughout the day
- ◆ A free, all-day Community Fair featuring vendors, kids' activities, guided nature walks, art and nature activities, and live music from local musicians. No registration is required.
- ◆ A likely Spotlight Artist Reception (free, no registration required; time to be determined)
- ◆ A Birders' BBQ (evening, registration required)
- ◆ An evening keynote speaker (details to be announced)

Youth Art Contest

A Youth Art Contest will be held in January and February 2026, encouraging young artists to explore birds and nature through creative expression.

Venue Information

Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest will once again be hosted at the Wenatchee River Institute in Leavenworth. While WRI's Red Barn and Outdoor Classroom experienced damage from flooding, high winds, and falling trees in December, repairs are currently underway. WRI and NCWAS are working closely to ensure a safe, welcoming, and vibrant festival experience.

Volunteers Welcome

NCWAS members and community volunteers are encouraged to participate. Volunteer opportunities include co-leading birding trips, assisting with social events, supporting workshops, helping with the Community Fair, and assisting with the expanded children's programming. Volunteer support is especially important this year, as several long-standing birding locations have been impacted by recent fire or flooding. Those interested in volunteering may contact Jane Zanol at janezanol@me.com or 573-289-1201.

Festival information, including registration details and schedule updates, will be posted at <https://wenatcheeriverinstitute.org/bird-fest/>.

NCWAS at the Wenatchee Museum

by Susan Sampson, Wenatchee

For the third consecutive year, a team from NCWAS spent a Saturday at the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center's Holiday Family Fun Day. The event offered children craft-making events and photographs with Santa Claus. The Audubon table offered pine cones for children to slather with sunflower seed butter, roll in birdseed, and hang outdoors to feed wild birds. Approximately 83 children made bird feeders.

Sun butter was chosen as an alternative to peanut butter because it is not allergenic and is used in school lunches for that reason. However, some recent literature in *Consumer Lab* suggests that sunflowers, the source of sun butter, may take up cadmium from the soil they are grown in, and some soils that are devoted to growing sunflowers commercially do contain significant amounts of cadmium. A further literature search is ongoing. If using sun butter proves to be inadvisable, NCWAS can switch to common lard for its bird feeder projects. With lard, fewer kids should be tempted to lick their fingers clean after assembling their projects anyway.

The NCWAS team was Mark Oswood (fearless leader), Judy Oswood, Ken Smith (whose granddaughter MaKenzie was the first visitor), and Sue Sampson.

Bonaparte Meadows: A Rare Conservation Opportunity

article and photo by Julie Vanderwal, Sparrow Song Consulting

Introduction: Our chapter believes the acquisition and conservation of Bonaparte Meadows in eastern Okanogan County, which is described below, is a significant conservation opportunity within our four-county region. Over the coming months, the NCWAS board will be considering how our chapter can most effectively support this project.

Avid birders enjoy exploring the Wauconda-Chesaw area, and, perhaps on the way to camp at Bonaparte Lake, have found themselves passing by a large wetland. Maybe you have pulled over on the side of Bonaparte Lake Road and heard a Wilson's Snipe winnowing as it dives through the air, strong and healthy, supported by abundant forage options in the wetland below. Imagine having the opportunity to help conserve this wetland, forever, by acting now.

Bonaparte Meadows is a diverse ecosystem, and it is also a calcareous fen—one of the rarest wetland types in the United States. A calcareous fen is fed by mineral-rich groundwater, making the site alkaline instead of acidic. The calcium-rich environment of these wetlands can support unusually diverse and rare plants that thrive in low oxygen, low nutrient conditions. Botany surveys of the Bonaparte Meadows wetland in 2025 revealed several rare plant species and indicators of calcareous conditions. The rich web of life found onsite, combined with the wetland and open water conditions and varied refugia, make this site crucial habitat for songbirds, shorebirds, waterfowl, raptors, and other wildlife.

Peat has formed in this wetland over thousands of years as organic plant materials partially decayed under low oxygen conditions. This process is known to sequester more carbon than all other vegetation types in the world combined (IUCN 2021), and develops landscape-scale capacity to store and clean much-needed water. Together, these benefits provide urgently needed resilience to climate change.

Peat was extracted from the site from about 1978 to 2023, leaving swaths of wetland exposed. Other areas remain intact. Protecting and restoring this peat wetland would benefit a significant diversity of bird and other wildlife species, and would promote water storage and groundwater recharge that would benefit Bonaparte Creek, a tributary to the Okanogan River.

Over the past two years, a group of concerned residents of Okanogan County have worked together to acquire and

conserve Bonaparte Meadows. This group includes Okanogan Land Trust, Trout Unlimited, Sparrow Song Consulting, Okanogan Conservation District, and others, in close communication with Colville Tribes Fish and Wildlife Program staff. The team plans to secure half of the project cost through grants. To raise the required match, a private donor campaign is being launched with a goal of 1.5 million dollars. As of the writing of this article, the campaign has raised 40% of its goal.



Botanist George Thornton assists with the 2025 botany survey of Bonaparte Meadows

If left intact, this wetland will continue to contribute to biodiversity, wildlife habitat, flood mitigation, nutrient cycling, water quality, carbon storage, and wildfire resilience. If allowed to be sold in pieces, with cabins built, we will never have this conservation opportunity again. This is a chance to leave peat in place, to keep this habitat unfragmented, and to contribute toward the restoration of a critical and unique wetland.

To support this effort, visit www.okanoganlandtrust.org/protect-bonaparte-meadows. To volunteer, contact kate@okanoganlandtrust.org.

Hike for Health Series!

The Chelan-Douglas Land Trust and Columbia Valley Community Health are excited to continue their Hike for Health Series. Throughout this series, participants will have an opportunity to connect with nature and learn about the benefits nature has on our physical, mental, and emotional health. This eight-month series of Saturday morning outings will take participants to different areas in North Central Washington where they can connect to nature for free. A guided walk is offered for every event in the series. For more information, contact Ayla Medina Ulloa at ayla@cdlandtrust.org or 509-667-9708.

by Ayla Medina Ulloa, Chelan-Douglas Land Trust

The walks scheduled for the next several months are:

- March 21 at 9am: Horan Natural Area (Wenatchee)
- April 25 at 9am: Little Bear Trail (Chelan)
- May 30 at 8am: Horse Lake Reserve (Wenatchee)
- June 27 at 8am: Mountain Home Ridge (Leavenworth)
- July 25 at 7am: Kenzie's Landing (Wenatchee)

(Editor's Note: Some of these walks may be guided by members of NCWAS.)

February 2026 Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Resources and Calendar

Items in **bold text** are sponsored or co-sponsored by NCWAS

February 13-16	Great Backyard Bird Count	See page 2 for more information
March 5	Saltmarsh Sparrow Presentation	See page 3 for more information
March 20-22	Othello Sandhill Crane Festival	www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org
March 21, April 25, May 30, June 27, July 25	Hike for Health Series	See page 7 for more information
April 16-19	Olympic BirdFest 2026	www.olympicbirdfest.org
May 14-17	Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest	See page 6 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.