

# The Wild Phlox

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## Nason Ridge Community Forest News: March 2026 Update

by Mary Gallagher, Plain

Over the past several years, something exciting has taken root in the Nason Ridge Community Forest (NRCF): our own set of public eBird Hotspots. After three years of dedicated surveying, these locations are now “live,” allowing all of us—residents, visitors, and bird lovers alike—to share observations and contribute to citizen science through the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

These hotspots reflect the tremendous biodiversity of this roughly 4,000-acre forest, nestled between Nason Creek and Lake Wenatchee. In partnership, NCWAS and the Chelan County Natural Resources Department have worked to establish baseline data on the bird life of this former industrial forest. This work has already confirmed more than 100 bird species utilizing this landscape.

### How Our Surveys Began

My husband, Tim, and I joined this effort in August 2022 alongside our friend Sarah Smith. As members of the newly formed NRCF Stewardship Committee, we wanted to ensure birds were thoughtfully considered in the forest’s long-term management. But before we could do that, we needed real data—not just impressions—about the species using these lands.

Back in April 2021, Sarah and Tim began noticing Black-throated Gray Warblers—a species far more common west of the Cascades. Were they just passing through? Would they return? Were they nesting here? To help answer these and other questions we worked with NCWAS members Mark Johnston, Richard Scranton, and Bill Deters to develop a standardized NRCF bird-survey protocol. Seven survey sites were selected across a range of habitat types, including one on Chelan-Douglas Land Trust property within the forest.

Since October 2022, we’ve visited these sites during the first week of every month—on foot, by bike, and in winter, by snowshoe or on skis. It’s a commitment. From our starting points, Sites 1–6 span six miles one way, and Site 7 is an additional three miles up a steep trail. But we go anyway, year-round, because understanding this forest means experiencing it in all seasons.

### A Warbler Returns

So, did those Black-throated Gray Warblers return? Yes! On May 6, 2023, the Black-throated Gray Warbler became Bird #51 in the NRCF survey. Since then, we’ve recorded one or more of them fifteen times by sight or by song. Even more exciting, several observations occurred in June and early July, right within the nesting window. That means they aren’t just passing through.

This is exactly what long-term eBirding helps reveal. What species are here? When are they here? How is this public forest supporting them?



Black-throated Gray Warbler  
photo by Tim Lenz, USFWS (Public Domain)

### eBird Hotspots Are Now Public

By January 2026, after logging more than 400 private checklists, it was time to share these locations with the public. With help from local eBird reviewer Neil Paprocki, we created public hotspots for the established survey sites and added two more within the forest boundaries.

Why make them public? So anyone can explore what birds have been seen in NRCF using eBird’s “Explore” feature. So your sightings can contribute to the same growing community dataset. And because learning from this forest is a shared experience. *Continued on page 3.*

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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If you haven't done so already, it's time to clean out your nest boxes. Removing old nests improves sanitation and helps prevent parasites, such as lice and mites, from affecting future broods. Cleaning also keeps the boxes from filling up and gives you a chance to inspect your boxes for damage and make repairs if needed.



Male Wood Duck inspecting a potential nesting site  
 photo by LeRoy Farmer, Wenatchee

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**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.

Did you know the American Goldfinch is the official State Bird of Washington? I didn't, until I saw an article about it on Audubon Washington's website. That made me wonder what else I didn't know about the species, so I went online to find out. I knew that goldfinches commonly visit bird feeders, but I didn't know that because they are almost exclusively vegetarians they have a built-in defense against brood parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbirds. When a cowbird lays her eggs in a goldfinch nest, if the eggs hatch the cowbird nestlings rarely live more than a few days because they can't survive on the all-seed diet goldfinches feed their young! That led to another online search to find out more about Brown-headed Cowbirds. I learned that cowbirds lay eggs in the nests of more than 220 different bird species and that individual females tend to specialize on one particular host species. That made me wonder if female cowbirds that are American Goldfinch "specialists" will eventually figure out they are making a mistake and switch to a different species, but I haven't found an answer to that question yet.

## Editor's Notes



Osprey  
photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

I guess the point I'm trying to make is that learning about birds is a life-long adventure. As another example, most of us know that Ospreys eat live fish, hence the nicknames "fish hawk" and "fish eagle." But did you know that Ospreys also will eat snakes, birds, frogs, reptiles, and crustaceans? I didn't until recently, when a birding friend gently corrected me after I stated that "Ospreys only eat fish." And that's what good friends are for!



American Goldfinch  
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

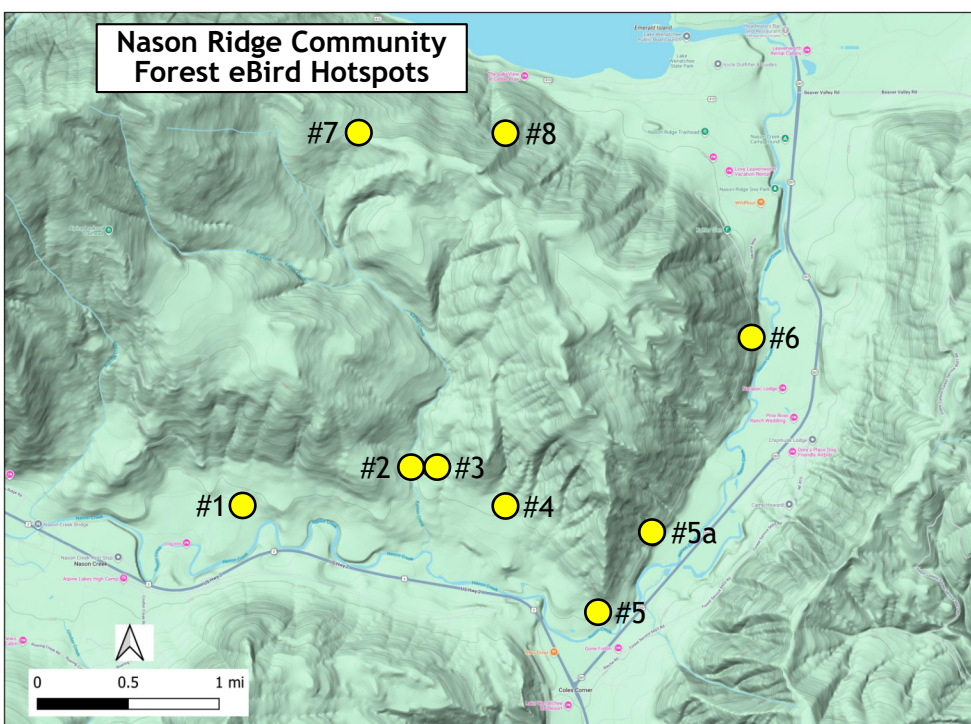
## Nason Ridge - continued from page 1

### Come Bird With Us

NRCF is open to the public year-round, and we hope you will record your bird observations on eBird when you visit. If you would like to join a monthly survey or arrange a group field trip for a club, classroom, or community group, please contact Mary Gallagher at [marywillardgallagher@live.com](mailto:marywillardgallagher@live.com) or 206-650-7511. All are welcome, whether you are a seasoned birder or simply curious. You also can visit the forest during this year's Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest. There will be a field trip to NRCF on May 15 that includes lunch at a privately owned cabin within the forest. (See page 5 for more information about Bird Fest.)

### Be Part of Community Science

Birding is joyful. eBirding is meaningful. And together, they allow all of us to play a role in conservation. Whether here at Nason Ridge or at your favorite public green space, your observations matter. I hope you'll join us—on the trail, on eBird, or out under the trees listening for the voices that share this forest with us. Happy Spring!



### eBird Hotspots

- #1 Aspen Stand NRCF
- #2 Kahler Creek NRCF
- #3 CDLT Property NRCF
- #4 Clearcut NRCF
- #5 Corner NRCF
- #5a Lower Clearcut NRCF\*
- #6 Washout NRCF
- #7 Saddle/Warming Hut NRCF
- #8 Big RED USFS\*

\* New sites added to the original seven

# Bowerbirds in Australia and New Guinea Presentation

By: Steve and Melinda Pruett-Jones  
Friday, May 22, 4:30-6:00 pm  
Winthrop Library Community Room

Steve and Melinda Pruett-Jones moved to the Methow Valley in 2023 after retiring from their careers in academia and scientific administration. Early in their careers, Melinda and Steve had the opportunity to study MacGregor's Bowerbirds in Papua New Guinea and this work comprised Melinda's Master of Science thesis work. They worked in Papua New Guinea from 1980 to 1987, and then Steve continued to observe and study bowerbirds in Australia from 1988 to 2018. In this talk, Steve will summarize what we know about the evolution of bowerbirds and their ecology and behavior, including the diversity of bower structure and mate choice. Male bowerbirds build bowers, which are some of the most complex structures known in the animal kingdom. Bowders are the primary means by which males attract females, and their construction and defense occupy males for up to seven to eight months each year. Bowerbirds have been demonstrated to exhibit cultural transmission of decoration preferences, aesthetic sense in their choice of decorations, and they practice sophisticated visual illusions in their arrangements of the decorations at bowders. Separate from the biology of bowerbirds, Steve will also share information on where to go if you want to see these amazing birds. If you are interested in animal evolution, behavioral ecology, mate choice, and complex visual displays, or just want to see some photos of amazing birds, please join us on Friday, May 22, at the Winthrop Library Community Room from 4:30-6:00 pm.



A Male Flame Bowerbird at his bower  
photo by Dominic Chaplin

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!

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## NCWAS Bluebird Nest Box Monitoring: 2025 Summary

article and photo by Joe Veverka, Cashmere

During the 2025 breeding season five NCWAS volunteers monitored bluebird nest box trails at the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust's Horse Lake Reserve and The Nature Conservancy's Moses Coulee Preserve. The nest boxes are spaced approximately 20 meters apart and were monitored from mid-April through the end of July when breeding activity ceased.

The Horse Lake Trail is comprised of 20 boxes and ranges between 2,700 and 3,500 feet in elevation. The trail begins in the Apricot Orchard area, primarily follows the Old Ranch Road, and ends near the western boundary of the reserve. Nineteen of the 20 boxes at Horse Lake experienced some kind of use in 2025. Six boxes fledged at least 20 Western Bluebirds, one fledged 6 Mountain Bluebirds, two fledged 10 Northern House Wrens, and 2 fledged 11 Mountain Chickadees. One box that fledged 3 Western Bluebirds was subsequently used by Mountain Chickadees and fledged 5 young! In total, 10 boxes at Horse Lake fledged 47 young birds. Only one box went completely unused and nine others had initiated nests or "dummy" Northern House Wren nests. (Northern House Wrens will often fill boxes with sticks to prevent other cavity nesters from using them.)



Mountain Bluebird Nestlings

The Moses Coulee Trail consists of 16 boxes along Olson Road in shrub-steppe and grassland habitats between 1,600 and 2,200 feet in elevation. Because Western Bluebirds tend to prefer open ponderosa habitats, Mountain Bluebirds are the primary target species for this trail. Throughout the 2025 season, nine boxes experienced some kind of use. Mountain Bluebirds nested in seven boxes; five of those nests were successful and fledged 21 young and two were not successful. Tree Swallows attempted to use two boxes, but their nests failed. Unlike the Horse Lake Trail, Northern House Wrens did not plug up boxes with dummy nests along this route; they are only found in riparian corridors at Moses Coulee and don't nest in open sagebrush.

A third bluebird nest box trail located at the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust's Cashmere Canyons Preserve was not monitored in 2025. This was the first trail established, but is the most challenging to monitor. We are looking for volunteers to help monitor all three bluebird trails in 2026, particularly Cashmere Canyons. If you are interested in helping, please email Joe Veverka at [joe\\_veverka@yahoo.com](mailto:joe_veverka@yahoo.com).

# 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest Registration Opens Wednesday, March 25, 2026

by Angela Crampton, Wenatchee River Institute

Hosted by the Wenatchee River Institute (WRI) and NCWAS, the 24th Annual Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest officially kicks off on **Thursday, May 14**, with field trips and workshops. For locals or folks who come to town early, check out the website for details of free, beginner-friendly birding trips starting Monday, May 11, and lasting throughout the weekend.

**Friday, May 15**, will feature additional field trips and an evening Bird Fest Happy Hour, including Wingspan, trivia, and a birders' social.

**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 with Carleen Zimmerman.
- ◆ A Birders' BBQ (evening, registration required).
- ◆ An evening keynote speaker with Dr. Neil Paprocki.

## Festival Merchandise

Bird Fest supporters can now purchase official merchandise online through the WRI website. For those attending the festival in person, a limited selection of totes and hats will be available for purchase at the WRI campus during the event.



The festival concludes on **Sunday, May 17**, with additional guided field trips. All festival information, including registration details and schedule updates, will be posted at <https://wenatcheeriverinstitute.org/bird-fest>.

## Keynote Address

On Saturday, May 16, from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm, Neil Paprocki, Ph.D., will present "Wings Over Washington: Tracking the Movements of Two Iconic Hawk Species." A raptor ecologist affiliated with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the University of Idaho, Paprocki will take the audience on a journey through the skies of Washington and the Arctic. His presentation will reveal the secret lives of Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks using data from GPS transmitters. This hybrid event will be held in person at the WRI Red Barn and livestreamed virtually. Registration is required, with tickets priced at \$20 for in-person attendance and \$10 for virtual access.

## Artist Spotlight

Carleen Ormbrek Zimmerman is this year's Spotlight Artist. Describing herself as a "birder with a sketchbook," Zimmerman's work emphasizes the role of art in honing scientific observation. Attendees can view her work at the Spotlight Artist's Gallery in the River Haus on the WRI campus May 14-17. Zimmerman will also lead workshops during the festival, teaching participants how to use sketching and language as tools to better understand the natural world. The artist workshops will be held both Friday and Saturday from 12:30-3:00pm. Registration is required.

## Birding Is Good For Your Brain!

from The Birding Community E-Bulletin, March 2026

According to a study published last month in *The Journal of Neuroscience*, birding has the capacity to reshape the brain in much the same way as learning a language or a musical instrument does. The researchers concluded that experienced birders have more structurally compact attention-and-perception-related brain areas, seemingly linked to more accurate bird identification skills.

To understand whether birding also shapes the brain, Erik Wing at York University in Toronto and his colleagues analyzed brain structure and function in 48 hobbyist birders, half experts and half novices, as judged by a screening test. The participants were aged 22 to 79, and both groups were similar in terms of sex, age, and education.

Of course, more experienced birders could identify birds better than novices. (On average, they accurately identified 83% of local bird species and 61% of non-local ones. In contrast, novices correctly identified 44% of both groups of birds.) While identifying non-local birds, activity in three important brain regions increased among experienced birders, but not in novices. These brain regions are involved in object identification, visual processing, attention, and working memory. "It speaks to the wide range of cognitive processes that are involved in birding," commented Wing.

Remember, this study is only a snapshot in time. It might be that people who develop an interest in birds already have structural changes in their brains, or that there are other lifestyle factors related to brain changes that happen to be more common among bird enthusiasts.

For more information about the study visit: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-modern-brain/202603/what-birdwatching-can-do-for-your-brain>.

# Meet Our Newest Board Member: Michelle Martin

I was fortunate enough to grow up on the sunny shores near Clearwater, Florida, and that is where my love for birds and the associated birdy adventures began. One of my favorite places to go as a child was the Suncoast Seabird Sanctuary, where I would play with one of my beloved toys, a rubber gull, until it was stolen by a Laughing Gull one day.

I attended undergraduate studies at Florida State University, studying neuroscience and psychology. With a deep fascination for behavioral research and the false belief that I wouldn't be able to make a living studying wildlife, it felt like the right path. That was, until I took an animal behavior course my senior year. The teachings and the coursework inspired me to begin working in the instructor's research group studying Brown-headed Nuthatch breeding behavior, and at that point I knew I couldn't go back to the lab.

After many applications, I landed my first field job doing broadcast surveys for Willow Flycatchers in the Eastern Sierra. All I needed was one summer in those beautiful subalpine meadows and towering mountains to spend the next three years conducting avian research. I was privileged to study California Scrub-Jay behavior for the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and avian occurrence and abundance on experimental working ranchlands in South Texas for Texas A&M University. I also completed an internship with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and worked for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources surveying birds on private and public working lands in

southern Utah. In 2019 I started graduate school at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada, and studied Ruffed Grouse behavior for my Master of Science degree.

After graduate school, I took a position as a research scientist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, researching adaptive management techniques to promote usable habitat for the federally threatened and

highly cryptic Eastern Black Rail. The Eastern Black Rail can inhabit both high marsh habitats along the coastline, often developed for housing, and interior freshwater marshes, which are under increasing developmental pressure.

In January 2023 I started my current position as a conservationist at the Okanogan Land Trust. It has been refreshing to work in a place with less development pressure and better habitat connectivity than in Florida. At the Land Trust I work primarily with agricultural producers to emphasize "what is

good for the bird is good for the herd." I create projects and apply for grants to improve awareness of what birds inhabit our area, and what that tells landowners about the habitat their property provides. I also conduct surveys at the Enloe Dam site to capture avian population demographics in its current condition, which could change dramatically in the coming years if the dam is removed. I believe communities where people feel included and empowered in the ecological landscape are ones where we can make the greatest impact for wildlife, and I look forward to serving on the NCWAS board through action and vision.

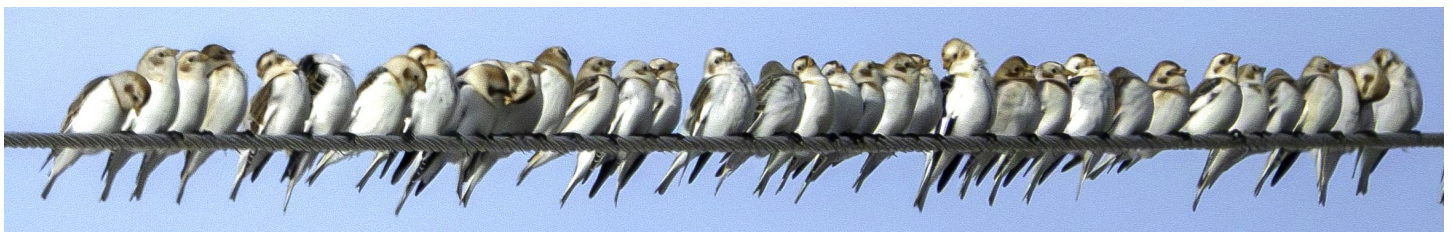


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## Snow Buntings At Last!

article and photo by Pat Leigh, Mazama

How is it that whenever I become obsessed with seeing a particular species, that species goes into hiding? I saw my first Snow Buntings in 2021 on McNeil Canyon Road near Waterville. My second sighting was in 2023 when my friends and I found them at a septic dump site on the Waterville Plateau. (Not a great photo op.) I've been longing for an opportunity to capture good images of a large flock, and this was my lucky year. I recently spent three days with my birding buddies Dj and Jane birding in the greater Okanogan area including the Okanogan Highlands. An eBird report had been filed claiming to have seen over 500 Snow Buntings on Havillah Road, and on January 23 we were astonished when we found them there perched on a wire! As we watched, they flew over a field and circled back to the wire two or three times before they took off. Between you and me, I have actually tried to count them in my broader view photos and I would be comfortable claiming there were 800 or more. What a thrill! If you'd like to come up with your own count, email me at [patricialeigh1@mac.com](mailto:patricialeigh1@mac.com) and I'll send you some of my photos to use.

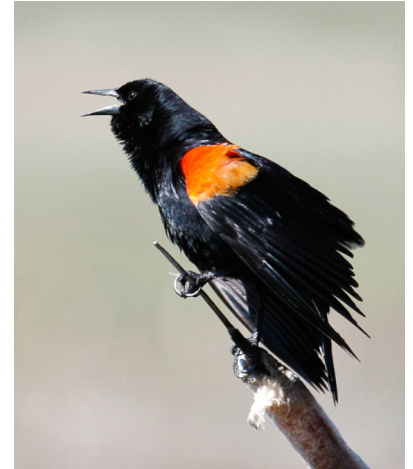


Snow Buntings on a wire

# Upcoming Field Trips and Other Events

## Monday, May 4: Deadhorse Lake, Twisp

Join Julie Hovis and Torre Stockard for a morning bird walk to Deadhorse Lake. A good variety of songbird and waterfowl species should be back in the area, so this is a good early-season opportunity to brush-up on your birding skills. Species seen on this trip in the past include Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Red-tailed Hawk, Lewis's Woodpecker, Tree Swallow, Western Bluebird, Mountain Bluebird, American Goldfinch, Yellow-breasted Chat, Red-winged Blackbird, Nashville Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Lazuli Bunting. Please wear good walking shoes and expect to walk two to four miles over gently rolling trails and dirt roads. Bring binoculars, water, and snacks as needed and expect to be out for approximately three hours. We'll meet at 8:00 am at the Twisp Community Center and carpool from there. The trip is limited to ten birders. For more information or to register, email Julie Hovis at [jahovis711@gmail.com](mailto:jahovis711@gmail.com).



Red-winged Blackbird  
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

## May 14-17: Annual Washington Ornithological Society Conference

The 2026 annual conference of the Washington Ornithological Society will be held in Lewiston, Idaho, where the Clearwater and Snake rivers join, as the Snake makes a turn west and heads for the mighty Columbia River. Half-day and full-day field trips have been lined up in three states: Washington, Idaho, and Oregon, including Hells Gate State Park, gateway to the amazing Hells Canyon National Recreation Area. You can expect great birds and spectacular geology! There also will be the traditional Friday night "Stump the Experts" bird identification quiz and the Saturday evening banquet, which will feature a keynote address on the White-tailed Ptarmigan. Registration for the conference opens at 8:00 am on April 4. For more information visit <https://wos.org/annual-conference/2026-hells-gate-annual-conference-lewiston/>.

## Wednesday, May 20: The Sinlahekin Valley in Spring

Join Art Campbell and Dj Jones in exploring the beautiful bird paradise of the Sinlahekin Valley. We will spend a full day birding from Conconully to Loomis and Palmer Lake, and continuing along Horse Coulee Road on our way back to Omak. With almost all the spring migrants back in our region by the end of May, we'll have an excellent chance to see many of our region's breeding birds. Dress for the weather and bring lunch, snacks, water, etc. There will be only limited walking along unpaved roadways. We will meet at 7:00 am in Omak and expect to return by 5:00 pm. This trip is limited to ten birders. To reserve your space and for information on where to meet in Omak, email Art Campbell at [rapakivi@methow.com](mailto:rapakivi@methow.com).



Yellow-rumped Warbler  
photo by Pat Leigh, Mazama

## Monday, May 25: River Run Trail, Mazama

Please join Dj Jones and Torre Stockard for a morning of birding on the River Run Trail near Mazama. Possible species in the area include woodpeckers (Downy, Hairy, Pileated, Red-naped Sapsucker); finches (Purple, Cassin's, Pine Siskin, Red Crossbill); vireos (Western Warbler, Red-eyed); thrushes (Swainson's, Veery); warblers (Yellow-rumped, Townsend's, MacGillivray's), and hummingbirds (Rufous, Calliope). Other possibilities are Hammond's Flycatcher, Western Tanager, Chipping Sparrow, chickadees, and nuthatches—to name a few! We'll meet at 7:30 am at Jack's Trailhead on Highway 20 approximately two miles west of the turnoff to Mazama. Bring water and snacks and plan to walk on a mostly level trail for two to three hours. The trip is limited to ten birders. To reserve your space, email Dj Jones at [djtrillium birder@gmail.com](mailto:djtrillium birder@gmail.com).

## May 29-June 1: Audubon Wenas Campout

You are invited to attend a celebration of birds, blooms, and bugs and the beauty of spring in eastern Washington. The annual Wenas Campout will take place at the Hazel Wolf Bird Sanctuary at the Wenas Creek (Cascade) Camp southwest of Ellensburg. This year marks the 61st Wenas Campout. This casual and friendly event offers a variety of outdoor exploration, including birding field trips, wildflower walks, field sketching, children's activities, live music, and evening presentations with guest speakers. All are welcome to this family-friendly event. Come for a day or for a long weekend. Visit the Wenas Campout website ([www.wenasaudubon.org](http://www.wenasaudubon.org)) for directions, past field trip descriptions, and more information about the area. The campout is free to attend and open to all ages. No reservations or registrations are needed; just show up, set up camp, and participate in the activities.

# April 2026 Wild Phlox

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## North Central Washington Audubon Society Resources and Calendar

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<b>3rd Wednesday of the Month</b>	<b>Beebe Springs Bird Surveys</b>	Contact Virginia Palumbo <a href="mailto:ywpalumbo@gmail.com">ywpalumbo@gmail.com</a> or 509-860-2129
April 16-19	Olympic BirdFest 2026	<a href="http://www.olympicbirdfest.org">www.olympicbirdfest.org</a>
April 25, May 30, June 27, July 25	Hike for Health Series	Contact Ayla Medina Ulloa <a href="mailto:ayla@cdlandtrust.org">ayla@cdlandtrust.org</a> or 509-667-9708
<b>May 4, May 20, May 25</b>	<b>NCWAS Field Trips</b>	See page 7 for more information
<b>May 14-17</b>	<b>Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest</b>	See page 5 for more information
May 14-17	Washington Ornithological Society Annual Meeting	See page 7 for more information
<b>May 22</b>	<b>Bowerbird Presentation</b>	See page 4 for more information

NCWAS relies on donations that are generously provided by our many donors. We are grateful for everyone who donates the funds we need to publish the Wild Phlox newsletter and to conduct our conservation and educational programs. THANK YOU to all of our donors—regular members and those who contribute anonymously!



You can find the Wild Phlox online at our website - [www.ncwaudubon.org](http://www.ncwaudubon.org).  
The beautiful photos are even nicer in color.