



Volume 44 #5 February 2011

Low Velocity Birding for Everyone

by Mark Oswood, Wenatchee

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is the longest running Citizen Science program in the world, with over a century of records. This year's CBC is just finished but you can make plans for next year.

However, your timing is perfect for the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), 18 -21 February. The GBBC is a more do-it-yourself, low-velocity version of the CBC. You pick your own location to count birds (for at least 15 minutes). You can do more than one count in a day, if you are counting at different locations and you can do counts on any or all of the four days of the GBBC. There are simple rules for counting birds and you need to have some easy-to-get information for each of your counts. If your birding experience is limited, chances are that you'll see birds that you can't identify. That's OK! One of the questions you'll answer for each of your counts is whether you identified all the birds you saw.

The GBBC is especially suited for stay-at-home bird watchers. Your seen-from-your-window count of birds at your backyard feeders is just as needed as a count done by a bungee-corded birder, dangling from a blimp over a remote mountaintop.

The GBBC website, www.birdsource.org/gbbc/ has instructions, downloadable checklists of birds for your location, and help for bird identifications. After you've done your counts, you enter your data at the GBBC website. If you are completely non-digital but would like to do the GBBC, just contact me at NCWAS. I'll send you a paper version of the GBBC.

Please see the colorful GBBC insert in this issue for more information and inspiration.



Count Birds with the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust

On February 19th, the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust is sponsoring a field trip as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count. Biologist Phil Archibald and Kim Lohse invite you to join them for the 2011 Great Backyard Bird Count in the Entiat River Valley. Participants will snowshoe or walk along the Entiat River looking for winter birds and learning about winter ecology. The birds counted will be entered in a national database to gauge species' health, migration patterns, and the variety of birds in our area. This is a great citizen science project and you do not need to be an expert birder to participate and have fun! Afterwards, Kim and Phil will have tea and cocoa at their house.

Bring snowshoes and snow boots; warm clothes, layers, and rain gear; binoculars and field guide; snacks and water. Expect to be outside for 2 - 3 hours. This trip is limited to 12 and free for Land Trust members.

RSVP to kathy@cdlandtrust.org. No dogs, please.

Hungarian Partridges (huns) being counted during the Bridgeport Christmas Bird Count.

photo by Teri J Pieper



Daniel S. Kilby

The mission of North Central Washington Audubon is "to conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds and their habitats, for the benefit of people and the biological diversity of North Central Washington."

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Editor's Note

It's only the end of January and already we've had dirt day (the first time dirt appears from under the snow) and we can still see the dirt. This is not a good sign for snow lovers and also for salmon and other species needing water in the rivers come summer. A week ago, the water level in the Methow River rose as if it was already spring, signaling an already melting snowpack. We can only hope for late winter mountain snowfall to replenish this loss.

My FeederWatch (see Wild Phlox, November 2010) experience has been interesting. On the feederwatch days, I spend more time watching the feeders to see what species and how many birds appear. One day last week, I was delighted to see a Clark's Nutcracker at the suet feeder. When I entered that species into my data, the website generated an "are you sure about this?" response. While they are commonly seen in the Methow Valley, apparently the Cornell Lab of Ornithology folks don't expect us to see them at feeders.

A friend who lives close to Winthrop tells me this winter that her neighborhood has had many animal visitors including a moose, a Boreal Owl and a flying squirrel! It doesn't get much more exciting than that if you are a wildlife watcher. I've yet to see a moose in Washington and have never seen the other two species.



This issue of the Phlox has lots of great images. To see them in color, remember that a PDF version of the Phlox is available on the NCW Audubon website.

And on another note, my Droid has arrived. If you have any favorite birding or other natural history apps recommendations, do send them my way!

Clark's Nutcracker at a suet feeder.
 photo by Teri J Pieper

North Central Washington Audubon Society Membership Form

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ACOW, WSACC, AUD WA: WHAT?

Re-establishing the Voice of Audubon in Washington State

by Rachel Scown, Plain

Audubon Council of Washington (the acronym is pronounced A-cow) is an informal association of 26 local chapters of the National Audubon Society (NAS) that collaborated about thirty years ago to have legislative representation and advocacy in Olympia. An office in Olympia was established and funded by the chapters and NAS, which served as employer of the Audubon Washington State Office (Aud Wa) staff. North Central Washington Audubon Society (NCWAS) board member, Jeff Parsons, was one of the first State Audubon policy directors and later served as executive director. Jeff worked for NAS until 2003, when he moved to Leavenworth to direct the Barn Beach Reserve program. Most local Audubon chapters are all-volunteer organizations with no paid staff. There are a few exceptions including the Tahoma and Seattle Chapters.

A few years ago, declining revenue forced NAS to close the Washington state office, leaving Audubon without representation at the state legislature. ACOW is now in the process of reorganizing and, since last fall, two ACOW meetings have been held: in April at Barn Beach Reserve, and in October at Padilla Bay, near Anacortes, to identify needed changes, organize the chapters into regional groupings and develop a strategy for making sure Audubon has a voice in Olympia.

The 26 chapters are listed at: <http://wa.audubon.org/chapters.html>, under “websites.” The chapters have been organized into five regions to facilitate sponsoring the annual state-wide fall meetings, and to share work of chapters within the region.

- NW I includes Pilchuck, North Cascades, Skagit, San Juan and Whidbey

- NW II (aka Tres Amigos) consists of Olympic Peninsula, Admiralty, and Kitsap.

- Urban includes Vashon, Eastside, Rainier and Seattle

- Southwest includes Vancouver, Willapa Hills, Black Hills, Tahoma, Discovery Coast and Grays Harbor

- Eastern includes Spokane, North Central Washington, Kittitas, Lower Columbia Basin, Palouse, Blue Mountain, Central Basin and Yakima Valley. The Eastern Region will host next fall’s ACOW meeting.

WSACC (pronounced WA-sack) is the acronym for Washington State Audubon Conservation Committee and consists of members from the state chapters and a state representative of NAS. This group decides which issues to pursue in the state legislature, establishes positions and priorities, and provides a forum where each chapter (and region) can voice specific concerns and potentially obtain state-wide support. \$20,000 was pledged by state chapters to hire a policy advocate for the current legislative session, interviews were conducted, and Neil Beaver was hired to represent our interests. Tahoma Audubon has agreed to be the fiscal agent for this endeavor.

WSACC met in Olympia on December 11 and, after lengthy discussions, made the following decisions:

- Approved WSACC Charter revision to ensure a “One Audubon” position in the state to promote conservation priorities by building relationships with state-wide and local decision-makers.

- Prioritized potential policy resolutions, including:

A proactive approach to preserving core environmental protections in the state budget

Proactive oil spill prevention and preparedness legislation for all navigable state waters.

And other issues of importance include clean water and a coal-free Washington.

Lobby Day in Olympia is set for Tuesday, February 15, 2011 and chapters will be asked to participate to show a state-wide coalition presence. Audubon is the one environmental organization that has state-wide membership and historically the largest attendance at Lobby Day. Many Audubon members also have membership in other organizations and will attend Lobby Day as unified citizens to lobby on behalf of Audubon and the rest of the environmental community in Washington State. WSACC meeting attendees agreed that this year, state Audubon supporters should be identified by bands, buttons, or other identifying feature, to show this solidarity.

If you are interested in attending Lobby Day or other activities please contact me, or one of the other NCWAS Board members.



Downy Woodpeckers are regulars on Feederwatch counts.

photo by Teri J Pieper

Birding Central Peru: The High Barren Land

article and photos by Dave Chantler, Winthrop
More of Dave's photos may be seen at
www.flickr.com/photos/pinebird/

Peru is an incredible country for travelers, whether for the general tourist seeking to look into the past at places like Machu Picchu and Cuzco, or to hike in the glorious Cordillera Blanca, or visit the rain forest lodges in Manu National Park. For the birder, there are more species found in Peru than in any other country in the world save nearby Colombia which has about five more. The habitats in Peru are the most varied of any country on the globe – from the desiccated coastal strip of the Atacama desert to the huge expanse of the Amazonian rain forest, to the highest navigable lake in the world, to lush fertile intermountain valleys surrounded by some of the highest mountains in the world; it's no wonder there are over 1800 species of birds found in this land, approximately the size of Washington, Oregon and California.

Last September, I visited Peru for the fifth time, visiting areas I'd not seen previously. There were not that many new species for me; most of the new ones were either specialties or rarely seen, or critically endangered or newly described species with limited ranges. The tour was organized through Manu Expeditions in Cuzco and led by a Frenchman living in Chile, a fantastic birder - Fabrice Schmitt. Also along were seven other clients, all with considerable birding experience in South America.

From coastal Lima, we birded areas south, starting with marshes just outside of town and later at the fishing village of Pucusana, where a boat ride around an island gave us views of Seaside Cinclodes poking for food between the rocks all the while barely avoiding the crashing surf. These are the only passerine that inhabits this environment and endemic to Peru. Nesting colonies of Peruvian Pelicans, Peruvian Boobies, the incredibly handsome Inca Terns, Humboldt Penguins, sea lions, three species of cormorants, and two species of Oystercatchers were among the other birding delights.

North along the Pan Am highway, is a refuge called Lomas de Lachay. It has special birds in a desert valley and in the nearby fascinating upland swept by ocean breezes where moisture is delivered thru fog to the landscape creating a remarkably lush micro-climate replete with hummingbirds, parrots, and other interesting species. All this was within a couple of miles of a desert where it has not rained in 400 years.

Inland, we visited the high mountain valley of Santa Eulalia, with a whole new avifauna due to the limited moisture that comes to these western ranges of the Andes. The valleys are incredibly steep; the vistas are jaw-dropping. People are living and growing crops on slopes that often reach 45 degrees or more. Roads are carved out of the mountainside and can cause considerable mental anguish to passengers riding in a vehicle looking down to see nothing but the valley floor thousands of feet below. And to think, only twenty more switchbacks in the road will deliver you there. In fact, over the course of our some 20 days in the interior of Peru, we traversed 850 switchbacks in the roads we travelled. I know, because I counted them! Also, this is the best place to see Andean Condors and Giant Hummingbirds.



Andean Gull courtship

Continuing east, Ticlio Pass is on the main road from Lima to the interior at 16,000 feet, making this the highest paved mountain road in the world. Gasping for air is all you can expect if you want to see the fabulous Diademed Sandpiper Plover, one of the world's most iconic birds; found only in high altitude bogs from central Peru through northern Chile, and requiring a painful uphill walk of a couple hundred yards to find them in a boggy marsh. Only four pairs live in the bog.

Dropping to a mere 11,000 feet, we eventually reached the flat, fertile Mantaro valley, staying for the next several days at a comfortable lodge. Driving into nearby valleys (more switchbacks) to find the specialties, some of which have only recently been described to science, we camped one night, simply so we could be longer in the field the next day. Try these birds on for size: Eye-ringed Thistletail or Fire-throated Metaltail (hummingbird) – both endemic to Peru.



Rufous-browed Hemispingus

Continued on next page

Notes from Mazama

photo and article by
Bob Spiwak, Mazama

Ah, the joys of January. Snow, ice, cold, colder, warmish, Chinook, cold, snow, rain, sleet and escalating amounts of bird food. Sometimes I think they eat better than I do.

The chickadees have long been victimized. I say this running the risk of being labeled as an anthropomorphoser I know, but even though they are always around, they are chased from their open feeders by any bird or mammal larger than they. Not only that, the jays delight in scattering the food in non-concentric circles below the feeders in question, which now number seven.

As a footnote to their stellar activities, we had a surfeit of Steller's Jays this year. For many years past there were four regulars, last year seven showed up and this season we have an even dozen. No wonder the seeds disappear so quickly. Those that are strewn about seem, however to keep the squirrels more at ground/deck level rather than flinging themselves about the trees and feeders.

Two phenomena have now occurred this winter making it special. One is an annual event I call "Magic Day". This happens when the sun clears two humps on the ridge south of us and on the day the second hump is no longer impeding the solar journey, we get an extra hour of sunshine. Granted,



what with snow, rain, fog, or inversion clouds most days here in the Methow, it is hard to pinpoint the day. So while we cannot prance around like Druids on a certain day, it has been narrowed, over the years, to about 3:10 pm on January 16th.

The other exciting thing was the appearance of five bowling-ball fat California Quail that have taken up residence in a sheltered brushy excavation about eight feet from the pond. They wander about, and when their home is vacated at times, a curious jay will stop at the front door and peer in. The quail are our favorites because in the past we have seen but a single individual one winter.

And recently, an unlabeled few sparrows have shown up, small birds but still too large for the little bird feeder I gave to my wife for Christmas. It is a tube for the seed surrounded by a large cage of one inch square wire. It took a few days for the nuthatches and chickadees to trust it, but now it is on top of their restaurant list. The tube has holes and perches. I saw the squirrel make one try, leaping from the birch (*Betula negra*) to grasp the cage and then be flummoxed because the food was still unreachable.

Central Peru - continued from previous page

Lake Junin, at over 13,000 feet, is the highest lake in Peru. Here, in the Altiplano, we sought the critically endangered flightless Junin Grebe of which there are only 100 left, and that number is dropping dramatically every year. The culprit – pollution from a nearby copper mine. The landscape – so barren and pristine looking, with rows of mountains in the background reflected in the shimmering lake is among the most dramatic I can imagine.

Travelling northward, we dropped to Huanuco at only 8900 feet and spent several days in the area exploring eastern slope Andes birds, where the moisture starts to increase. Eventually, at Tingo Maria, a major town at the edge of the rainforest, we picked up the strange Oilbird roosting in a large cave nearby. In its own family, it is a large bird (18") that uses echolocation to navigate in total darkness and it finds fruit that it plucks from branches while flying at night in the forest.

Returning to higher elevation we camped for three nights at a place called Bosque Unchog, at 12,000 feet for some special birds, one of which did not show itself in spite of help from the local expert who discovered it only fifteen years ago. And it was a stunner besides! Oh well. But

the sight of White-cheeked and Bay-vented Cotinga and Rufous-browed Hemispingus rang my chime for sure, as did Yellow-scarfed Tanager – gorgeous birds all!

Then on to the north and the Cordillera Blanca, with the highest concentration of peaks in Peru, including Huascaran at 22,200 feet, a stupendous site from our homebase in Huaraz, at a mere 10,000 feet in the valley below. Many specialties here of course most notably in the stunted alpine forest called polylepis. Finally we returned to Lima along the Pan Am highway to complete a most fascinating journey in a most fascinating country.

Oh, by the way – we saw 369 species of birds on this tour! Not too bad.

Many-colored Rush Tyrant



Online Birding Tools: Aviatlas

I stumbled across a new website the other day that I thought could be quite useful to individual birders as well as, say, our NCW Audubon chapter. I was hunting on the internet for information about birding hotspots in Southeastern Arizona... which led me to the Tucson Audubon website... which after a few more clicks led me to their rare bird alert web page. Scrolling down this revealed a small appeal on the sidebar, requesting birders to help build a database of local birding locations around Tucson by using a mapping tool called "Aviatlas".

So I clicked on the link (www.aviatlas.com) and explored. Started in 2007, it's a free online tool that allows users to both explore, as well as add content to, birding areas around the world. "Think of it as a map-based wiki for birding hotspots," it says on their website. It appears to use Google maps as the foundation, but map data have been provided by a variety of sources, while birding data have been shared by organizations such as eBird and BirdLife International. Viewing options include map, satellite, hybrid, or terrain views, with number of hotspots displayed dependent on how closely you're zoomed in. When you select a particular spot to view its description, you will find information such as latitude and longitude, habitat, target bird species, links to other websites, etc. The amount of information available is dependent on the person who entered it, so some birding

by Torre Stockard, Winthrop

areas have much more detailed descriptions than others. But part of the beauty of it is that anyone can enter in data. You can even upload photos and post comments. (The downside, I suppose, is that like Wikipedia, since anyone can enter data, it may not always be accurate. In fact, I found two markers for Hart's Pass that are not in the correct place on the map, but to be fair, the markers have pop-up messages requesting more accurate information.)

I've only just started to explore Aviatlas, but I like the maps (which seem to load quickly), and there's a wealth of information on some birding areas. It's great that you can explore regions all over the world efficiently, either by navigating on the world map, or by searching for a particular place name or hotspot in the site's search engine. By registering for an account, you can enter in your own favorite birding locations, sightings, and pictures, which then become part of your own life list and can be easily shared with other birders. Tucson Audubon is using Aviatlas to compile their regional maps of birding locations; perhaps we could do the same for our north central Washington region.

Is anyone else already using Aviatlas? Have any ideas as to whether this could be a useful tool for assembling a catalog of locations and maps around our region? Email your comments and thoughts to birdsightings@ncwaudubon.org!

Another Way to Support NCWAS

If you are a NCWAS Member, you will receive a free set of "Bino-Straps" with your optics purchase from Wild Birds Unlimited in Gig Harbor. And for EVERY purchase made by a NCW Audubon Society Member, our Chapter will receive, as a donation, 5% of the sale! So visit the friendly experts at Wild Birds Unlimited, in person or online, for your birding and optic needs and let them know you are a member of North Central Washington Audubon Society!



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<http://gigharbor.wbu.com>

Answers to the December Crossword Puzzle

Across

1. PREEN—using bill to clean, oil, and rearrange feathers
3. COOT—lobe-footed, duck-like bird of wetlands; not all are old
5. FLICKER—ant-eating woodpecker
6. COMMON—this loon isn't very _____
8. CBC—annual holiday census of US birds (abbreviation)
12. ALBATROSS—a bird you don't want around your neck
15. SWALLOWS—cliff, bank, and tree _____
16. COWBIRD—lays eggs in nests of other birds
17. CORNELL—The _____ Laboratory of Ornithology
19. PIGEON—park bench birder's delight
20. SPARROW—vesper _____

Down

1. PTARMIGAN—feather-legged birds turn white in winter
2. CORMORANT—fish-eating bird with wettable feathers
4. FINCHES—In the Galapagos, Darwin's _____
7. KESTREL—smallest falcon
9. CHICKADEE—bird calls its name
10. NUTCRACKER—Clark's _____ caches pine seeds
11. AOU—American Ornithological Union
13. BREWER—friend of Audubon; gave name to sparrow and blackbird
14. FLYWAYS—bird interstates for migration
18. RAIL—secretive marsh birds; "thin as a _____"

Water in the Wintertime

by Torre Stockard, Winthrop

This is a follow-up to the article in the December 2010 Wild Phlox titled "Water is Key to Complete Backyard Wildlife Habitat" (reprinted from the WDFW Crossing Paths News Notes).

Upon researching heated bird baths, I was astonished at the variety (and price range!) of options to choose from, so I thought I'd share one that has worked for us. Since it is not uncommon for us to experience temperatures down into the single digits, I figured an AC plug-in type would be more reliable than solar, but I also wanted to make sure it wasn't going to chew up mega watts of electricity. It was also important that it be easy to clean. A creative salesperson at our local hardware store came up with a great suggestion: a heated dog bowl. Its low wattage, only stays on when needed to keep the water just above freezing, and because the heating element is on the underside of the bowl (as opposed to submerged), it's easy to clean. I put a rock and stepped platform in it, to make it easy for the birds to both drink and bathe, though I've seen them perch easily on the rim as well. So far, it's seen temperatures down to just a few degrees above zero and has worked as promised, without making any dent in the electric bill that we notice. Price tag: \$27. An easy way to help out your local birds in winter!

Let us know what other solutions you've come up with. We'll share your ideas on our blog, Ponderings and Peregrinations.



Here is another way birds get water in the winter.
photo by Ed Stockard

White River Snowshoe Tour: February 13th, 9:00 - 4:00

Join wildlife biologist Heather Murphy and fisheries biologist Judy De La Vergne for a naturalist's snowshoe tour of the White River. Judy and Heather will discuss this special area's importance to large carnivores, spawning salmon, and birds. Stops on the tour will also highlight American Indian use of the land and current conservation projects. Hot tea and cocoa will be served at the Tall Timber Ranch after the hike.

Snowshoers should be experienced walking for 4 hours on snowshoes in winter weather over difficult terrain. Backcountry skiers could attend if experienced in off-track skiing with appropriate equipment. Please bring layers, safety gear, water, and lunch. Binoculars and field guides would be very helpful. Trip is limited to 15 and is free for Land Trust members. RSVP to 509-667-9708, kathy@cdlandtrust.org. No dogs, please.

Here is a wintering grebe on the Columbia near Bridgeport. The question is - is this a Western or a Clark's Grebe? Let us know what you think and why.

photo by Teri J Pieper



A Sneak Peak at a New Book

By Susan Ballinger, Wenatchee Chapter, WNPS

The Wenatchee Chapter, Washington Native Plant Society (WNPS) invites the public to their monthly chapter meeting at 6:30 PM, February 17, 2011, at the Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center, 127 S. Mission Street. Instead of the regular meeting format, hors d'oeuvres will be served during a social hour with a silent auction. A brief program will follow with featured guest speaker, Catherine Hovanic, Executive Director of the Washington State Native Plant Society. Ms. Hovanic will be announcing the upcoming release of "Field Guide to the Rare Plants of Washington." The book is scheduled to be available in April, 2011, but Catherine will bring an advance copy for a sneak preview. A \$5 donation is suggested for non-members.

The "Field Guide to the Rare Plants of Washington" published by University of Washington Press, includes 317 Vascular plants, 6 mosses, and 1 lichen that are designated as rare species in Washington. Each rare plant is fully characterized by a detailed description, bloom-time, identification tips, full color photos of the plants and their habitats, line drawings, and distribution maps. This will be the only comprehensive source of information about rare plants for our state.

This book was co-edited by Pam Camp, the Wenatchee Chapter Co-Chair, a 20-year project in the making. Pam is a private consultant in field biology and restoration ecology and former district botanist with the Bureau of Land Management.

February Wild Phlox

North Central Washington Audubon Society

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Calendar

February 5	Waterville Plateau Field Trip	Led by Dan Stephens. For more info, contact Dan at DStephens@wvc.edu, or 682-6752 or 782-4890
February 13	White River Snowshoe Tour	Chelan-Douglas Land Trust; see page 7 for details
February 15	Lobby Day in Olympia	Tell your legislators what is important to you! See page 3 for details.
February 17	Field Guide to the Rare Plants of Washington	With the Native Plant Society; see page 7 for details
February 18-21	Great Backyard Bird Count	See page 1 and the color insert for details!
February 19	Count Birds with the CDLT	On the Entiat River; see page 1 for details



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Visit the NCW Audubon Society website for updates on these and other events
www.ncwaudubon.org