



Better Dead Than Alive? Snags are for the Birds and Other Wildlife

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from Washington Department of Fish
and Wildlife's Crossing Paths News

As strange as it seems, some trees can actually provide more habitat for wildlife when they're dead than when they're alive. Standing dead and dying trees, called "snags" or "wildlife trees," are important for wildlife in both natural and landscaped settings. Birds, small mammals, and other wildlife use snags for nests, nurseries, storage areas, foraging, roosting, and perching. Live trees with snag-like features, such as hollow trunks, excavated cavities, and dead branches can provide similar wildlife value. Snags occurring along streams eventually fall into the water, adding important woody debris habitat for fish and other aquatic life. Snags can attract wildlife species to your property that you might not otherwise see.

In Washington, more than 100 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians need snags for nesting, roosting, and denning. Hollow snags and large knot-holes are used by Douglas squirrels, northern flying squirrels, martens, porcupines, raccoons, and even black bears. Several species of owls and woodpeckers also use large cavities. Bluebirds, chickadees, swallows, wrens and other songbirds use smaller cavities. Brown Creepers, nuthatches, bats, lizards, and mourning cloak butterflies will roost behind loose bark and bark slits for winter warmth and shelter.

Many of our wildlife species forage for

food in snags, which are often loaded with insects. Woodpeckers, sapsuckers, flickers, nuthatches, and a myriad of other insectivorous species regularly make snags their dining rooms. Mice, squirrels, jays, crows and other wildlife use snags more like kitchens, for food storage areas. Some snags make ideal hunting perches for hawks, eagles, and owls. The more open resting perches that

Unfortunately, many of these dead or dying trees are cut down without much thought to their wildlife value and the management options.

snags provide are preferred by swallows, Band-tailed Pigeons, Mourning Doves and other colonial birds. And of course the resonating surfaces of some snags are perfect for woodpeckers to announce their presence with their hammering bills during courtship season.

Snags of both deciduous and coniferous trees are used by wildlife. The most favored snag species east of the Cascades are ponderosa pine, western larch, quaking aspen, and paper birch; west of the Cascades, Douglas fir, western red cedar, big-leaf maple and cottonwood snags are highly used. Softwood trees such as fir tend to make better food foraging trees, while hardwood trees are sometimes better for nesting cavities.

Unfortunately, many of these dead or

dying trees are cut down without much thought to their wildlife value and the management options that can safely prolong their existence. Of course if not managed properly, snags can pose a risk to people and structures. If a dead or dying tree threatens something that can be moved, such as a swing set or patio furniture, consider moving those items before cutting the tree. An alternative to eliminating the entire tree is to remove only the dangerous sections. Remaining parts can be removed over time. Often, once the unsafe limbs or portions of the trunk have been removed, the tree is safe. Retain live trees and tall shrubs near a snag to protect it from wind and provide a more complete environment for wildlife. Trees that lean away or are downhill from structures and other areas of human activity present little or no risk.

You can create a snag from trees that are hazardous or problematic, like ones with forked tops or disease or invasive roots threatening a drainage or septic system, or individual trees in a group that needs thinning. Like landscaping rocks and boulders, snags can add interesting, artistic angles to your property.

More information about snags, including details about how to safely create a snag, or enhance existing dead or dying trees, is available at <http://wdfw.wa.gov/living/snags/>.

The mission of the
North Central Washington Audubon Society
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."

Christmas Bird Count Help Needed!

by Karen Haire, Leavenworth

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All phone numbers in the Wild Phlox are area code 509 unless otherwise indicated.

Wanted: Coordinator or assistant for the
Leavenworth Christmas Bird Count.

I'm feeling overwhelmed this year with work and family, and I'd love some help with this worthwhile and exciting event. It takes many hours to line up volunteers for all the count areas in the circle, pass out instructions and maps and compile the results for the National Audubon website. Please contact Karen Haire at 509-433-6402 or karenhaire@earthlink.net.

editor's note - remember when you are doing your holiday planning that our region has six or seven Christmas Bird Counts. All these counts need volunteers to observe and record the birds seen in specific areas. There's sure to be one near you! You need not be an experienced or expert birder to participate. Birders of various abilities will be paired or grouped together. Many of these CBC's have fun social times at the end of the day to share counts and tell stories of the day over a hot meal. Watch next month's Wild Phlox for a schedule of our area's Christmas Bird Counts.

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To join the National Audubon Society which also includes a subscription to the Wild Phlox, please see their website at www.audubon.org or drop us a note and we will send you a form for a special rate introductory membership.

Now, at the end of September it seems like the weather and the calendar are at last in synch. This morning, the North Cascades are again snow-capped. It's unfortunate that we missed out on much of the warmth of spring and summer weather in May, June and July and already we are faced with cooler days of fall. It seems like we've been a bit short-changed, especially with another La Nina forecast for this winter.

Birds have been out of synch as well. I can't tell you how many times I've said, or I've heard, "well that should have happened a couple of weeks ago". Kent Woodruff of the US Forest Service was just telling me that the hawk migration at Chelan Ridge is a week or two behind 'normal'. Having collected data up there since 1997, he has some science to back up that statement.

Speaking of Chelan Ridge, the Hawk Migration Festival on September 17th was another success. While the weather wasn't as warm as last year and the birds not as numerous, attendees had lots of fun learning about migration and the long-running project on the ridge. In Pateros, the WSU Raptor Club entertained and educated folks with live birds perched on their forearms. These birds have been injured or imprinted on humans so cannot be released to the wild so the students use them for educational opportunities around the state. It is a real treat to be able to study these birds up close and personal.

If you enjoy bird feeding, remember to give your feeders a good cleaning out before winter sets in. Birds congregated at feeders can spread disease to one another. At our feeder we saw a Red-naped Sucker the other day, probably heading south. There are still Anna's Hummingbirds frequenting the feeders and the primary seed feeders are Pine Siskens and other finches. White-crowned Sparrows glean off of the ground. Turkey Vultures fly by each day and on warm days I see them spiraling on thermals. All the swallows at our



Kessie, an American Kestrel is handled by one of the WSU students in the Raptor Club
photo by Teri J Pieper



place left the first week of September. Yesterday we were visited by a large flock of American Robins - I have not seen any around since the young all fledged. Folks tell me they have seen and heard Sandhill Cranes. Lots of accipiters are flying too. It's fall.

Remember, if you want to see all the newsletter photos in color, check out the pdf on our website.

A Red-tailed Hawk from the WSU Raptor Club
photo by Teri J Pieper

Audubon Council of Washington Meeting in Moses Lake

by Lindell Haggin, Spokane Audubon Society

This year the Audubon Council of Washington will be meeting on Saturday, October 8 in Moses Lake at the Grant County Fairgrounds. The meeting is being confined to one day, starting at 9:00 am and concluding at 3:30.

The Washington State Audubon Conservation Committee (WSACC) has scheduled a meeting for Friday, tentatively starting at 4:00 p.m. also at the fairgrounds. Following WSACC, a program on the Shrub-Steppe habitat and the status of the Sage Grouse and Sharp-tailed Grouse in Washington will start at 7:00 p.m. in the same location.

The main focus of the Saturday meeting is to determine the future of a state presence of Audubon in Washington. At the last ACOW, representatives from each region were chosen to facilitate the selection of a policy advocate

for the last legislative session and to look at the options available for the future.

There will be optional self-guided field trips on Saturday evening and Sunday morning. Please bring your Coulee Corridor Birding Map to facilitate your bird watching.

Registration for ACOW is available at www.spokaneaudubon.org/

editor's note - Rachel Scown and Mark Oswood will represent NCW Audubon at this ACOW. Contact them if you are interested in going or if you have questions or comments regarding the Audubon presence in Washington, more specifically in Olympia and lobbying on Audubon's behalf to the state legislature.

First Methow Salmon Celebration and Community Dinner: Building a Shared Future with Science, Art, Food, Fun and Music

The Methow Restoration Council (MRC) has teamed up with TwispWorks, Methow Valley Interpretive Center, Partnership for a Sustainable Methow and Methow Arts Alliance to create the first annual Methow Salmon Celebration and Community Dinner to honor the teamwork and community support involved in restoring salmon in the Methow. The event takes place on Sunday, October 9 from 3:00-7:30 p.m. All ages are welcome to this free event.

The Salmon Celebration begins at 3 p.m. with science and art activities for the whole family at Twisp Ponds until 5 p.m. The festivities will then move to TwispWorks for a salmon and potluck dinner, music by the Pinkertons, juggling and a bon fire finale. The Methow Valley Interpretive Center will be preparing BBQ'ed salmon with additional culinary delights from Partnership for Sustainable Methow. Attendees are asked to bring a side dish or dessert to share, and a picnic blanket.

Twisp Ponds is on Twisp River Road a few blocks upstream from Twisp. Parking is very limited so ride the Big Blue Shuttle Bus from the large parking area at TwispWorks to Twisp Ponds. TwispWorks, the old Forest Service facility, is located at 502 South Glover Street.

The Methow Restoration Council (MRC), formed in 2002, is a group of stakeholders made up of citizens, irrigators, non-profit organizations, and federal, state, local and tribal governments interested in restoring the health and status of native salmonid populations and their properly functioning habitats in the Methow. The MRC serves as a locally-based guide for protection and restoration of salmonid habitat.



article by Paula Mackrow, Twisp
artwork by Dan Brown, Omak and Barry Stromberger, Twisp

TwispWorks is an historic property, a visionary partnership of the entire Methow Valley community, and a gateway to the region. Its goal is to promote economic vitality in the Methow Valley, by transforming the former U.S. Forest Service complex in Twisp into a vibrant center for art, agriculture, innovative technology and education.

Methow Valley Interpretive Center's mission is to create, fund and operate an interpretive center that recognizes the pre-European native inhabitants and portrays the geology and natural history of the Methow Valley. The interpretive center is part of the TwispWorks campus. Partnership for a Sustainable Methow is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to initiate, encourage and support activities that foster long-term sustainability and well-being in the Methow Valley Community.

Methow Arts Alliance is a non profit organization formed in 1987 whose mission is to enrich the lives of people living in rural Okanogan County by making the arts an integral and dynamic aspect of community and economic vitality, public education and civic life. The Arts Education program serves over 5000 students, 350 teachers and their communities in six Okanogan County school districts.

For more info on the Celebration contact Tori Karpenko, tkarpenko@twispworks.org, or 509-997-3300

NCW Audubon will be at the Salmon Celebration with our 'What's That Bird?' activity. To help with this fun event, contact Bridget Egan or Teri J Pieper (see contact info page 2)

Chelan Douglas Land Trust Volunteer Opportunities

by Tina Duffey, CDLT

With Fall's cooler weather the Chelan Douglas Land Trust has volunteer opportunities coming up. To participate in any of these events, please RSVP to tduffey@cdlandtrust.org or 509-667-9708

Install eBird Study Posts and Trail Way-finding Signs.

October 12 - 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Help install steel posts that will be used for songbird studies, as well as trail way-finding signs at Horse Lake Reserve. Bring gloves, water, and snacks.

Make A Difference Day 2011. October 22 - 8:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. Join in this national day of making a difference.

The Land Trust will be sponsoring two different projects on this day for you to get involved:

Wenatchee Foothills - Trail Work

Come out and help rework some of our beloved trails in the Sage Hills region of the Foothills. Please bring gloves, water, snacks, sturdy shoes and trail tools if you have them.

Mountain Home Ridge in Leavenworth - Trail Clearing & Kiosk Building.

Help clear trees and shrubs from the roads and trails on this Land Trust Preserve. We are also looking for someone to design a kiosk for the property. Please bring gloves, water, snacks, pruners and a folding saw if you have one.

Notes from Mazama

by Bob Spiwak, Mazama

There have been raptor watching lectures, trips to Chelan Ridge and Harts Pass to watch the flapping and soaring wings headed south. My wife, Ms. Gloria has been to them all. So, whilst herself is out hiking and looking I tend to stay behind. It is not that I am disinterested, rather that I am not overly interested, not enough to drag my aging body, mild emphysema, and bad knee into the hinterlands. I say, as did the raven, "Nevermore."

Now, aside from chores and writing I look at and photograph nature mostly on our own 5 acres and the shrinking pond.

A few days ago I answered a questionnaire from Cornell Ornithology that is conducting another Urban Bird Count. I felt like a hypocrite as we are about as far from urban as Hudson Bay is, far above Cayuga's waters. But, since they were nice enough to send it I told them I was well beyond rural.

In the ten minute allocation for a half-football field sized area, I chose the pond and accompanying flora - from a 100 foot bull pine to swamp weeds. I saw the list of birds to check off and two crows flew over. I checked crows. I don't remember the other check mark's quarry. So I ended with two, and mailed it over to New York for possible tabulation.

In the days prior I witnessed what might be assault, rape, cannibalism or love in bloom on the close edge of the pond. There a brilliant green dragonfly fluttered through the water to a dry stem of swamp grass and fanned its wings to dry them. As I watched, a blue dragonfly swooped low over Green and went east, then about-faced and did the same

going westerly. It turned around to come back, swooped low again and grabbed the green one and flew out of sight. What this meant I have no idea. Any of the above is possible.

The day after I mailed the count, a pair of Mallards landed in the pond. We have a pair every year, this year splendidly augmented by a Wood Duck, the male woody hanging around for over a month, the female for about a week, at times the two pairs cruising side by side. The Mallards have been here about a week and today they did not appear.

The big news - chew on this - a beaver came into the pond three days ago. We had one two years ago, delivered by a biologist as an experiment. How would beavers adapt to a landlocked, very small pond? Ward (Cleaver) as we named him was here for at least a month. Daily I left tender young leafy alders that he consumed. One day he disappeared and we assumed he had been eaten by a predator. This was underscored on a nature walk when the guide found cougar scat with beaver fur in it.

It is half a mile from our pond to the next water - a neighbor's pond to the east, the Methow River across highway 20, to the south and west. Could this be Ward coming home? Last night I cut a couple of young aspen and tossed them in the pond. They were gone this morning. An hour ago I did the same. We'll see.

I like nature studies, especially with a comfortable chair, a few icy beverages and a pack of cigs or a cigar alongside. I hike to the refrigerator. Life is good.

The Nature Year on Mount Adams and Calendars in Time for the Holidays

by Pam Camp and Susan Ballinger,
Wenatchee Chapter
of the Native Plant Society

The Wenatchee Chapter of the Native Plant Society will meet October 27th at the North Central Washington Museum from 7 – 9 p.m. Paul Slichter will take people on a visual journey to Mount Adams, Washington's second highest peak, located in the south Cascades. He will show the flora, some fauna and scenery from the first bloom in early April along the Klickitat River and at Conboy Lake National Wildlife Refuge to the peak of flower bloom at Bird Creek and Killen Creek Meadows as well as the colorful fall foliage of mid-October.

Paul is a retired high school biology teacher who worked for a number of summers during college in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and became well acquainted with the beauty and solitude of this large stratovolcano. He now runs a Pacific Northwest Wildflower website (<http://science.halleyhosting.com>), volunteers for the Washington Native Plant Society and builds plant lists for many sites around the PNW.

Enjoy the brilliant scarlet leaves on this year's cover of our 2012 WNPS calendar which features David Hagen's photo of smooth sumac. Then enjoy the beauty of Washington's wildflowers throughout 2012 with 13 months of terrific photos and a whole new year of floral splendor. WNPS members have helped us produce an outstanding calendar of native plant images. Buy one for yourself and some for those on your gift list.

Calendars may be purchased at chapter meetings this fall and winter, or you may buy online at www.wnps.org and look for the Calendar link under "What's New". Each calendar is just \$10.00, plus \$2.00 for shipping (one flat rate of \$2.00 shipping even for multiple calendar orders). So buy one for yourself and some for family and friends.

Support the conservation work of the Society and its efforts to educate others about the value of native plants.

Get the Lead Out: Lead Poisoning of a Loon

from the
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Editor's Note - While this article comes from Minnesota, this same issue threatens loons and swans in our own state. Common Loons in Ferry and Okanogan Counties are very much at risk as are Trumpeter Swans throughout Washington.

It started when the DNR received a report on a loon that had not migrated. It was the day after Thanksgiving, and the lake was freezing. The loon was keeping a small hole open in the ice on Big Jay Gould Lake near Cohasset in Itasca County. Members of the Cohasset Fire Department used the "ice angel" air boat and wet suits to retrieve the loon. Early the next morning, the loon was taken to the Garrison Animal Hospital and was diagnosed with lead poisoning. An x-ray showed that a lead jig-head was in its stomach, and blood tests indicated a blood lead level of 2.28 parts per million (ppm). By the time the lead jig was removed, it was too late. The lead had already poisoned the bird. It died. Lead poisoning occurs in birds of blood levels greater than 0.2 ppm and birds usually die with levels greater than 1.2 ppm.

One lead sinker can poison a loon.

A loon with lead poisoning behaves strangely. It may fly poorly, have crash landings or stagger onto the ground. The loon begins to gasp, tremble, and its wings droop as lead is carried through its blood stream. As the poisoning worsens, it eats very little and hides among aquatic vegetation, staying behind when other birds migrate. It becomes emaciated and often dies within two or three weeks after eating the lead. It takes only one lead sinker or jig to poison a loon.

How poisoning happens.

Loons routinely swallow small pieces of gravel on the bottom of lakes. The gravel passes to their stomach and helps in digestion, like grit in the

stomach of a chicken. When fishing sinkers are lost during fishing and drop to the bottom of the lake, they can be picked up by loons, or waterfowl like ducks and Trumpeter Swans. Some loons also swallow fishing jigs when they mistake them for minnows. As the lead sinker or jig is exposed to the acids of the stomach and to other pebbles, lead enters the bird's system and slowly poisons the bird.

You can help.

Give nontoxic sinkers a try. The less lead we release into the environment, the better off our wildlife will be. Next time you clean out your tackle box and make a list of replacement tackle to purchase for the upcoming fishing season, be sure to include nontoxic fishing sinkers. Currently there are many non-toxic sinker alternatives on the market made



Common Loon on Lost Lake,
Okanogan County
photo by Teri J Pieper

out of bismuth, tin, stainless steel, tungsten, ceramic, recycled glass and natural granite. Because weights of the different materials vary, you'll have to experiment to find what works best for your type of fishing. Ask your local bait and tackle store to stock environmentally friendly unleaded sinkers. Two examples are Gremlin Green and Bullet Weights. Some stores have made a special effort to increase the variety and supply of non-lead sinkers. Never throw old tackle into the water or on shore. Consider lead sinkers and jigs as toxic material and

dispose of them at proper household hazardous waste collection sites. To insure that future generations hear the call of the loon we need to do more to safeguard their environment. **Even if you don't fish, share this information with family and friends who do. Just tell them to "Get the lead out!"**

A conservation dilemma

In 2003 Minnesota's loon population was about 12,000 birds, and the numbers appear stable. There are, however, some potential threats to the long-term survival and status of loon populations. One of those is the threat posed by lead fishing sinkers and jigs. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency did a study to examine loons for high mercury concentrations. The mercury study incidentally discovered that loons are dying from lead poisoning. Out of 101 dead

loons that were analyzed, a total of seven died of lead poisoning and an equal number died of fish line entanglement. The fish line problem is fairly straightforward and can be reduced by urging anglers to avoid disposing of waste fish line in our lakes. The lead poisoning problem is more complex.

Biologists have studied the effects of lead sinkers and jigs on water birds and birds of prey since the 1970s. In areas where loons breed, lead poisoning from sinkers or jigs may account for up to 50 percent of the dead adult loons found by researchers. Between 1980 and 1996, the Raptor Center at the University of Minnesota reported lead poisoning in 138 of 650 eagles they treated. From 1996-99, 43 additional eagles were affected by lead toxicity. Most times the source of the lead cannot be detected, as the birds have cast the material out of their system. The Raptor Center reports there has been no reduction in lead poisoning of bald eagles despite recent restrictions on lead gun shot for hunting waterfowl.

Washington Western Bluebird Reintroduction Efforts

Birds Thriving on San Juan Island Following Completion of Five-Year Project

(Washington, D.C. , August 11, 2011) A five-year cooperative effort involving several organizations has succeeded in returning the Western Bluebird to Washington's San Juan Islands. The bird had historically inhabited the islands, but changing land use practices and a paucity of nesting sites meant the species had not nested there for over 40 years.

Over the course of the five-year project, biologists with the Western Bluebird Reintroduction Project captured and translocated 45 breeding pairs of Western Bluebirds from an expanding population at Fort Lewis Military Installation, Washington, and another four pairs from the Willamette Valley in Oregon. The birds were kept in aviaries on San Juan Island prior to release to acclimate them to their new surroundings.

One pair of translocated birds nested in the first year, and in each succeeding year the nesting population size has increased. Over the five years, 212 fledglings were produced. Most encouragingly, some of those fledged birds have returned each year and are now part of the breeding population, giving hope that the population will be able to sustain itself into the future.

"It is gratifying to have the hard work of so many people bear fruit with the result that we now see these birds coming back to an area they had once called home. This year, the islands are home to 15 breeding pairs of Western Bluebirds that fledged 74 birds," said Bob Altman, project leader with American Bird Conservancy. "We are very optimistic about the future of this population," he said.

The project collaborators included American Bird Conservancy, Fort Lewis Military Installation, Ecostudies Institute, San Juan Preservation Trust, San Juan Islands Audubon Society, Washington Department of Fish and

Wildlife, and The Nature Conservancy of Washington.

Thirty birds returned to the San Juan Islands this year. Ten were translocated birds from previous years, 18 were fledged from previous years, and two were of undetermined origin. The 15 pairs of birds built 25 nests, of which 14 were successful.

"This year saw record breaking cool, wet weather through June, meaning everything, including bluebird nesting, was about three to four weeks behind. This resulted in reduced productivity from the previous year. House Sparrows also caused three or four nesting failures, which is something we may need to address in coming years," Altman said.



Western Bluebird
photo by Teri J Pieper

The project is now moving into a two-year monitoring phase to determine the stability and growth of the population, and the need for future population management. "We are very pleased to have achieved our goal of establishing a breeding population, however, 15 pairs is by no means a large enough population to be considered secure, so we are exploring ways to enhance it beyond the initial five-year period," he said.

One potential enhancement is Western Bluebird translocations in nearby British Columbia that may be starting

from The American Bird Conservancy next year. The San Juan Islands are only 20-25 miles as the bluebird flies from the proposed release site on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, and it is likely that the continuation of translocations in British Columbia will help to sustain the San Juan Islands population in the future.

In tandem with the translocations, project partners also are working to conserve the oak-prairie ecosystem that the birds depend on. Toward that end, the San Juan Preservation Trust made a key prairie-oak land acquisition – 120 acres in the center of the San Juan Valley- which hosts two nesting pairs of bluebirds and is a primary location at which flocks of bluebirds congregate during the post-breeding season. In addition, approximately 600 nest boxes have been put up on the islands to provide additional nesting opportunities for the returning birds.

Altman said that "the project would not have been possible without the help of numerous people on the San Juan Islands, who hosted aviaries and nest boxes on their properties, helped construct nest boxes and move aviaries, provided materials and project equipment, and helped monitor nest boxes and look for released birds. Further, he added "I don't know of any other bird reintroduction project that relied completely on so many private landowners".

The American Bird Conservancy would like to thank the following supporters:
Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund
The Norcliffe Foundation
Friends of Zoo Boise
The San Juan Preservation Trust
Warren and Cathy Cooke
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North Central Washington Audubon Society Calendar

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October 12	Methow Bird Walk	contact tertipier@hotmail.com
October 12	Chelan Douglas Land Trust	Opportunities
October 12	Chelan Douglas Land Trust	Install eBird posts and way-finding signs! See page 4
October 22	Make a Difference Day with Chelan Douglas Land Trust	Trail work and kiosk building. See page 4
October 27	Native Plant Society meets	Learn about Mount Adams. See page 5
December 14 - January 5	Christmas Bird Counts	Start Planning Now! See page 2



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