



The Wild Phlox

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Bald Eagles at Horan Natural Area

by Merry Roy, Wenatchee

It was early December and my husband and I were walking through the Horan Natural Area along the Columbia River in Wenatchee. A Bald Eagle flew overhead. Then another, this one trailing a long thin stick. They landed in the fork of a tall cottonwood on a small pile of sticks. Were they building a nest? In December? Could that be?

Over and over the pair flew out, picking loose cottonwood sticks out of the trees and flying back to weave them into the nest. One eagle, in particular, seemed to have a decorator instinct. She would take a stick and move it around, put it back again, then tweak it a bit before she was satisfied.

We and others observed over the next weeks; the nest was noticeably larger each time. Sometimes the eagles were in the nest or actively building, other times they were roosting on a nearby tree or simply not around. Maybe they were fishing. Everyone watching these eagles had the same question - could they actually be building a nest and were they preparing to lay eggs in the winter? Here's what I discovered.

Bald Eagles build nests as part of the breeding process, one to three months prior to mating. Nest building is dependent on latitude and the length of daylight. In Wabasha, Minnesota south of Minneapolis at the National Eagle Center on the Mississippi River (44.37 degrees north) nest building begins in November. Wenatchee is 47.42 degrees north, and these eagles probably began their nest building in late November.

According to the National Eagle Center's excellent website, eagles pair-bond through nest building. They choose the tallest living tree near water, start the building in a sturdy tree fork, and build a nest four to five feet in diameter and two to four feet deep. They weave the sticks together and line the nest with grass, moss, and downy eagle feathers. Eagles have strong nest fidelity but will start a new nest if the one from last year was unsuccessful or was unsuitable for various reasons. Or they may build a second nest, like a second home, and move every couple of years.



Bald Eagles on the nest
photo by Bruce McCammon,
Wenatchee

Egg laying is also dependent on latitude. In southern Minnesota egg laying begins in late February or early March. This timing might be similar for our Wenatchee eagles. If our female lays her eggs in late February, incubating for 35 days, the eaglets should hatch in late March. Very late March. Eaglets fledge in ten to fourteen weeks and are full-grown at that time.

Keep watching, for sure, but remember that eagles are sensitive during nest

building and incubation so respect eagle privacy too. We are very lucky to have this opportunity; we shouldn't mess it up.

editor's note: The American Birding Association promotes a set of birding ethics (<http://listing.aba.org/ethics/>)

1. Promote the welfare of birds and their environment.

1(a) Support the protection of important bird habitat.

1(b) To avoid stressing birds or exposing them to danger, exercise restraint and caution during observation, photography, sound recording, or filming. Limit the use of recordings and other methods of attracting birds, and never use such methods in heavily birded areas or for attracting any species that is Threatened, Endangered, of Special Concern, or is rare in your local area. Keep well back from nests and nesting colonies, roosts, display areas, and important feeding sites. In such sensitive areas, if there is a need for extended observation, photography, filming, or recording, try to use a blind or hide, and take advantage of natural cover. Use artificial light sparingly for filming or photography, especially for close-ups.

1(d) Stay on roads, trails, and paths where they exist; otherwise, keep habitat disturbance to a minimum.

An article on the National Audubon website - www.audubon.org/magazine/winter-2017/five-rules-photographing-bald-eagle-nests says: Research shows that eagles are more likely to be bothered by any activity happening in full view, so try to shoot from a blind when you can. Distance is also a factor. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guidelines suggest staying 330 feet away from an active nest (and some states have their own laws about how close you can get)

The mission of the North Central Washington Audubon Society is to:
“Enhance, protect and restore healthy natural 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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North Central Washington Audubon Society is on Facebook too

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

February Field Trips

by Virginia Palumbo, Chelan

Dan Stephens is leading his annual Waterville Plateau field trip on February 3. The group will meet at 8:00 am at the Easy Street Park and Ride in Wenatchee, and will return by 4:00. Dress in layers for cold, windy weather, and bring lunch, water, and binoculars. Interesting species are found on this day-long trip; come join in! Dan's contact information is 679-4706 or dstephens@wvc.edu.

Join Joe Veverka on Tuesday, February 5 as he leads a birding trip at Walla Walla Point Park and Horan Natural Area. The group will meet in the parking lot at the north end of Walla Walla Point Park, by the playground and ball fields at 9:00 am. The trip will last until noon, regardless of weather. Total walking distance is two to three miles on level ground. Bring binoculars, weather appropriate clothing and footwear, and bird magnetism! Joe has a great eye and ear for birds, and always has enjoyable trips with exciting finds! To register please contact Joe at joe_everka@yahoo.com.

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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



A month ago, on a snowy Sunday, I saw three Red-winged Blackbirds at the feeders in our yard. From past experience, I know that they often send out scouts who report back to the flock on their findings. Sure enough, they did not stay long. Within minutes of their leaving, waves and waves of blackbirds flew to our place. They just kept coming like that old Alfred Hitchcock movie. My husband suggested we try to scare them away, but I felt like it was some sort of phenomenon and I wanted to watch and see what would happen. At one point, I estimated there were about 250 Red-winged Blackbirds flying around or perched on every bush, tree and snag within view of the feeders. And then, just as abruptly, they all left. The big group returned that afternoon and since then there have been smaller groups of the blackbirds coming around. The biggest group was about eighty but mostly we are seeing ten or fewer



male Red Crossbill

photo by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley



female Red Crossbill

photo by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valley

at a time. It's been interesting for sure. And when I mention this to other bird feeders, they say the Red-winged Blackbirds don't show up until February 11 or 14 or something like that. Many people closer to the river than us, do not see them at all during the winter.

Other than that, the only other feeder highlight this year has been a pair of Red Crossbills that I've seen twice. The bright red male was a nice, colorful sight during our mostly black and white winter. Recently a juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk has been working the feeders and my husband saw it take a Mourning Dove in midair!

On the Twisp Christmas Bird Count, my birding partner and I were lucky to spot a Ring-necked Pheasant rooster walking upstream on highway 20 a couple miles outside of Twisp. This is an unusual bird up here. Sadly, the next day I saw that it was dead on the highway not far from where we saw it. We had hoped it would make its way to some nearby feeders. The bird was in good condition and I was able to salvage it for the Slater Museum of Natural History's collection. My husband said it was a first-year bird based on new tail feathers and the length of the spurs on its legs.

Birdwatchers here in the Methow Valley continue to notice a shortage of forest birds at their feeders. Mountain Chickadees, Red and White-breasted Nuthatches, Steller's Jays, woodpeckers and Pine Siskins are all being missed. Have feeder watchers from other parts of our four-county region also noticed a shortage of these birds?

Editor's Notes



juvenile Sharp-shinned Hawk
photo by Teri J Pieper,
Methow Valley

NCW Recent Bird Sightings

Okanogan: Western Bluebirds and American Robins were seen in several places in the Methow Valley. A Say's Phoebe was in Twisp before the Christmas Bird Count and again after New Years. A pair of Northern Goshawks was hunting at a feeder outside of Winthrop. A flock of about 80 Snow Buntings was seen on the Bally Hill Road near Twisp. Dark-eyed Juncos, Black-capped Chickadees and House Finches have been singing spring songs in Twisp. Red-winged Blackbirds have also been singing in the Methow. A Swamp Sparrow, a Yellow-rumped Warbler and a Marsh Wren were seen on Washburn Island. Virginia Rails were heard along the Twisp River Road. Bewick's Wrens were seen at Cassimer Bar. A Long-eared Owl was hunting in the Okanogan Highlands. A Red-breasted Sapsucker was seen in Twisp. A Snowy Owl was seen off of Cameron Lake Road. A flock of Snow Buntings and a Ruffed Grouse were seen on Mary Ann Creek Road.

Douglas: A Snowy Owl was seen east of Mansfield. Two Long-tailed Ducks were seen on the Columbia across from Brewster.

compiled from the ncwabird email list
and eBird and Tweepers by Teri J Pieper

A Northern Goshawk and a Savannah Sparrow were seen on the Bridgeport Bar. A Eurasian Wigeon was seen on Lake Entiat. An Orange-crowned Warbler and a Peregrine Falcon were seen at Daroga Park. A Mountain Bluebird was seen in Moses Coulee. A Killdeer was seen at Porter's Pond in East Wenatchee. A Clark's Nutcracker and a Dusky Grouse were seen on Badger Mountain Road. Trumpeter Swans were seen at Jameson Lake.

Chelan: A Prairie Falcon was seen on the Horse Lake Road. A Peregrine Falcon was seen at the Chelan River Dam. A California Scrub-jay was seen at Horse Lake Road. A Wood Duck, two Eurasian Wigeons and a Greater White-fronted Goose were seen at Walla Walla Park in Wenatchee. A Swamp Sparrow was seen at Beebe Springs. An early Western Meadowlark was seen at the Chelan River PUD Trail.

Ferry: Trumpeter Swans were seen from highway 395, north of the Columbia River Bridge. Tundra Swans were seen from the Barnaby Creek Campground. Red Crossbills were singing in Republic.

Seeing Yourself in Good Places

by Mark Oswood, Larry Tobiska
and Penny Tobiska, Wenatchee



“If I were to discover that a certain kind of stone by the pond-shore was affected ... by a particular natural sound, as of a bird or insect, I see that one could not be completely described without describing the other.”

H. D. Thoreau

NCWAS too cannot be described apart from our volunteers and donors. In fact, we are one and the same thing.

Your donations empower the volunteer machinery of NCWAS. You see something of yourself every time you read the Phlox, engage with our social media, join one of our birding trips or festivals or programs, have a child or grandchild doing *What's that Bird?* or read about our involvement with local governance.

Every year, the holiday donation season is a reminder of the manifold needs of our world. We are now, and always, grateful that you made us a part of your giving.

Our once-a-year donation request fledges in late summer. Below, we list donors making donations through early January 2019. We'll list donors after early January in the September 2019 Phlox.

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Wanted: Sightings of color banded Horned Larks

by Devin de Zwaan Vancouver, BC

Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) are obligate open-country species, associated with grasslands, semi-arid deserts, and tundra. Since 2002, we have monitored an alpine breeding population near Smithers, B.C. All birds are fitted with 3 colored leg bands and one metal band. In 2015, we began tracking the migration of adults to investigate their migration and winter habitats. We need your help to locate our color banded Horned Larks to better understand the wintering behavior of these songbirds.

We request information on banded Horned Lark sightings. Our tracking devices suggest that they winter in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho from November to March. Specifically, east of the Cascades, from the Okanogan Valley south to Central and SE Washington and Oregon (including Klamath Falls), and SW Idaho near Boise and Twin Falls. In late February to May, many move north to the B.C./Washington border in the South Okanogan, up to the Central Okanogan, Merritt, and

especially Kamloops. Since exact color combinations can be difficult to read, we ask for three pieces of data that together are just as useful: 1) any band colors and which leg if possible (bird's right/left), 2) male/female, and 3) yellow wash to throat (yes/no). Yellow plumage indicates a Streaked Horned Lark, an endangered subspecies.

GPS location and photos are always welcome!

Like most grassland birds, Horned Larks are declining rapidly across North America (~ 70% decline since 1970). Knowing where birds spend the winter is vital to understanding conservation threats. We greatly appreciate any information you can contribute to the first migration study of Horned Larks in North America, and one of the first for an alpine songbird. Please direct sightings to Devin de Zwaan, PhD student at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada. Email: drdezwaan@gmail.com

Looking for Sagebrush Songbird Survey Volunteers

by Christi Norma, Audubon WA

Are you attracted to a melodious early morning hike through wide-open spaces? Join us on the Sagebrush Songbird Survey, a multi-year shrub steppe avian occupancy study of the Columbia Plateau in eastern Washington. The survey is a partnership of Audubon Washington, local chapters and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife since 2014. We are poised to complete field work in 2019! We need even more volunteers looking and listening for shrub steppe birds to reach this ambitious conservation goal.

Surveys are performed once a month in spring; one within the last two weeks of April, one within the first two weeks of May and a final survey within the first two weeks of June.

Field training provided:

April 6. 10 am – 4 pm Meeting place near Ellensburg TBA
April 7. 9 am – 3 pm Meeting place near Ephrata TBA

EXTRA! Get your camera ready to record your sagebrush steppe inspiration for our Sagebrush Sea Photo Contest. Your photos will tell the story of this awesome landscape and its inhabitants.

For more info and to sign up contact Christi Norman, Audubon WA Program Director, cnorman@audubon.org, or <http://wa.audubon.org/songbird-survey-eastern-washington-underway> or Richard Scranton, NCWAS Chapter Chair: rscrans4350@yahoo.com

Learn Bird Watching Basics at WVC

by Susan Ballinger, Wenatchee

Are you curious and interested in becoming a birder, America's fastest growing avocation? Join North Central Washington Audubon Society's Joe Veverka and Wenatchee Naturalist Susan Ballinger as they introduce beginners to the fundamentals of birdwatching in a collaborative setting. This hands-on course will use a variety of field guides, web-based tools, bird models and a several types of optics to better understand birdwatching. Loaner binoculars will be available, courtesy of NCWAS. The class will be held Monday and Wednesday evenings (6 - 8 pm), March 25 and 27, and a half-day field trip on Saturday March 30. We will practice ID skills during the half-day field trip to several local birding hotspots. The instructors' goal is to prepare you to attend upcoming local birding festivals including Othello Sandhill Crane Festival, Grays Harbor Shorebird Festival and Leavenworth Bird Fest. Register for this winter quarter class at: <https://www.wvc.edu/academics/continuing-education/index.html>



Varied Thrush
photo by Janet Bauer, Winthrop

Monthly Horan Bird Walks

North Central Washington Audubon Society's Friends of Horan invites you to join informal monthly bird walks to explore the Horan Natural Area and see birds. Outings will be on the third Wednesday of the month and led by Wenatchee Naturalist, Susan Ballinger. She will record bird sighting and enter them into the community science eBird database.

We will meet at 7:30 am at the north parking lot at Walla Walla Park, next to the restrooms, and spend about 30 minutes in the park, and then walk the two-mile round-trip loop within Horan Natural Area, returning about 10 am.

The Friends of Horan is dedicated to gathering and sharing information about the Horan area to increase public awareness about the area. These bird walks will immerse you in the beauty of the Horan Natural Area and provide an opportunity to learn about the area's history and the potential for future restoration, improvements and use.

Participants are welcome to come for all or part of any walk. No RSVP is needed.

We will not cancel due to weather conditions. Walks will be on the third Wednesday of the month from January through December. Contact Susan to learn more (skylinebal@gmail.com).

by Susan Ballinger, Wenatchee



Northern Flicker

photo by Peter Bauer, Winthrop

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Coastal Plain A Visual Conversation

by Mary Gallagher, Wenatchee

Join North Central Washington Audubon Society members, Susan Ballinger and Tim and Mary Gallagher, as they share stories and photographs of caribou, grizzly bears, birds, and plants from their adventures to the remote reaches of the coastal plain and Beaufort Sea of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Additionally, at the Wenatchee and Leavenworth presentations, Mark Oswood will share his work studying the ecology of Alaskan fresh waters.

Come see for yourself how irreplaceable this far corner of our country is and join in a conversation regarding YOUR role in protecting the Refuge.

Wenatchee - February 5

Wenatchee Valley Museum and Cultural Center

127 S Mission St

7 pm to 8:30 pm, doors open at 6:30 pm.

Leavenworth - February 6

Wenatchee River Institute

347 Division Street

7 pm to 8:30 pm, doors open at 6:30 pm.

Winthrop - February 7

Winthrop Ice Rink – upstairs meeting room

208 White Ave.

7 pm to 8:30 pm, doors open at 6:30 pm.

These programs are free. For more information contact: Mary Gallagher at marywillardgallagher@live.com or 206-650-7511

What YOU can do to help protect the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

by Mary Gallagher, Wenatchee

1) Comment on the draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) regarding the oil and gas leasing proposal. Comments will be accepted through Feb. 11, 2019 and can be sent by any of the following methods:

- Website: www.blm.gov/Alaska/Coastal-Plain-EIS
- Mail: Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS
222 West 7th Ave, Stop #13 Anchorage, Alaska 99513

2) Sign the petition to speak out against leasing our precious Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain to oil developer.

Go to: https://act.audubon.org/onlineactions/jhAgYIERqUyEWxgC-iPZFA2?ms=policy-adv-web-website_nas-engagementcard-20181220_arcticrefuge_alert

3) Contact your local elected Federal representatives providing comments and concerns regarding the EIS and ask your member of the House of Representatives to join Rep. Jared Huffman and co-sponsor the Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act before Feb. 11. Best results by 1) in person; 2) phone; and 3) mail. Let them know you live in their District and VOTE!

4) Share with friends, post on Facebook, and spread the word every way possible.

For More information see this excellent article: <https://www.audubon.org/magazine/winter-2018/a-journey-heart-alaskas-pristine-and-imperiled>

Christmas Bird Count Reports

I've seen interesting reports from various Christmas Bird Counts around our region and one from Homer Alaska. There have been notable declines in some species and upticks in some that ought to be wintering elsewhere. Additionally, there are declines in counters for some areas while others, like Twisp and Bridgeport had an eager bunch of volunteers to count birds. Weather is probably big factor in all of this.

Bridgeport saw a decline in overall numbers of birds – about 5000 less than the long-term average of 23,129. Waterfowl were down about 2000 and American Coots about 3000. Other notable declines included Bohemian Waxwings, Northern Shrikes and American Tree Sparrows. Notable increases included Bald Eagles, Wild Turkeys, Ring-billed Gulls, Herring Gulls, Common Ravens, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Gray-crowned Rosy-finches. The 88 species observed was just one short of the average 89.

Chelan managed to find 70 species with only 13 counters, and they had a new bird to add to their list – a Bewick's Wren.

Omak and Okanogan found 67 species with some notable highlights. These included Trumpeter Swans, Anna's Hummingbirds, the first ever Gadwall on this count and a highly unusual Turkey Vulture that forgot to migrate south.

And in Twisp, there was a record number of counters – 50! 39 were in the field and 11 at feeders. For Twisp, the weather was unusually good with temperatures in the low 30's and sun or partly cloudy skies most of the day giving good visibility. Dark-eyed Juncos were abundant as were

compiled by Teri J Pieper, Methow Valey

American Robins and Varied Thrushes. Three swans were observed but not identified. New additions to the count were a Red-breasted Sapsucker, Mountain Bluebirds, a Spotted Sandpiper, a Pacific Wren and a Harris's Sparrow! Declines included Clark's Nutcrackers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Mountain Chickadees, Pine Siskins and Steller's Jays. These are all forest birds and it may be a result of the frequent forest fires in the Methow.

Overall it seemed like many of the northern birds have not migrated this far south. In Homer, AK, some unusual species that were observed included Mountain Bluebirds, White-throated Sparrows, Double-crested Cormorants and four Anna's Hummingbirds. A notable missing species was the Steller's Jay and record numbers of American Robins were seen.

What does all this data mean? I am curious about the Steller's Jays. Did other counts have larger or smaller numbers of them? Bridgeport had 27 of them – a high number for that area. Are they moving to new places or is their population decreasing overall in north central Washington? The numbers of species and individuals are interesting to study and for me, these numbers bring more questions, rather than answers. It's a changing world and I expect to have more questions as time goes on.

It's been suggested that the compilers of the six counts in our four-county regions ought to coordinate the count dates in hopes of getting more volunteers to each count. Having one on December 28th and 29th and two on the 30th made it hard for folks to do as many CBC's as they'd wish.

Great Backyard Bird Count

from The Cornell Lab of Ornithology

Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real-time. Now, more than 160,000 people of all ages and walks of life worldwide join the four-day count each February to create an annual snapshot of the distribution and abundance of birds.

We invite you to participate! For at least fifteen minutes on one or more days of the count, February 15-18, simply tally the numbers and kinds of birds you see. You can count from any location, anywhere in the world, for as long as you wish! If you're new to the count or have not participated since before the 2013 merger with eBird, you must create a free eBird account to enter your checklists. If you already have an account, just use the same login name and password. If you have already participated in another Cornell Lab citizen-science project, you can use your existing login information, too. For more information see <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>

Bird Fest 2019

by Richard Scranton, Wenatchee

The 17th Annual Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest, May 16-19, celebrates birdsong and the natural world with top-notch bird guides, new adventures, and Richard Crossley as this year's keynote speaker! Crossley is an internationally acclaimed birder, photographer and award-winning author of 'The Crossley ID Guide' series. Festival activities offer new and returning field trips for experienced birders and casual birding recreationalists that explore an array of habitats.

Our talented volunteer bird guides lead everything from rigorous off-trail excursions to gentle walks, river rafting and even a canoe trip on the Columbia River! Free events, family activities, and classes for those who love the arts mean that Leavenworth Spring Bird Fest truly has something for everyone!

Please join us in celebrating nature at this year's Leavenworth BirdFest. More details will be provided in the next edition of the Phlox and www.leavenworthspringbirdfest.org/

February Wild Phlox

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North Central Washington Audubon Society Calendar

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February 1	Soil Science and Story	In Tonasket with the Okanogan Highlands Alliance. See www.okanoganhighlands.org/education/hw
February 3	Waterville Plateau Field Trip	With Dan Stephens. See page 3
February 5	Horan Field Trip	With Joe Veverka. See page 3
February 5, 6, 7	Arctic National Wildlife Refuge	Programs in Wenatchee, Leavenworth and Winthrop. See page 6
February 8	Arctic Solitaire program	With the Methow Conservancy in Winthrop. See www.methowconservancy.org/enews.html
February 15-18	Great Backyard Bird Count	Join a world-wide effort. See page 7
February 20	Monthly Horan Bird Walk	3rd Wednesday of the month. See page 6
February 20	Owling at Big Valley	With the Methow Conservancy in Winthrop. Reserve your spot. See www.methowconservancy.org/enews.html
March 22-24	Othello Sandhill Crane Festival	www.othellosandhillcranefestival.org/
March 25, 27, 30	Birding Basics at WVC	Birding fundamentals. See page 5
April 12-14	Olympic Bird Fest	www.olympicbirdfest.org/
May 16-19	Leavenworth Bird Fest	Mark your calendar. See page 7



You can find the Wild Phlox online at our website - www.ncwaudubon.org
The beautiful photos are even nicer in color.



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