



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – June 2015

Cashiers – Franklin – Highlands – Scaly Mountain

www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org

The mission of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society is to provide opportunities to enjoy and learn about birds and other wildlife and to promote conservation and restoration of the habitats that support them.

From the President . . .

Exploring the connection between birds and native plants

Recently two of us from HPAS participated in an all day Audubon North Carolina sponsored meeting in Asheville. This was a get-together of some of the people from the Audubon North Carolina (ANC) organization (e.g., Curtis Smalling and Kim Brand) and from local chapter members who currently play a part in ANC's "Bird Friendly Community" (BFC) initiative. Two employees from National Audubon sat in on the meeting as well.

The Bird Friendly Community program is an interesting sub-heading under ANC's organizational umbrella and, from all that I can tell, is where much of the 'rubber hits the road' with regard to ANC involvement in tangible projects that bridge between multiple chapters within the state. For example, the BFC has been the source of the ambitious program to install 10,000 nest boxes designed to increase nesting success for the Brown-headed Nuthatches in the Piedmont regions of N.C. Of course the ANC/BFC Brown-headed Nuthatch initiative helped to inspire HPAS to embark on our own, currently ongoing, experiment with nest boxes with alternatively sized entrance holes for mountain bird species (we rarely have Brown-headed Nuthatches on the Highlands Plateau, although they nest near Franklin).

Another Bird Friendly Community initiative that is gaining statewide momentum, and which was discussed at length at the Asheville meeting, is the program to encourage the use of native plant species in landscaping as a means to stimulate native bird populations. Many of you have probably seen the color brochures that the ANC/BFC group has developed and which list examples of native plant suitable for landscaping in coastal, piedmont, and the mountain regions of N.C. In addition to organizing the native plant lists themselves, ANC and the BFC group are using the organization's state-wide 'sphere of influence' to help organize nurserymen and plant growers to be able to provide the same native plants that are on the BFC native plant lists, such that there will hopefully be a balance between the anticipated commercial supply and demand for native plants from landscapers and homeowners (a 'win-win-win' for growers, nurseries, native plant enthusiasts, and persons with an interest in healthy native bird populations and the environment).

The initial plan is to highlight a limited number of 'new' native plants each year, for the next several years; one key aspect of this is to help the growers anticipate demand at least a growing season in advance. I am very hopeful that this ambitious ANC/BFC native plant initiative will really 'take root' and develop into a significant contribution towards implementing a more significant role for native plant landscaping and native birds throughout the state. A very good use of ANC, chapter, and individual members' energies in my opinion!

At this point during the Asheville meeting, one of the National Audubon representatives, Robert Petty, made an announcement that National Audubon has decided to adopt a similar native plants for native birds initiative at the national level, patterned after the ANC/BFC model! Petty stated that he thought the national native plants for native birds initiative would turn out to be the "most impactful initiative" that National Audubon will embark on in recent times (strong words coming in this era of many serious crises)!

All of this planning at the state and national level to encourage planting native plants for the benefit of native birds sounds familiar to many of us. HPAS, along with some of our local conservation partners (e.g., the Land Stewards of the Highlands Plateau), can be proud to have begun promoting the same message several years ago, shortly after many of us were first introduced to the then novel concept by Dr. Douglas Tallamy, during a seminar at the no longer functional Highlands Native Plant Symposium.

Tallamy's book, *Bringing Nature Home*, has become a must read, current-era classic in how citizens can make significant individual contributions towards our environment, both at the backyard level and now, ultimately, at the national level. I am happy that HPAS recognized this important concept early on and that our chapter began doing our part to help promote the synergistic relationship between native plants and native birds some time ago...and perhaps in some small way helped to inspire Audubon North Carolina, and now even National Audubon, to embark on ever more ambitious aspects of the same significant concept!

Russell Regnery

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Annual Potluck and Program *How birds can help inform forest plan*

The annual potluck supper will be Friday, June 8 at the Highlands Civic Center. The supper will begin at 6:00 p.m. followed by the program at 7:00 p.m. Please bring a dish to share and a utensil with which to serve it. Drinks will be provided.

Curtis Smalling, Audubon North Carolina Director of Land Bird Conservation, will be the featured speaker.

Smalling will be speaking on the work Audubon and partners are doing for the Pisgah Nantahala Forest Plan Revision and what the birds can tell us about that process, and how the chapter and individuals can continue to have their voices heard.

Opportunities to expand your Audubon circle

Audubon North Carolina Chapter Day is scheduled from 10 a.m.-4 p.m., on Saturday, August 1, at Haw River State Park. Registration information and an agenda will be available as we get closer to the date. This is a great chance to meet ANC staff and share experiences with members of the other NC Chapters.

Prepare to join Audubon's amazing network of dedicated chapter, centers, state and national leaders to celebrate One Audubon! The next biennial Audubon Convention will take place at the Lansdowne Resort on the banks of the Potomac River, near historic Leesburg, Va., on July 10-13. Enjoy four full days of exciting field trips, inspiring speakers, in-depth hands-on workshops and the camaraderie only Audubon can provide. Registration and lodging details are available at www.audubonconvention.org.



HPAS members sight spring migrants

Early spring brings one of the great spectacles of nature in the Western Hemisphere. At this time many of the migratory birds that wintered in Central and South America follow the Mississippi and Atlantic Flyways to return to North America. These migrants range from hummingbirds to eagles and number in the millions. Those spanning the Gulf of Mexico often make landfall in the Gulf States: Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. When this occurs, members of the Audubon Society are often there to see the repatriation of our most colorful and interesting fellow inhabitants.

Recently, sixteen members of HPAS traveled to Dauphin Island, Alabama, to observe the spring return of all the perching and shore birds that would be on this landfall island in warm Gulf waters. Their highest hope was to see an avian “fall-out:” the landfall descent of thousands of birds completing a difficult migratory crossing and landing, exhausted and famished, at the first

opportunity. Fall-outs can be bucket-list experiences as birders find themselves surrounded by flocks of thousands of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Prothonotary Warblers, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Eastern Kingbirds or any of scores of other returning species.



This Dauphin Island trip was made possible by John and Jennie Stowers, seasonal Highlanders and HPAS members who made their home on Dauphin Island available for guests and to serve as a central base for planning and operations. The three days of intensive bird watching were organized and led by Highlands resident Romney Bathurst, a highly experienced birder and HPAS Board member who has birded in over 90 countries and whose lifetime list of sighted birds numbers over 6,500.

The three days of birding started early each day, commencing at daylight and lasting all day. Venues included the Dauphin Island Audubon Sanctuary, the Shell Mounds and the area known as Goat Trees. One morning, a local expert on shore birds led the hardy birders on a long trek across dunes and along shorelines. Field notes were taken and each evening the group carefully updated their list of sighted birds.

What was seen? Although there were no fall-outs, over 100 species of birds were seen and countless hundreds of individual birds. Among the most notable were: Blue-winged Teals, some flashing their blue speculums edged in emerald green, the males

having a creamy crescent on their faces; Great Egrets in breeding plumage with lively green facial skin; the elusive Clapper Rail; the equally elusive Hermit Thrush; flocks of Cedar Waxwings; Indigo Bunting; Orchard Orioles; Prothonotary Warblers in blooming Bottlebrush bushes; and various herons, terns, egrets, warblers and sparrows. A lone Bald Eagle was spotted flying low while a Coopers Hawk circled higher overhead. Nesting Ospreys ferrying fish to their chicks were enjoyed by all.

William McReynolds

Nest box experiment generates email chatter



We have heard from numerous participants of the nest box project that "things are happening" in many of the boxes that were put out last Fall in the Highlands/Cashiers area. Part-time residents are returning to discover signs of life when first checking their boxes. It is an exciting time! Nests of various materials, with or without eggs or babies are being found. It has been fun to hear from partakers who are enjoying watching what is happening in official bird boxes in their own backyards!

Participants will monitor nesting activity through early summer. HPAS will summarize overall nesting success after this nesting season and determine whether or not the entrance hole diameter in each box is a meaningful factor for nesting success of various local species. These results will be tallied, and a determination for continuing and expanding this project into 2016 will be decided. So stay tuned!

Regina Hunter, of Glenville, submitted these photographs. She and her family are watching the comings and goings of bird parents busy around the boxes. We do believe that right now, her nest of NINE EGGS(!) will be a record for us! If you can top this, please submit your photos!



Michelle Styring

Education Committee highlights

The Education Committee is anticipating another exciting season of educational opportunities for adults and children that will reach hundreds of people. Some highlights include:

- Curtis Smalling will be presenting a CLE class in Highlands on June 5.
- We will sponsor bird of prey presentations in Highlands to the general public and in Cashiers for the Boy's & Girl's Club.
- We will partner with the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust and the Cashiers Historical Society to provide environmental activities for summer campers.
- We will participate in Mountain Wildlife Days July 17-18 in Sapphire Valley. Romney will lead a bird walk on July 17 and Russ will be the Master of Ceremonies on July 18.
- We will assist the Highlands School, Blue Ridge School, and Summit Charter School in monitoring their Audubon bird boxes.

Check out our website for details of these and other events. If you would like to be involved in any of these activities or just volunteer for one event please contact Ann Campbell, Education Chairperson, anncampbell48@hotmail.com.

HPAS field trips

June 4: Don't miss our annual Owl Prowl! The Charlotte Raptor Rehab Center, sponsored by Highlands Biological Station and Highlands Plateau Audubon, will present a program featuring live birds at the Highlands Nature Center, 7:30 p.m. The program is free and suitable for all ages. Following the program, weather permitting, those with flashlights may choose to join in the search for owls around town. Leaders are Cynthia Strain, Romney Bathurst, Brock Hutchins.

June 6: Beginners' walk, starting at 8:30 a.m. – Bird-banding at Tessentee Reserve, George Kaye to lead, Pat Strickland assisting. Meet in the parking lot behind Highlands Town Hall at 7:30 a.m. Bring a folding chair if desired, be prepared with long pants and closed-toe shoes for long grass that may be wet with dew, bring a bottle of water, insect repellent and binoculars – loaners will be available if needed. Learn about our local and migrant birds in an up close and personal encounter with field researcher Mark Hopey. Good photo opportunities!

June 13: A walk at the Old Ranger Station and Forest Service property on Flat Mt. Rd. Russ Regnery to lead, George Kaye assisting. Wear good hiking shoes for the tree farm on Flat Mt. Road as we search for Field Sparrows, Indigo Buntings, Canada Warblers and others. Meet at 7:30 a.m. behind Highlands Town Hall.

June 16: Birds & Beer – an hour of birding prior to the “beer,” at HCLT's Dixson Park, Highlands. Meet outside Ugly Dog Pub at 5:15 p.m. to carpool to the reserve. Romney Bathurst to lead.

June 20: Jones Gap & Bartram Trail, Brock Hutchins leading, Mary Jo Askew assisting. Meet at 7:30 a.m. at the parking lot behind Highlands Town Hall. Explore a bit of the Bartram Trail and enjoy great views as well as birds! Good hiking footwear and water are advised.

June 27: Joint trip with HCLT to High Hampton, no charge, meet at 7:30 a.m. at the Crosby Center, Highlands, and at 8 a.m. at Cashiers new Rec. Center parking lot. Romney Bathurst and Kyle Pursel leading, Pat Strickland assisting. As always, binoculars will be available as needed. The flora and fauna are varied and plentiful! Possible Hooded Warblers, Mountain Purple Pitcher Plant and lots more!

July 17: Mountain Wildlife Days walk, Cashiers Commons, Romney Bathurst to lead, Ann Campbell assisting. Meet at Cashiers Rec. Ctr. at 9 a.m. A surprising number of birds may be found in this more urban area! After the walk, go on to the many activities at Mountain Wildlife Days in Sapphire.

July 21: Birds & Beer – 5:30 p.m., Sapphire Mountain Brewing Co., Sapphire National Golf Club, Clubhouse, 50 Slicers Avenue. Pizza and pub grub are available along with a group of congenial Audubon members.

Aug. 1: Beginners' Walk, starting at 8:30 a.m., Cashiers Commons, Russ Regnery to lead, Ann Campbell to assist. There are plenty of birds to be seen around the Rec Center, the boardwalk and the Village Green. Loaner bins will be available. Russ will emphasize basic birding skills beginners can use to find and identify birds.

Aug. 18: Birds & Beer, 5:30 p.m., Ugly Dog Pub in Cashiers. A new venue for our informal gathering to talk birds and critters, or most anything else except politics and religion! Get to know some of our Audubon friends and stay for a bite to eat too. Be sure to check: www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org for updates! Call Romney Bathurst, 828-526-1939, with questions.

Sept. 5: Beginners' Walk, meet at 8:30 a.m. at Highlands Town Hall, either Dixon Park in town or Flat Mt. Rd.

Sept. 12: Charlie Davis Memorial BRP trip (Note Sept. 19 as rain date if needed), Romney & Brock to lead. This trip, in search of autumn migrants, is made in memory of Charlie Davis, who was a long time member and supporter of Audubon, a man who loved the mountains and the Blue Ridge Parkway. We will leave earlier than usual, at 7:00 a.m., from the Highlands Town Hall parking area. Please pack a light lunch for we will not return until mid-afternoon. The Parkway always provides spectacular views along with interesting birds. Please contact Romney Bathurst to sign up, 828-526-1939.

Sept. 15: Birds & Beer, 5:30 p.m. at the Ugly Dog Pub, Highlands. With autumn in the air, the migrant birds will be too – come find out what's being seen in your neck of the woods!

Sept. 19: Rain date for Charlie Davis Memorial BRP trip

Sept. 19 – 25: Possible Hawk Watch, Brock Hutchins leading. As the hawk migration is highly weather dependent, those interested

must contact him with interest so that last minute plans to meet at the Whiteside Mt. parking lot can be conveyed: brockhutchins@bellsouth.net, 828-787-1387. As many as 300 Broad-winged Hawks have been observed in one afternoon atop Whiteside!

HPAS Program Schedule 2015

Unless otherwise noted, programs begin at 7:30 p.m., preceded by a time for fellowship and refreshments, starting at 7:00 p.m. Additional details about these programs will be available on the website as the dates approach.

June 8: Highlands Civic Center. Potluck Supper at 6:00 p.m. followed by the program at 7:00 p.m. Curtis Smalling, Director of Land Bird Conservation for Audubon North Carolina, will present.

June 22: Hudson Library in Highlands. Robbie Fearn, Director of the Donal C. O'Brien, Jr Audubon Sanctuary at Pine Island, NC, will present. Please enter through the rear door.

July 6: Hudson Library in Highlands, John and Cathy Sill: "Birding in Alaska." The Sills, who are birders, authors and artists from Franklin, will present. Please enter through the rear door.

July 20: Hudson Library in Highlands, PBS film, "Hummingbirds: Magic in the Air" will be shown. Please enter through the rear door.

Aug. 3: Hudson Library in Highlands. PBS film, "Owl Power" will be shown. Please enter through the rear door.

Aug. 9: Highlands Civic Center Pavilion 5:00 p.m. Annual Picnic.

Aug. 24: Hudson Library in Highlands. Ed and Cindy Boos will present "Wild Critter Adventures." The Booses are members of our chapter who accomplish truly extraordinary, professional level, avian photography. Please enter through the rear door.

New membership co-chairs welcomed

The Board is happy to announce the addition of two new leaders to our volunteer team: Mary Jo Askew and Sarah Pursel, who will serve as Co-Chairs of the Membership Committee. Mary Jo and her husband, Jim, are longtime members of the Chapter. She was the catalyst behind our successful Birdathon a number of years ago. Mary Jo will join the Board. Sarah and her husband, Kyle, have also been involved for several years. Sarah, who is Program Director for the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust, assists our Education Committee on outreach programs. We all look forward to working with these two capable and delightful ladies.

Pat Strickland, who has served as Membership Chair, is happy to rotate out of this position. We are not saying goodbye to her, though, as she will continue to serve on the Board. Thank you, Pat, for your service in the past.

Membership report

Thank you to everyone who has renewed their memberships so far this year! If you have not yet renewed, please take a moment to fill out a membership form and send it with your check to: HPAS, P.O. Box 833, Highlands, NC 28741. Forms are available on the HPAS web site: www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org.

We have had five new memberships this year. Please welcome our new members: Erin Bronk and Rick Rawlins; Al and Glenda Cadarette; Margaret Walker Costello; John and Gabrielle Gillies; and Duncan Parham.

In this edition of The Mountain Warbler, we welcome all members of the National Audubon Society who live within our service area. This will be the only copy of the newsletter you will receive unless you join our local chapter. Access to the HPAS webpage is of course publicly available (www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org).

Supporting National and Audubon North Carolina are important; the larger organizations have the clout to support wildlife refuges and other major national and international bird conservation efforts. However, becoming a member of HPAS, and/or the Franklin Bird Club, is where the *local* participation begins. HPAS strives to be an asset for this community. If you are not already a member of HPAS, please consider stepping forward to become a participant in our modest but important and exciting environmental educational experience.

Officers

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Conservation – Kyle Pursel

Education – Ann Campbell

Field Trips – Romney Bathurst

Finance – Brock Hutchins

Hospitality – Dee Andry

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Nominating & Leadership Development – Don Shure
Program – Bill Peavey

At Large – George Kaye, Conservation
Michelle Styring, Nest Box Project
Glenda Zahner, Education
Pat Strickland, Communications

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