



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – December 2017

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 . . .

Looking back through the Mountain Warbler

Just as many of you probably have done, my primary motive for joining our local Highlands Plateau Audubon chapter was to become more familiar with the bird species with which I had begun to share more of my time in our eastern forest. And that part of my ‘life experiment,’ I am happy to report, has been reasonably successful; I am better able to appreciate and understand our local birds than I was ten years ago, thanks in large part to the chapter’s bird outings and evening programs.

After I joined HPAS, the HPAS Conservation Committee became one of the original local partners promoting the local ‘native plants for native birds’ project, inspired by a Dr. Doug Tallamy lecture at the no longer active Highlands Native Plant Symposium (Tallamy’s thesis was subsequently discussed in TMW, May 2011). This concept, which provides individually actionable conservation goals was a conservation paradigm shift for many of us (Helen and me included), as we began to relate to our native plant, insect, and bird species with new a new understanding and appreciation.

Like many of you, we now regard our property as a veritable Southern Appalachian native garden that also happens to encourage native birds. The native-plants-for-native-birds concept makes so much bird and conservation sense, and provides such a viable ‘strategy’ for enjoyable gardening, that hopefully the concept has become a ‘no-brainer’ for many environmentally sensitive local horticulturists and bird enthusiasts. Subsequent to HPAS involvement (and wider dissemination of Tallamy’s message), Audubon NC began to develop an analogous native plants program statewide, and this state program became a model for what is now a major initiative for National Audubon!

I’m proud that, during the six years I have served as HPAS chapter president, the chapter has continued to make strides in terms of regular, educational bird outings and evening programs, educational outreach to local schools, initiating our own community project to study cavity nesting birds, and to partner with Western Carolina University and Young Harris College to support academically rigorous, regional avian research programs. Hopefully, students of various ages, as well as chapter members, will continue to monitor and utilize the 150+ existing, chapter-sponsored nest boxes within the HPAS area and that ensuing projects will constitute significant milestones in cultivating ornithologists of the future.

Education clearly is a requisite for informed, meaningful conservation: “Only if we understand can we care. Only if we care will we help. Only if we help shall they be saved.” (Jane Goodall, as referenced in TMW, March 2013).

I admit that, at the onset of my tenure as President, it didn’t occur to me that I would be expected to write something of potential interest, on a regular basis, for The Mountain Warbler. In retrospect, the recurrent writing experience has been an enjoyable challenge and now helps makes me to appreciate just how fast time flies.

For example, who would have guessed that sea-level rise and climate change would now be nearly universally recognized concerns (TMW, Oct 2014)? And sadly, that within less than ten years many of us have

begun to experience decreased frequency of observations of migratory species such as Veery, Wood Thrush, and some of what used to be 'common' warbler species, including our chapter mascot, the Black-throated Blue Warbler.

I hope you were patient with, and perhaps responded to, the recurring newsletter appeals for continued community HPAS involvement; for example, in TMW, May 2016 'Only three things that money can't buy are true love, homegrown tomatoes...and volunteers for worthy causes' (with apologies to the late Guy Clark).

Aside from the good birding, educational experiences, and periodic opportunities to write for the newsletter, I acknowledge that my association with HPAS has been a welcome introduction to a community of fellowship.

As I complete the maximum term-limits for HPAS Board of Directors and President, I am gratefully indebted to the many people with whom I have been privileged to interact, including the good (and patient) folks who have helped to produce the last 36 issues of The Mountain Warbler!

Russell Regnery

Talking turkey

Like the potato, tomato, corn and tobacco, the Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*) is a North American gift to the world. According to Lovett Williams, in 1492 the population of this indigenous bird covered a good deal of the eastern and southern continent and numbered 40 million.

By 1940, overhunting and habitat loss had reduced their presence to just 12 percent of their earlier range. Since then, good conservation and transplant efforts have reinstated the Wild Turkey and it now appears in all states except Alaska.



This truly native American bird is highly social and prodigiously vocal within their flock or raft. They produce at least 30 distinct calls, signals to others within earshot. The males gobble to call the hens, hence they are gobblers. There are also "whippoorwill calls" to warn an adversary, distinct "rattles" that signal a fight, and a sharp, loud note or "alarm putt" signaling an approaching predator. Other alarms include an "alarm *pit-pit-pit*" calling all heads up, a "singing alarm" signaling a high-flying bird of prey and "distress scream" when attacked. Hens emit "hatching yelps," "hatching hoots" and "assembly yelps" to hatchlings and young poults. There are a variety of other turkey whistles,

cackles, clucks, coos and calls. Poults begin imprinting on their hen mothers' calls even before hatching.

Immature males are called Jakes. Gobblers or Toms court females and try to intimidate other males with a puffed-up display of feathers that is worthy of a float in a Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. Gobblers and some hens sport beards, wattles, caruncles and a snood hanging over the beak. The male's featherless head can change colors quickly from gray to red and blue signaling mood and sexual interest.

Turkeys forage along roads and in open fields and have home ranges of hundreds of acres depending on the availability of insects, grubs, nuts and other food. Nationally, their range has expanded north and much farther west. Adults molt gradually once a year in the warmth of the summer months. The Thanksgiving Day turkey that graces our tables each year is a domestic version of America's Wild Turkey.

The Highlands Plateau Audubon Society, focused on enjoying and preserving birds and their habitats, is a Chapter of the National Audubon Society and a 501(c) (3) organization. For information on all our activities and membership, please visit www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org.

William McReynolds

Christmas Bird Count in Highlands is December 15

Join HPAS for the 118th National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. Your participation is welcome to make this the best count ever. Last year we had 26 participants and recorded 46 species of birds. We meet at the Founder's Park in Highlands at 7:30 a.m., divide into groups, and survey bird populations within a 7.5-mile radius of Highlands. This includes Cashiers and south to the Georgia border.

After the count, we will meet for lunch for a countdown and share experiences.

If you want to participate, please contact Brock Hutchins at brockhutchins@bellsouth.net or call 404-295-0663.

Brock Hutchins

Preliminary Summary of Nest Box Activity

Until the “experts” complete their statistical calculations, final results from all four nest box studies cannot be given. However, we do have some interesting data that have been confirmed. This year's HPAS participant study showed that in 149 boxes (38 of which were not used by any birds this year), there were 157 nesting attempts. That means there were multiple nestings in many of the boxes.

Some 71 nestings were successful (nests built, eggs laid, babies hatched, fledglings left the nest). We also identified 36 “maybe successful” nestings. Unfortunately, 50 of the 157 attempts proved unsuccessful.

Dr. Olga Milenkaya of Young Harris College launched two projects with the 106 boxes that were on or near campus in Young Harris, Georgia. The first was testing how parental effort (how often they left the nest to get food for the nestlings) affects response to predators, while the second compared Carolina Chickadee behavior in response to House Wrens as compared to a longer-established predator, an eastern gray squirrel. We look forward to seeing what her study shows.

Grad student Chelsea Corrigan of Western Carolina University, compared personality traits in Eastern Bluebirds that nested in either an urban area or in rural sites. She monitored HPAS boxes, plus boxes in Franklin, as well as boxes near the university. Her results should be available later in 2018.

Sarah Britton, also a graduate student of WCU, investigated how the presence of House Wrens indirectly influences reproductive behaviors of Carolina Chickadees. This study should be especially interesting to some of you. Many of us have frustratingly watched our boxes with Chickadees inside suddenly be overtaken by House Wrens building a nest on top of the Chickadee nest, thereby making the Chickadee nesting attempt fail! Her study should give us insight on how these “take overs” by the House Wrens are affecting Carolina Chickadee populations.

Look for final results of these studies in a future newsletter. Thanks, again, to all of you who continue to participate in the HPAS nest box project!

*Your Next Box Committee,
Michelle Styring, George Kaye, William McReynolds,
Jeri Wexelbaum and Russ Regnery*

Federal Duck Stamp



Dear Highlands Plateau Audubon members, here is a simple way to make a positive impact for wildlife conservation. We normally think of the Duck Stamp is for hunters, but purchasing a duck stamp can bring benefits to birders and nature enthusiasts also. Almost all the money collected goes to purchasing and leasing land for the National Wildlife Refuge System. For more information and where to purchase stamps visit:
<https://www.fws.gov/birds/get-involved/duck-stamp.php>

Volunteer with HPAS

Without volunteers there would be no ‘grass roots’ to most community organizations and, in the example of a local Audubon chapter, there would be no organization at all. HPAS has a healthy organizational structure that encourages turnover of leadership of directors and committee chairpersons after completion of several years of service. The ‘price we pay’ for healthy leadership turnover is that the organization must routinely find new volunteer leaders. We must cultivate our own homegrown leadership.

HPAS directors and committees have a good time working together. If you aren’t already, please consider volunteering to the long-term viability of HPAS. Let us know if you are interested. We are recruiting for the following leadership positions: Chairs for the Field Trips Committee, the Nominating & Leadership Development Committee, the Hospitality Committee, the Programs Committee and additional active Directors.

2017 Members of Highlands Plateau Audubon Society

Special thanks to all our Local Chapter members. Your generous support of our growing organization has provided funding for expanded activities in our mountain community. The list reflects payments received through November 15, 2017.

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Highlands Plateau Audubon Society

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