

# HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

High Country Audubon Society - Serving Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties

January/February 2012

Volume 4 Issue 1

## HC Audubon at Cove Creek Elementary

On October 29, 2011 Doris Ratchford (Education Committee Chair), Betsy Murrelle and Anita Clemmer met at the Cove Creek Elementary School to take Lynn Gordon's 4<sup>th</sup> grade class on their first bird walk. Doris spoke to the group about bird watching etiquette and how to use binoculars before taking the 15 children outside. Even though there weren't many birds to be seen during the walk, mostly eastern bluebirds, they used binoculars, saw how a field guide works, and got lots of questions answered.



Doris, Betsy and kids looking for birds

The class has been assigned the task of determining which birds nest here and use nest boxes, in order to pass the pertinent

information along to the Cove Creek Collaborative Project participants in the art department at Appalachian State University. They will use the information relayed to them about nest box and cavity hole sizes to create unique boxes to put up around the school area for the students to study further.

The objective of the bird walk this time of year was to demonstrate the drastic difference in the numbers of year round birds and the spring migrants, of which some do breed here. The contrast will be dramatic when we take them out again in May.

The enthusiasm shown by the 4<sup>th</sup> graders was evident and they have been on small bird walks around the school yard with Ms. Gordon since the October visit. We thank Doris and the volunteers, who enjoyed the experience very much, and encourage other HCAS members to participate in bird walks sponsored by our chapter whenever possible. If you are interested contact Doris Ratchford at [dpratchford@me.com](mailto:dpratchford@me.com).

## Lake Mattamuskeet Field Trip

December 4-6, 2011 HC Audubon Field trip to: Lake Mattamuskeet, Alligator River, Stumpy Point, Bodie Island, Pea Island, Nags Head, Palmetto Pear tree Preserve, and points in between.

by Jesse Pope



Six High Country Audubon members ventured down to the coast for some early winter birding around several National Wildlife Refuges, preserves, and coastal birding sites. The group included Van Joffrion, Bob Cherry, Houck and KB Medford, Mickey Shortt, and myself. Well, we picked up Houck and KB in Winston-Salem, and Mickey joined us at

Lake Mattamuskeet on Monday, he is currently working at the Wright Brothers National Monument for the winter but will most likely return to work at Grandfather in the spring. Mickey was our local knowledge on Monday for the morning and early afternoon. We had hoped to catch up with Curtis Smalling on the trip as well, but due to unforeseen circumstances on a construction project at his home in Stumpy Point he couldn't join us. Too bad for Curtis, because we really did see some excellent birds!

The trip didn't start out very well, as I opened the back hatch of the vehicle at our first rest stop only to be greeted by Bob's famous home brew nicely packaged in a Sam Adams 12 pack box flying to the ground (photos on facebook and possibly on yahoo groups!). We managed to

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### January

17	Chapter Meeting NC Ag Extension Cooperative Conference rooms	6:30 p.m.
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### February

12	Burke's Garden Field Trip (backup date February 19th).	
17-20	Great Backyard Bird Count	
18	Field trip to Trout Lake, if the weather allows. Richard Gray is the leader.	7:00 a.m.
282	Chapter Meeting at Watauga County Library	6:30 p.m.
29	New River State Park Field Trip (backup date March 7 <sup>th</sup> )	

A \$5 donation is requested with field trip attendance.

All events and meeting times are subject to change.

For updated information please visit

<http://highcountryaudubon.org>.

## Yellow-bellied Sapsucker



- The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker is considered a key-stone species. Other species take advantage of the holes that the birds make in trees.
- A group of sapsuckers are collectively known as a "slurp" of sapsuckers.
- Sapsuckers can drill as many as fifty holes per hour into trees.
- The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker frequently uses human-produced materials to help in its territorial drumming. Street signs and metal chimney flashing amplify the irregular tapping of a territorial sapsucker. The sapsucker seems to suffer no ill effects of whacking its bill on metal, and a bird will return to a favorite sign day after day to pound out its Morse code-like message.
- They are mainly an insect eater with 36% of his food coming from ants. Depending on the source you read, sap may or may not be a big part of their diet.
- They are known to feed on as many as 1,000 different species of trees, but birches, sugar maples, and scotch pines are a few common favorites.

Information gathered from What Bird, Smithsonian and Wild Birds Unlimited. Photo by Cameron Rogan on Cornell Labs.

## Window Strikes

### WINDOW STRIKES — HOW TO MINIMIZE THEM AND WHAT TO DO IF A BIRD HITS THE WINDOW

By Martha Cutler

It's probably not news to most of us that birds do occasionally fly into our windows. We may not be aware of the scope of the problem, however. According to Daniel Klem "A vast and growing amount of evidence supports the interpretation that, except for habitat destruction, collisions with clear and reflective sheet glass and plastic cause the deaths of more birds than any other human-related avian mortality factor." [[training.fws.gov/EC/Resources/.../avian\\_mortality\\_at\\_windows.pdf](http://training.fws.gov/EC/Resources/.../avian_mortality_at_windows.pdf)]

#### WHAT CAN WE DO TO MINIMIZE THESE WINDOW STRIKES?

The Internet offers a lot of information about what we can do to minimize window strikes. The following links may be helpful

[http://web4.audubon.org/bird/at\\_home/SafeWindows.html](http://web4.audubon.org/bird/at_home/SafeWindows.html)

<http://www.sialis.org/windowstrikes.htm>

<http://www.nwf.org/News-and-Magazines/National-Wildlife/Birds/Archives/2001/Steering-Birds-Clear-of-Windows.aspx>

[http://www.flap.org/flap\\_home.htm](http://www.flap.org/flap_home.htm) (deals with window treatment only)

<http://www.sibleyguides.com/2007/11/more-on-windows-and-birds/> (informal reports on various things Sibley has tried)

#### Following are some of the most common suggestions

- The single best thing you can do according to most sites is to place feeders and birdbaths within 3' of a window or further than 30' away
- Do NOT hang plants inside windows, especially windows that seem to be hit often
- Use light colored blinds or drapes and keep them closed at least when you are away from home
- Plant shade trees or shrubs to reduce the reflectivity of windows

Other suggestions mainly concern the windows themselves, ways to make the windows more visible to birds while still allowing us to see the birds from inside, and ways to physically keep the birds from hitting the window (placing objects or planting in front of windows or using various types of netting).

#### WHAT TO DO IF A BIRD HITS YOUR WINDOW

If a bird hits your window, try to help it recover by following the advice at <http://www.sialis.org/emergency.htm>. It is important to protect the bird from cats, dogs or other predators while it is recovering. It is also important to keep the bird from hurting itself if it revives and tries to fly off. Keep it warm, dry and quiet by placing it in a small (covered) box or bag lined with paper towels or other smooth material (loops in material such as terry cloth may catch on a bird's claws).

If a bird appears to be seriously injured, contact the Blue Ridge Wildlife Institute at Lees McRae College. You will have to make arrangements to transport the bird to Banner Elk but this is the only rehab facility in the area.

Blue Ridge Wildlife Institute

Nina Fischesser, Director

(w) (828) 898-2568

(c) (828) 898-7188

(h) (828) 733-6142

<http://www.lmc.edu/brwi/Default.htm>

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High Country Hoots is published six times a year by the High Country Audubon Society, a chapter of National Audubon. Local members receive the newsletter via electronic mail. It is also archived on <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/highcountryaudubon>.



High Country  
Audubon Society

PO Box 3746

Boone, NC 28607

<http://highcountryaudubon.org>

E-mail: [highcountrybirder@yahoo.com](mailto:highcountrybirder@yahoo.com)

#### Winter Programs Feature Movies About Birds

The January 17<sup>th</sup> program will be "To Fly or Not to Fly", the first in a series of 10 episodes by David Attenborough with his 3 DVD set called **The Life of Birds**. From flying reptiles to modern ostriches and emus, birds have evolved into what they are today.

"Winged Migration" is the most incredible movie about birds! Five film crews took almost four years to follow a variety of birds through 40 countries and 7 continents using planes, gliders, helicopters, and balloons to achieve startling close-ups of birds in flight for incredibly long 10 to 12 second clips. It was an Academy Award Nominee for Best Documentary Feature for 2001. High Country Audubon will be fortunate to see this movie as our program on February 21st.

Of course, all programs throughout the winter will be dependant on the weather so if we have bad road conditions, please rightly assume that the programs will be cancelled.

## Bird Strikes cont.



Photo Courtesy of Martha Cutler

If a bird is killed by striking the window it can still be of use as long as it is in reasonably good condition. Place the dead bird in a Ziploc bag, squeeze out the extra air, label the bag with the date and location of the window kill and place it in your freezer. The following individuals may be interested in the bird and able to use it for education or research:

Jesse Pope, Grandfather Mt. <highcountrybirder@yahoo.com>

Lynn Siefferman, Appalachian State University  
<sieffermanlm@appstate.edu>

If you have successfully done other things to minimize window strikes and/or to revive birds, please let us know (cutford@skybest.com). We may add these ideas to our website or use them in a future article.

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## February Field Trips

On Sunday, February 12<sup>th</sup>, Jesse Pope will be the trip leader for the Burke's Garden field trip. Burke's Garden in Virginia has been an excellent winter trip for our chapter for many years in a row.

At an elevation of 3,000 feet, Burke's Garden is Virginia's highest valley and completely encircled by mountains. Geologically, this ovate 25,000-acre indentation is an anomaly. From the air, it looks like a giant bowl scooped from the mountaintop. Meteor pit? Top of ancient volcano? Neither. The valley is the result of the collapse of an ancient mountaintop millennia ago. Erosion of limestone underlying the peak are the cause of the collapse and is still evident today with sinkholes and caves in the area.

An interesting fact about Burke's Garden is the only community in Virginia to be designated as a National Historic Rural District. And the Appalachian Trail touches one edge of it.

Tazewell County boasts a most unusual birding spot in this location. The roads form a circle and there are a lot of open pastures with some woodland habitat. Some of the species seen there include rough-legged hawks, golden eagles and american kestrel.

## Don't forget the Great Backyard Bird Count!



The Great Backyard Bird Count is the annual 4 day event sponsored by Cornell Lab and Audubon and Canada for a real-time snapshot of where birds are all .cross our continent. This year's count will be from Feb. 17<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup>. Anyone can participate for as little as 15 minutes or for longer time periods. The object is to count the highest number of birds of one species that are seen together at one time. Fill out the checklist at the GBBC website to report what you see. It could be in your backyard, at a park, or wherever you happen to be.

The results of the count help scientists learn how winter weather may be affecting bird populations, reveals where irruptive species are located, clues about migration, where bird diseases may be, and if there are sharp declines in particular species.

More data means more knowledge. And we can help! So participate alone or with friends, but please do participate!

Richard Gray will be leading a GBBC field trip to Trout Lake on Saturday, Feb 18<sup>th</sup> at 7am. If you are interested contact him at:

[grayro@appstate.edu](mailto:grayro@appstate.edu).

We have scheduled a backup date of February 19<sup>th</sup> if the weather is bad on the 12<sup>th</sup>. If you plan to attend, you may contact Jesse Pope at [highcountrybirder@yahoo.com](mailto:highcountrybirder@yahoo.com).

Woodcock displays at New River State Park are another of our repeat field trips that we have scheduled for Wednesday evening, February 29<sup>th</sup> with a backup date of March 7<sup>th</sup>. Last year the displays were more auditory than visual, since they do not fly around much until dusk, but it was possible to spot them flying over if they were near wherever you happened to be standing. The Park Ranger is very knowledgeable about the woodcock and provided us with guidance as to exactly where they had been seen displaying.

We were successful at seeing the woodcock year before last when it landed right in front of the platform we were standing on, facing a large open grassy area. "That is where I was standing last year when I saw multiple woodcocks flying over in their circular flight path," says Anita. Anita Clemmer will be field trip leader and you may contact her at [anclmer@att.net](mailto:anclmer@att.net).

## MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

An annual tax deductible membership to the High Country Audubon Society is \$10 per person and due June 1 of each year. Membership and support gives you access to the group's listserv and the HCAS e-newsletter High Country Hoots. Mail check and information (name, address, telephone number, e-mail) to:

High Country Audubon Society  
Attention: Membership Dues  
PO Box 3746  
Boone, NC 28607

## Mattamuskeet Field Trip Cont.

salvage about 6 beers. Luckily Bob didn't decide to leave me at the gas station! This year rather than stopping to do some birding along the way, we instead drove straight to Lake Mattamuskeet, well at least that was our intention! Along highway 64 we started seeing good numbers of birds in the agricultural fields and farm ponds around Williamston.

We stopped several times watching great numbers of Bald Eagles.



At one set of ponds we found several hooded mergansers, ruddy ducks, and 8 bald eagles!! We found several locations with multiple bald eagles in the fields and along the edges of ponds. Looking back it was good we stopped to check those areas out, because we didn't see Bald Eagles in those numbers anywhere else. Once we finally made it to Mattamuskeet we did get to see good numbers of

waterfowl, but they were very far away from the causeway and other viewing points. We stayed in Washington, NC on Sunday night and enjoyed a great Mexican style meal and cozy accommodations.

The next morning, Monday, we decided to go back to Lake Mattamuskeet Lodge where we encountered a roosting site for egrets the night before. Curtis tipped us off to some other wading birds that are frequently found there so we had to check it out. We found black-crowned night herons, great egrets, great blue herons all hanging out in the trees. While birding around the canal at the lodge we also got great looks at an orange-crowned warbler and yellow-bellied sapsuckers. We birded several water impoundments on the south side of the lake before heading over to Lake Landing and eventually on to Alligator River.

At Alligator River we could barely get out of the car for all the mosquitoes that were mobbing us, so we did some limited birding from the car with a few stops along highway 264. We did stop at Stumpy Point briefly to find a common loon and a horned grebe out at the end of the point! That afternoon we went out to the Bodie Island lighthouse and boardwalk where we found probably the greatest number of waterfowl. We had great looks at gadwalls, northern shovelers, avocets, black ducks, northern pintail, and several other species. Along the boardwalk on the way back to the car we found several brown-headed nuthatches in great lighting. Everyone got very good looks at them. We later went down to the Bonner Bridge over Oregon Inlet and birded the groin near the old coast guard station. We didn't find the purple sandpipers this year, but we did enjoy the walk out at near sunset. We killed a little time heading down to Pea Island NWR

visitor's center to wait until it was completely dark to go look for northern saw-whet owls at Bodie Island. We didn't get to see them, but we did get to hear a great-horned owl, and possibly a n. saw-whet



just as we were getting in the car. Only KB and myself heard the little bird, and neither of us could confirm for sure that it was in fact a saw whet.

The final day we started out at Pea Island, and were very pleasantly surprised at the diversity. The north pond was basically a puddle since the hurricane in September damaged the west impoundment wall. Salt water intrusion basically wiped it out for ducks, but it was incredible for shore birds. They were often at great distances from us but with binoculars and the spotting scope we could see that the ground was just crawling with shorebirds. It was somewhat overwhelming to try and identify all the birds that were there, but we did a pretty good job



picking out some interesting birds.

As we were looking over our species list we realized that we only needed to see a red-headed woodpecker and a Red-cockaded woodpecker to complete the full list of woodpeckers in North Carolina. We made that our mission, as we headed to Palmetto Peartree Preserve, a known red-cockaded woodpecker hangout. We didn't have any luck finding the final two species of woodpeckers, but we did get to see a very neat natural preserve off the beaten path. It's well worth the trip out there if you haven't visited the site before. It doesn't really have any amenities, but some great bird habitat.

We had a wonderful time seeing 104 species of birds while experiencing some really nice weather as well. We did encounter quite a few



mosquitoes, especially around Alligator River and Stumpy Point, but all and all we had a wonderful trip. For several of the members of the groups, we recorded new life birds for our lists. We didn't see the numbers of waterfowl that we normally see on the trip, but the diversity was actually pretty good. We did get lucky enough to see a very nice flock of snow geese swirling around before settling out of view on Lake Mattamuskeet from the Lake Landing access. I'm sure each of us on the trip has his own highlights, but mine was seeing the black-bellied plovers and red-breasted mergansers at Pea Island.

Photos courtesy of Houck Medford