

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

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

March/April - 2010

Volume 2, Issue 1

LOOKING FORWARD TO SPRING AFTER AN UNFORGETTABLE WINTER

Most High Country residents are describing the winter of 2009-2010 as one of the worst, if not the worst, they have ever experienced. While some snow was recorded in November, the winter really started off with a bang in late December.

December 18-20 brought close to two feet of snow to the North Carolina High Country and a Christmas ice storm paralyzed the area causing many people to be stuck in their homes and without power for days.

The following months brought much more snow and extended periods of bitterly cold temperatures. Many people wondered if they would ever see their yards again and shoveling snow became a daily occurrence for others. High Country Audubon Society's February meeting was cancelled due to the winter weather.



Photo by Monty Combs

As of mid-March, Ray's Weather is reporting a total of 82.90 inches of snow measured in Boone and a whopping 131.3 inches for Beech Mountain. Perhaps there is a light at the end of the tunnel though!

Curtis Smalling reports that as temperatures are starting to moderate and the snow is melting, a lot of birds are on the move and feeling the

impending arrival of spring. The first hint of things to come happened in early March when Janet Palmer spotted Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Blue-headed Vireo, and Black-and-white Warbler at Trout Lake.



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Photo courtesy of www.allaboutbirds.org

As the weather gets warmer, don't forget to take advantage of the Watauga Birding Hotline (828-265-0198) which gives the latest birds seen in the area.

Since the February meeting was cancelled, the group watched an episode of Tom Earnhardt's Exploring North Carolina during the March meeting on March 16. The episode was titled "Passion for the Land" and focused on Hugh Morton, his tireless advocacy and his conservation efforts.

The monthly meeting on April 20 will



Photo by Jesse Pope

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March

21	TVA Lakes Field Trip	9:00 a.m.
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April

18-19	Stecoah Gap And Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest Field Trip	TBD
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20	Monthly Meeting at Coop Ext.	6:30 p.m.
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May

18	Monthly Meeting at Coop. Ext.	6:30 p.m.
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23	Wagoner Property Field Trip	TBD
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June

15	Monthly Meeting at Coop. Ext.	6:30 p.m.
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19	B.R. Wildlife Institute Field Trip	TBD
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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>.

FUN FACTS

Virginia Rail



© B. L. Sullivan

- A pair found in Meat Camp was the first confirmed breeding pair in Western North Carolina.
- Rails are precocial chicks but asynchronous hatchers, meaning that the male comes to the nest each day to collect that day's hatchling and the female stays and keeps incubating the rest until the whole clutch hatches (which can be a week or more).
- The forehead feathers of the Virginia Rail are adapted to withstand wear from pushing through dense marsh vegetation.
- The bird can swim under water, propelling itself with its wings. It swims in this way probably only to flee predators.
- The Virginia Rail and other rail species have the highest ratio of leg muscles to flight muscles of any birds.
- The Virginia Rail builds numerous "dummy nests" in addition to the one where eggs are actually laid.

Info and picture found on <http://www.birds.cornell.edu>. Additional info from Curtis Smalling.

LOOKING FORWARD TO SPRING CONT.

focus on wildflowers. A representative from the Watauga County Extension office will also be discussing the Master Gardener Program. This volunteer program is designed to train citizens in numerous aspects of practical horticulture.

We hope to see everyone at the meeting in April and we hope you enjoy spring and the wonderful birding that it brings!

TVA LAKES FIELD TRIP MARCH 21

On Sunday, March 21, members of High Country Audubon Society will journey to three of the Tennessee Valley Authority lakes. Wilbur Lake, Watauga Lake and South Holston Lake will be some of the sites that the group visits. HCAS members will be guided by Rick Knight of the Bristol Bird Club, an expert birder in that area. Those on the trip will meet Rick at the 421 boat ramp at 9 a.m. Carpool arrangements are being made by e-mail.

HCAS President Jesse Pope plans for the group to bird for four hours around South Holston Lake before heading over to Watauga and Wilbur Lakes to finish out the rest of the day.

WILBUR LAKE

Wilbur Lake is on the Watauga River in northeast Tennessee and is surrounded by some of the most beautiful country. The water is surrounded by the Cherokee National Forest and flanked by the Appalachians.

The site is probably best known for its wintering ducks. Bufflehead may number over 200. Smaller numbers of Mallard, American Black Duck, Gadwall, Ring-necked Duck and Lesser Scaup can usually be seen. One or two Bald Eagles often winter at Wilbur Lake. Spring brings transient and nesting warblers, vireos and thrushes to the Lake.



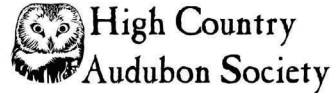
Wilbur Lake

Photo Courtesy of
Tennessee Valley
Authority

Two hydroelectric generating units were installed at Wilbur Dam when it was completed in 1912. A third was added in 1926 and a fourth was added by TVA when it acquired the dam in 1945. The dam is 77 feet high and stretches 375 feet across the Watauga River.

WATAUGA LAKE

Watauga Lake, located southeast of Elizabethton, Tennessee, was created by the TVA. Construction of the Watauga Dam began in early 1942 but was curtailed later that year in favor of other wartime building efforts. Work on the TVA Watauga Dam resumed in 1946, and finished at the end of 1948, impounding both the Watauga River and Elk River for the purposes of flood, hydropower generation and downstream navigation on the Tennessee River and Reservoir system.



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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>.

According to the 2004 TVA River and Reservoir Operations Study, Watauga Lake is approximately 16.3 miles long, with 104.9 miles of shoreline. At the TVA summertime water level target "full pool," the lake surface covers 6,430 acres and the estimated depth of Watauga Lake is 265 feet at the dam. At full pool, Watauga's elevation is the highest of all TVA lakes at 1,959 feet above sea level.



Watauga Dam

Photo Courtesy of
www.wataugalaketennessee.com

The Watauga Lake Dam is an earthen structure—331 feet high, 925 feet long and 1,275 feet thick at its base. The dam includes 350 million cubic yards of material. Building Watauga Lake incurred 10,274,559 man hours of labor. One man lost his life during Watauga's construction and 48 others were injured.

There are several conjectured meanings of "Watauga":

TVA LAKES FIELD TRIP CONT.

“beautiful waters”, “clear waters”, “whispering waters”, “river of plenty”, and more.

This site is also best known for wintering ducks. In the spring, Yellow-throated Warblers nest in tall pines along the lakeshore. Great Horned Owl (year round) and Whip-poor-will (spring and summer) may be heard at night. Wild turkeys also occur regularly.

SOUTH HOLSTON

RESERVOIR

South Holston Reservoir is on the South Fork Holston River in northeast Tennessee. It extends 24 miles east of the

dam into Virginia. Construction of the dam began in 1942, but like the Watauga Dam, it halted for other wartime efforts. Building resumed in 1947 and was completed in 1950.

In 1991, TVA built a weir below South Holston Dam to add oxygen to the river when the hydropower isn't generating electricity. Oxygen-rich water helps create a sustained habitat for aquatic insects, vegetation and fish.

South Holston is operated for several purposes, including flood damage reduction, power production, aquatic ecology and augmentation of the flow of

water during drier periods.

The South Fork Holston River is home to an annual spring migration of white bass. Locals say that when the serviceberry and dogwood bloom, the white bass run.



The Weir at South Holston Reservoir

Photo Courtesy of Tennessee Valley Authority

Ruffed Grouse are occasionally seen beside the road heading up to the top of South Holston

Dam. Loons, grebes, ducks, gulls and Bald Eagle may be seen in winter, with Osprey in migration.

The weir is located about a mile downstream from the dam. At the main parking lot for the weir, scan for wintering ducks. Buffleheads are usually the most numerous, but also look for Mallard, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Redhead (mainly late winter) and Ruddy Duck. Once a Harlequin Duck was found on the upper reaches. Yellow throated Warbler and Northern Parula nest there in winter.

APRIL EVENT DETAILS

Overnight Trip to Stecoah Gap and Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest

Sunday, April 18 - Monday, April 19

Steocoah Gap is a cove forest in Graham County, NC. In late April or early May, this area can produce a list that includes a large variety of warblers including Golden-winged, Cerulean and a Worm-eating Warblers. Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Indigo Buntings and Wood Thrushers are present. Joyce Kilmer Memorial Forest is located about 15 miles from Robbinsville, in Graham County. The group will discover towering trees and carpets of wildflowers in this remnant of the original Appalachian forest.

April Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, April 20 at 6:30 p.m.

Watauga County Cooperative Extension in Boone

Topics: Wildflowers and the Master Gardener Program

Is there a program topic you would like to hear about?

Let us know!

2010 THE STATE OF THE BIRDS REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

On March 11, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar released the 2010 State of the Birds Report, showing that climate change will have an increasing impact on birds and their habitat. It issues an urgent call for a sound climate and energy policy that will reduce carbon pollution and for strategic conservation investments that will help species adapt to a changing climate. If we can help the birds weather this unprecedented threat, we can help ourselves.

“The 2010 U.S. State of the Birds Report is a powerful wake up call. It says we must all tackle the threats of a changing climate, not just for the birds but for our own good as well,” said Audubon President Dr. Frank Gill.

“We must not tolerate the loss or even the decline of birds that this report shows to be at risk from climate change. The vulnerability of species from the Black-footed Albatross to the common Nighthawk reminds us of how vulnerable we are, too.”

Full Report: <http://www.stateofthebirds.org>

Summary: <http://www.stateofthebirds.org/summary>

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

An annual 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

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