

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

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

May/June - 2010

Volume 2, Issue 2

MAY EVENTS FOCUS ON TWO GREAT BIRDING LOCATIONS

May's monthly meeting and field trip will focus on two great birding locations - one near and one far.

The High Country Audubon Society's May meeting will include a member presentation by Doris Ratchford. Ratchford traveled to Dauphin Island, AL in late April of this year.

Dauphin Island is a great birding location that thousands of birders flock to each year, including local bird clubs and bird guides. It was selected as one of the top four locations in North America to observe spring migration by *Wild Bird Magazine*.

The 164 acres include the widest possible range of habitat from a fresh water lake, Gulf beaches, swamp, pine forest, dune system and hardwood clearings.



Boardwalk to Gaillard Lake

Photo courtesy of www.dauphinisland.org

The "Bird Sanctuary," as it was known, was established in 1961 by the Park and Beach Board. In 1967, the Park and Beach Board enhanced the status of the Sanctuary by entering into a formal agreement with the National Audubon Society, so that it was officially included as part of the national system of Audubon wildlife sanctuaries.

The Sanctuary is of vital importance because it is the largest segment of projected forest on the Island and the

first landfall for neo-tropical migrant birds after their long flight across the Gulf from Central and South America each spring.

The May meeting of the HCAS will be Tuesday, May 18 at 6:30 p.m. at the Watauga County Agricultural Conference Center.

The May field trip will focus on another great birding location and one that is just a short drive away. The May trip will go to the Wagoner Property off of HWY 321 south of Blowing Rock, near Lenoir.



Members of the Carolina Bird Club at the Wagoner Property
Photo courtesy of www.carolinabirdclub.org

"This is easily one of the best birding spots in our area," said HCAS President Jesse Pope. Located in Happy Valley, it is private property and will be generously opened to the group through HCAS's connection with Dwayne Martin of Catawba County Parks and Recreation.

The property is an old pea gravel mining operation and has many wetlands in several stages of growth.

"This is a great spot to find shorebirds," said Pope. "Greater Lesser Yellowlegs and others are regular visitors."

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May	
8	International Migratory Bird Day
18	Monthly Meeting at Watauga County Ag. Conference Center 6:30 p.m.
23	Field Trip to Wagoner Property 8:30 a.m.

June	
15	Monthly Meeting at Watauga County Ag. Conference Center 6:30 p.m.
19	Banner Elk Birding All Day

July	
20	Annual Chapter Meeting at Lees-McRae College Field Station 5:30 p.m.
24	Field Trip to Shady Valley preserve in Johnson County, TN TBD

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

Cerulean Warbler



- The Cerulean Warbler is one of the species of highest concern in the eastern US because of a small total population size and significant declines throughout its range. Many people travel to the NC High Country to see these birds.
- A small bird of the deciduous forest treetops, the sky-blue Cerulean Warbler is hard to see. It nests and forages higher in the canopy than most other warblers.
- When re-nesting after a failed first nest, the female often uses spider web from the old nest to start construction on the new nest. Fresh lining is gathered for the new nest, but spider web may be too valuable and time consuming to waste.
- The female has an unusual way of leaving a nest after sitting on it a while. Some people call it "bungee jumping." She drops from the side of the nest, keeping her wings folded to her sides, and opens her wings to fly only when she is well below the nest.
- On the wintering grounds of South America the Cerulean Warbler usually is found in mixed-species foraging flocks, associating with tropical tanagers and other resident species.

Info and picture found on <http://www.birds.cornell.edu>

MAY EVENTS CONT.

The Wagoner Property is frequently visited by the Carolina Bird Club during annual meetings in the area.

Those interested are asked to meet at New Market Center in Boone at 7:45 a.m. on May 23. Dwayne Martin will then meet the group at the BP station at the intersection of Hwy 321 and Hwy 268 at 8:30 a.m. More information will follow through the listserv and website.

Happy birding and we hope to see you at our May events!

GRASSROOTS AND GARLIC MUSTARD

Five organizations joined forces last week at Valle Crucis Community Park in a grassroots effort, well more accurately a mustard roots effort, to eradicate a pesky plant known as Garlic Mustard. Members of the High Country Audubon Society, Blue Ridge Conservancy, Valle Crucis Community Park, Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation and the North Carolina Audubon Society met at the park for some birding and community service work to eradicate this nasty invasive.

Invasive species have posed a challenge to resource managers in the High Country for decades. Some of the most commonly known pests dealt with are Balsam Woolly Adelgid and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, invasive insects that have threatened Fraser Fir as well as Eastern and Carolina Hemlocks in the Carolina mountains. In the case of the community park, it's not an invasive insect, but rather an invasive plant.



Photo by Jesse Pope

Garlic Mustard is a tremendously invasive plant. It was first discovered in the US in 1999 in Washington and was immediately listed as a noxious weed. It has since spread to over 30 states.

The plant has the ability to live in a variety of habitats including the forest understory, replacing existing native flora with a thick blanket of Garlic Mustard.

Since it is an annual plant, one might think it would be easy to control. Think again. It starts growing very early in the season getting a jump on native species living in the same habitat and eventually outcompeting them. This plant is also able to self-pollinate itself, meaning that one plant has the capability of taking over an entire site. A seed bed from this plant can exist in the soil for up to seven years. Once heavily established, Garlic Mustard is very hard to eradicate from a given site.

The small white flowers of Garlic Mustard could be easily mistaken for many native species in the High Country, but upon close inspection it is pretty distinct. Before the flowers bloom, this plant can also resemble vegetation of many native species including some violet leaves.

"With little effort, one can learn to recognize it quickly," said HCAS President Jesse Pope. "I've become so good at recognizing it; I often see populations at 55 mph along highways through the High Country."

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High Country Audubon Society Board

Jesse Pope - President, Field Trips & Social Events Chair

Anita Clemmer - Vice President

Janet Palmer - Secretary

Doris Ratchford - Treasurer

Bob Cherry - Conservation & Education Chair

Bettie Bond

Martha Cutler

Donald Mullaney

Mary Carol Ochipa

Rosalind Pevsner

Stewart Skeate

Sue Wells

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>.

HCAS ANNUAL MEETING JULY 20

The annual meeting for the High Country Audubon Society will be held July 20 at the Lees-McRae Field Station located between Banner Elk and Elk Park. A bird walk will start at 5:30 p.m., the potluck dinner will be at 6:30 p.m. and the meeting should begin around 7 p.m.

The meeting will include a year-in-review program, end of the year reports from the secretary and treasurer, and new this year, a silent auction.

Anything goes for the auction from your favorite book, artwork, feeder or craft. Please bring a donation for the auction to help support HCAS!

During the meeting, voting will occur for new officers and board members. If you would like to nominate yourself or someone else for the offices of president and secretary please do so before the annual meeting so the name can be placed on the ballot. Nominations will be taken from the floor on July 20 but the nomination committee prefers to have them in advance. The nomination committee is made up of three HCAS members, Janet Palmer, Anita Clemmer and Mary Carol Ochipa.

The annual meeting is a great time to come together and share a few laughs with chapter members while we look back at the previous year's activities and successes.

More details about the annual meeting will be in the next issue of *High Country Hoots*!

GRASSROOTS AND GARLIC MUSTARD CONT.

The plant's population at Valle Crucis Park is such that HCAS Conservation Chair Bob Cherry felt it was worth a shot to try and eradicate the plant before the spread got worse. Cherry noticed the population a couple weeks ago while visiting the park and walking along the paved trail around the pond and along the Watauga River.

Valle Crucis has long been known as a birding hot spot in the High Country.

"Any help at the park is much appreciated and needed," said NC Audubon's Important Bird Areas Coordinator Curtis Smalling. "It is important for a variety of birds and it was good to see the conservation community helping out in such a tangible way."

Thanks to the swift action of all the organizations involved, hasty efforts were pulled together to attack the plant before it went to seed.

The group met after the weekly 8:30 a.m. bird walk at the park. Smalling was also in charge of the eradication effort. Several of the volunteers joined Smalling on the weekly walk, including Valle Crucis Community Park Director Caroline Poteat.

"The park is very appreciate of all the hard work put in by volunteers," said Poteat. "As a nonprofit, community-funded park our survival is totally dependent on this kind generosity and support."



Photo by Curtis Smalling

The newly merged Blue Ridge Conservancy, a recent merger of the two former land conservancy organizations, The High Country

Conservancy and the Blue Ridge Rural Land Trust, also took up arms against Garlic Mustard. The group has a vested interest in Valle Crucis Park as well, due to a conservation easement along the Watauga River that permanently projects the steam corridor and some surrounding property.

In total, 16 volunteers bagged 43 60-gallon trash bags of Garlic Mustard in a

few hours of effort.

"Collaborative efforts between different conservation-oriented groups are extremely valuable," said Communications Director for the BRC Zachary Lesch-Huie. "There are a lot of conservation issues out there and keeping the bigger picture in mind and working together on these problems is critical. And it can also be a lot of fun."



High Country
Audubon Society

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JUNE EVENT DETAILS

June Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, June 15 at 6:30 p.m.

Watauga County Agricultural Conference Center

Robin Diaz will discuss her banding work over the years in Florida during migration. Robin has some very interesting information to share with the chapter about her findings while operating at banding station in Florida.

Banner Elk Birding

Saturday, June 19

Stewart Skeate will be leading the group to some wonderful birding locations in the surrounding area of Banner Elk. Following some morning birding, the group will tour the Blue Ridge Wildlife Institute located at Lees-McRae College. This will be a wonderful trip where the group will not only see some of the local summer resident birds, but also learn about local rehabilitation efforts for injured wildlife.

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

Let us know!

HCAS Happenings

Weekday Birding

- Tuesday, May 18 @ 7:30 a.m. - Shady Grove Gardens
- Tuesday, June 1 @ 8 a.m. - Trout Lake

If you are interested in attending please contact Martha Cutler at cutford@skybest.com.

Wilson Creek IBA Point Counts

- Bob Cherry, Stewart Skeate and Jesse Pope will be the official counters this year and are seeking scribes to go out with them and help conduct the counts. If you are interested please contact them via e-mail.

cherylay@bellsouth.net

skeate@lmc.edu

highcountrybirder@yahoo.com

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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