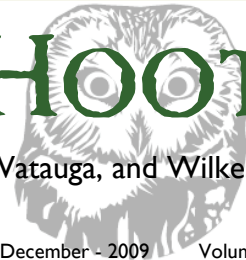


# HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

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



## MOVIE NIGHT: GEARING UP FOR LAKE MATTAMUSKEET AND THE OUTER BANKS

The next High Country Audubon Society meeting will be held November 17 at La Quinta Inn & Suites in Boone. The meeting will start at 6:30 p.m. and those planning to attend are asked to bring snacks to share with the group. This will be the last meeting of the year since there will be no meeting in December due to the holidays.

The group will be watching "A Winter Day Lake Mattamuskeet," an award winning film showcasing the beauty and solitude of this special place. This film has been showcased at the Wings Over Water Festival.

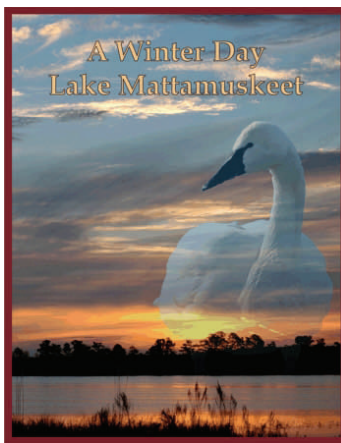
Lake Mattamuskeet is the largest natural lake (40,000 acres) in North Carolina. The lake is a wetlands depression that fills with rain water and the natural runoff from the land around it. There are no underground springs or headwaters feeding into the huge lake. The lake bed is three to five feet below sea level.



Photo courtesy of [outerbanksfreepress.com](http://outerbanksfreepress.com)

Lake Mattamuskeet is one of a number of Carolina Bay lakes of disputed origin. A Native American legend attributes its formation to a fire that burned for thirteen moons. Scientists

cite the possibility of a prehistoric meteor shower or underground peat fires in speculating about how the lake formed.



Since 1934, the U.S. Government has owned Lake Mattamuskeet and it makes up most of Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge. The lake is a favorite winter spot for migratory birds in the Atlantic Flyway.

The lake, marsh and woodlands on Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge provide habitat for over 240 bird species. Ospreys nest in low cypress trees near the edge of the lake. Hundreds of migratory shorebirds find resting and feeding spots along the edge of the lake and through 2,600 acres of marsh impoundments. Migrating warblers are popular subjects for bird watchers in the spring and fall.

Although known primarily for its large flock of visiting waterfowl during the months from November to March, Mattamuskeet is also a home for threatened and endangered

Continued on Page 2

November/December - 2009 Volume 1, Issue 5

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

See Page 3 for More Details

November		
17	Monthly Meeting and Movie	6:30 p.m.

December		
6-8	Outer Banks Field Trip	Itinerary on Page 4

January		
4	Christmas Bird Count	TBD
10	W. Kerr Scott Field Trip	TBD
19	Monthly Meeting	6:30 p.m.

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

### Downy Woodpecker



- An often acrobatic forager, this black and white woodpecker is at home on tiny branches or balancing on slender plant galls, sycamore seed balls and suet feeders.
- Downies and their larger lookalike, the Harry Woodpecker, are one of the first identification challenges that beginning bird watchers master.
- Downy Woodpeckers have been discovered nesting inside the wall of buildings
- The oldest known Downy Woodpecker lived to be at least 11 years 11 months old.
- Male and female Downy Woodpeckers divide up where they look for food in winter. Males feed more on small branches and weed stems, and females feed on larger branches and trunks. Males keep females from foraging in the more productive spots. When researchers have moved the males from a woodlot, females have responded by feeding along smaller branches.

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

## MOVIE NIGHT CONT.

species such as the Peregrine Falcon and Bald Eagle.

The Refuge manages the marsh impoundments to provide habitat for migrating birds, using moist-soil techniques to produce stands of natural waterfowl foods such as wild millet, panic grass and spike rush. The Refuge staff controls water levels using pumps and flow-control structures.



The Refuge contracts with local farmers to plant corn, soybeans and winter wheat on sections of the refuge, under a cooperative arrangement where a percentage of the crop is left not harvested for feeding the Canada geese, snow geese, ducks and swans that winter at Mattamuskeet. Forest management techniques such as prescribed burning and selective thinning are used to enhance wildlife habitat.

Blake and Emily Scott, filmmakers and producers for the Washington-based STRS Productions helped create "A Winter Day Lake Mattamuskeet," in collaboration with Lewis Forrest, the founder and executive director of the Mattamuskeet Foundation.

The Mattamuskeet Foundation is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization engaged in research and educational activities to preserve, publish and otherwise tell the stories of the rich history and ecology of Lake Mattamuskeet and the surrounding areas of eastern N.C.

The film came out in November 2006 and has since received 10 international awards. It has no dialog, only the natural sounds of the wildlife and appropriate music to underscore the beautiful cinematography.

The meeting on November 17 is open to the public. Joins us as we gear up for our upcoming field trip to eastern N.C. and the Outer Banks!



High Country  
Audubon Society

PO Box 3746

Boone, NC 28607

<http://highcountryaudubon.org>

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

### 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

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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>.

## PREPARING FOR PUNGO LAKE AND PEA ISLAND

In addition to visiting Lake Mattamuskeet, the HCAS group on the big field trip to eastern N.C. also plans to visit Pungo Lake and Pea Island.

### Pungo Lake

Pungo Lake is part of the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge. This lake is a sanctuary for many wildlife species and their habitats.

Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1990 when the Conservation Fund in conjunction with the Richard Mellon Foundation donated over 93,000 acres to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The adjacent 12,000 acre Pungo Lake NWR, established in 1963 to serve as a sanctuary for migratory waterfowl, was combined with these new refuge lands and became the Pungo Unit of Pocosin Lakes NWR. Today the refuge encompasses more than 113,000 acres.

The top layer of soil in this area is comprised of organic material, or peat. This consists of leaves, sticks and other debris that were once submerged in water and decomposed slowly. It takes over 100 years to create one inch of peat. Organic soils in pocosins hold water like a sponge, releasing it very slowly to the surrounding area. Historically, pocosins remained wet for long periods of time due to the poor drain-

age and slow water movement.

Prior to its establishment, many acres of refuge wetlands were drained through a network of canals and ditches to expand agricultural areas; an alteration that has made the refuge more vulnerable to wildfires. The most recent catastrophic wildfire occurred in 1985 when 95,000 acres burned and surface elevations were reduced up to three feet in some places due to the combustion of the peat during ground fire.

Pocosin Lakes NWR was established to provide habitat for migratory waterfowl and other birds, to protect and enhance a unique type of wetlands called pocosin, to protect and enhance habitat for those species which are classified as endangered, threatened, or of special concern, and to provide opportunities for wildlife-oriented interpretation, outdoor recreation and environmental education.

The Pocosin Lakes NWR lands that exist today were at one time the southern extremity of the Great Dismal Swamp. The term pocosin is an Algonquian Indian word meaning "swamp on a hill." Although the land is relatively flat, pocosins are generally slightly higher in elevation.

Continued on Page 3

## PUNGO LAKE AND PEA ISLAND CONT.

Pungo Lake is approximately 2,800 acres in size. It may have been formed by a ground fire

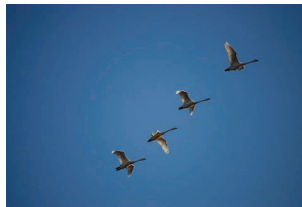


*2008 Outer Banks Trip  
Photo by Martha Cutler*

that later filled up with rainwater. The dark water, which is caused by tannins and particles from the peat and natural vegetation, prevents sunlight penetration to the bottom of the lake. Therefore, no submerged aquatic vegetation occurs in Pungo Lake. The lake is used by thousands of

winterizing waterfowl as a resting and roosting site.

Pocosin Lakes supports a large variety of wildlife. Over 200 species of birds, over 40 species of mammals, and over 40 species of reptiles and amphibians use the refuge habitats.



*Tundra swans  
Photo by Anita Clemmer*

The Pungo Unit provides wintering habitat for many species of ducks which arrive after the first full moon in November, as well as large concentrations of

tundra swans and snow geese. The spring and fall migration of neotropical migratory songbirds paints the forest with a variety of beautiful songs and colors. The refuge also has the endangered Red-cockaded Woodpecker and bald eagles. Large populations of black bears and white-tailed deer inhabit the refuge. Other mammals found there include the endangered red wolf, raccoon, gray squirrel, red fox and many others.

### Pea Island

Located on the north end of Hatteras Island, the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1937 for the protection of wildlife, especially migratory waterfowl.



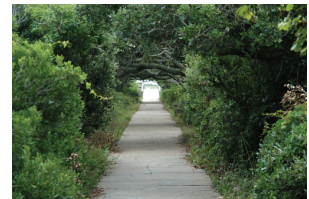
*Marbled Godwits and Willets  
Photo courtesy www.fws.gov*

Stretching approximately 13 miles from the Oregon Inlet to Rodanthe, it encompasses 5,834 acres of land and 25,700 acres of boundary water of the Pamlico Sound. Pea Island is named for the wild pea vine which grows there in abundance. The refuge is administered by the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge and sees 2.7 million visitors annually.

The refuge contains ocean beach, dunes, upland, fresh and brackish water ponds, salt flats and salt marsh.

The area was historically used for market waterfowl hunting, commercial fishing, farming and livestock operations. Today, the refuge has 1,000 acres of manageable waterfowl impoundments and several shore-bird nesting areas and wading bird rookeries.

Truly a "birder's paradise," it is a haven for more than 365 species of birds such as Canada and snow geese, more than 25 species of duck, tundra swan, heron, egret, tern and many other birds that pass through during fall and spring migrations. Several platforms are provided for free observation of the diversity of wildlife found on the refuge.



*Pea Island NWR  
Photo courtesy www.planetware.com*

Pea Island also boasts over 25 species of mammals, 24 species of reptiles and five species of amphibians. Endangered and threatened species include red wolf, peregrine falcons, loggerhead sea turtles, West Indian manatee and many others.

## JANUARY EVENT DETAILS

### Christmas Bird Count

Monday, January 4

See Page 4 for more details.

### W. Kerr Scott Dam and Reservoir Field Trip

Sunday, January 10

The group will head to this Wilkes County location to do some birding. The plan is to meet up with a ranger so the group can visit some special spots.

### January Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, January 19 at 6:30 p.m.

La Quinta Inn & Suites - Boone

Those attending are asked to bring their favorite books about birds for this "show and tell" session. Folks are welcome to talk about their selections and share what makes them so special!

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

**Let us know!**

## 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  
PO Box 3746

## OUTER BANKS TRIP ITINERARY

### December 6

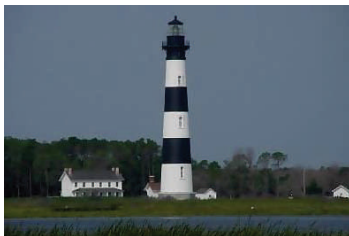
5:15 a.m.	Arrive at New Market Center to load up. The group will be leaving Boone at 5:30 a.m. If need be, others will be met at another location.
10:00 a.m.	Stop for birding along the way. Jesse is looking into locations.
12:00 p.m.	Stop for a quick lunch.
1:30 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Approach to Pungo Lake. The group will hopefully meet up with Mike Dunn off Hwy 64.
6:00 p.m.	Leave Lake Pungo. Overnight accommodations are at

### December 7

5:30 a.m.	Depart hotel for Lake Mattamuskeet. (One hour and 15
6:45 a.m.	Arrive at Lake Mattamuskeet. Birding north of the lake
11:30 a.m.	Birding Wildlife Drive and points south and east of the lake.
6:00 p.m.	Check-in and dinner. Overnight accommodations are at Blue Heron Motel in Nags Head.
9:00 p.m.	Leave for Bodie Island Lighthouse to look for Northern Saw-whet Owls.

### December 8

6:00 a.m.	Depart hotel for Pea Island NWR.
6:45 a.m.	Arrive at North Pond observation tower for birding.
8:45 a.m.	Depart for Oregon Inlet/Coast Guard Station for birding.
10:45 a.m.	Depart for Bodie Island Lighthouse for some marsh habitat birding.
1:00 p.m. - 2:00 p.m.	Depart for home.
10:30 p.m.	Arrive back in Boone.



Times are subject to change. Jesse Pope will e-mail the group with the final itinerary during the first days of December.

*Photo courtesy of nc-outerbanks.com*



*Photo by Miles Tager*

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Curtis Smalling has set January 4 as the date for the Grandfather Mountain Christmas Bird Count.

The Grandfather count is centered at the top of Clarks Creek Road and was moved there in the late 1970s from the top of Grandfather. This allows all of Boone and Beech Mountain to be in the circle as well as Blowing Rock. It includes parts of three International Bird Areas: Grandfather, Wilson Creek and the Amphibolites.

The first Grandfather CBC was December 29, 1979. Thirteen people helped out and the two biggest notables were 73 Purple Finches and 116 Black-capped Chickadees. Those numbers are unheard of today. Black-caps have been replaced by the Carolina Chickadee. Black-caps are a northern species that used to live at the higher elevations, but have gradually been disappearing from mountain tops in NC. Today, the higher elevation mountains still have some remnant populations, such as Roan, Mitchell and some of the high peaks in the Smokies.

The day will begin at Valle Crucis Park where volunteers will be divided up to go with the various counters on different routes within the circle.

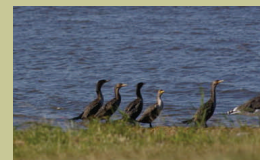
Other local bird counts include Mount Jefferson (date TBD), New River (December 19), Catawba Valley (December 23) and Stone Mountain on January 2. Contact info for the compilers is on the Carolina Bird Club website at <http://www.carolinabirdclub.org/christmas>.



## HCAS Member Photo Gallery

Double-crested Cormorant

By Jesse Pope



White Ibis

By Mary Ochipa