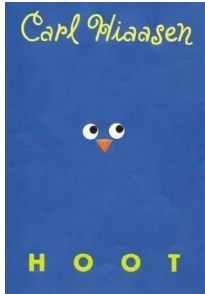


# HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

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

## KIDS MOVIE NIGHT IN NOVEMBER

November's meeting will feature a Kids Movie Night with a film based on a book called *Hoot*, written by Carl Hiaasen. It is an American comedy film directed by Wil Shriner and produced by New Line Cinema and Walden Media about a group of children trying to save a burrowing owl habitat from destruction.



The habitat is located on the intended site of a pancake house.

"Hoot" features live burrowing owls

and music by Jimmy Buffet, who is a co-producer and has a role in the film as well. The burrowing owls are "the story's most powerful argument for fighting to save parts of nature to be enjoyed without the presence of strip malls and tourist hotels," says Scott Gwin for cinemablind.com, a movie review website.

On the evening of November 22, HCAS is sending out a special invitation to children to attend this meeting. Refreshments will be served. So if you know any children who might be interested in attending this special evening, please invite or bring them along! The movie will begin at 6:30 p.m.

## HCAS BY-LAWS AMENDED

At the September 20 meeting at Grandfather Mountain, the attending members voted in favor of amending our by-laws, which were first adopted on September 7, 2007 and then revised November 20, 2007. Only 10 members in good standing are required for a vote. The required notice of the vote was sent out more than 10 days in advance of the meeting. The by-laws state our purpose and serve as guidelines for conduct. It also makes clear how National Audubon and our chapter are separate entities

Article 3: Board of Directors, Section I as been changed so that the number of board members will now be 13 instead of 11. Board members are composed of officers, committee chairs, and the rest are to be members-at-large. You may see who the current board members are by looking on page two of this newsletter.

HCAS has chosen to include board members who live here only in the summer, since they receive all e-mails

even when they are not here, and may remain knowledgeable about all happenings by checking the monthly meeting minutes and board meeting minutes that are posted to the Yahoo listserv by the HCAS Secretary Brenda Combs. These are posted every month.

The second change, made in Article XI: Amendments, is to the text that states that the notice of proposed changes and a future vote must be mailed to all members within 10 days prior to the date of the meeting at which discussion and vote are to take place. It now will include, "or electronically communicated" after "mailed."

We encourage all HCAS members to regularly check these files or to attend any of the board meetings, which are usually the first Tuesday evening of the month. Bob Cherry has been kind enough to procure the office of The Blue Ridge Conservancy, on Furman Road in Boone, for the meetings.

November/December - 2011 Volume 3, Issue 5

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

| November |   |
|----------|---|
| 22       | Monthly Meeting at Watauga County Ag. Conference Center 6:30 p.m. |

| December |  |
|----------|--|
| 4,5,6    | Annual Field Trip to Lake Mattamuskeet, Pea Island and Alligator River TBD |
|          | No Monthly Meeting   |

| January |   |
|---------|---|
| 17      | Monthly Meeting at Watauga County Ag. Conference Center 6:30 p.m. |

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

All events and meeting times are subject to change.

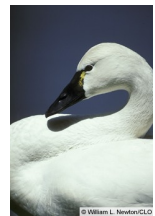
For updated information please visit

<http://highcountryaudubon.org>.

## FUN FACTS

### Tundra

### Swan



- True to its name, the Tundra Swan breeds on the high tundra across the top of North America. It winters in large flocks along both coasts, and is frequently encountered during its migration across the continent.
- The whistling swan, the American race of the Tundra Swan, currently is considered the same species as the Eurasian race, the Bewick's swan. They were considered separate species in the past, distinguished by the large yellow patches on the face of the Bewick's swan.
- During the breeding season the Tundra Swan sleeps almost entirely on land, but in the winter it sleeps more often on water.
- Swan nests on the tundra are vulnerable to a host of predators, such as foxes, weasels, jaegers, and gulls. If the parent is present, they are able to defend the nest and nestlings from these threats. Wolves, people, and bears, however, are too big to fight, and most incubating swans leave their nests while these large predators are far away. By leaving quickly when large predators approach, the parents may make the nest harder to find.

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

## ANNUAL FIELD TRIP TO INCLUDE ALLIGATOR RIVER

The field trip to Lake Mattamuskeet and Pea Island, the HCAS annual trip to the coast, is scheduled for December 4-6. Jesse Pope, field trip leader, says this year's group will also go to Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge.

Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge was established March 14, 1984 and encompasses 154,000 acres on mainland portions of Dare and Hyde counties. Forty-five thousand people visit the refuge annually and it is the home of the Red Wolf Recovery Program which has successfully re-introduced captive bred red wolves back into the wild beginning in 1987. Now over 100 red wolves roam native habitat in five northeastern counties of North Carolina and they are the only wild population of red wolves in the world.

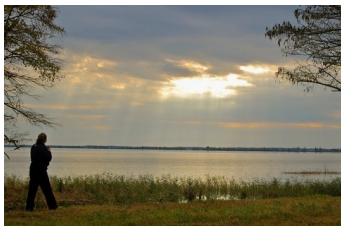


Photo by Doris Ratchford

Lake Mattamuskeet is the largest natural lake in North Carolina and is a wetlands depression that fills with rainwater and natural runoff. It has no underground springs or headwaters and is three to five feet below sea level. The lake is only

two to three feet deep, but is 18 miles long by seven miles wide. Eight hundred different species are found on the 50,000 acres of watermarsh and woods area. During the winter months thousands of Tundra Swans, Canada Geese and Snow Geese pour into the Lake Mattamuskeet area and remain until late February.



Photo by Jesse Pope

Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1937 to provide habitat for migratory birds, primarily waterfowl, and other wildlife, and cover 5,834 acres which includes ocean beaches, barrier dunes, salt marshes, fresh and brackish water ponds and impoundment and tidal creeks and bogs. The Outer Banks bird list has more than 365 different species!

This trip has the makings of a fantastic birding experience, especially since we have already made the trip more than once and have refined the itinerary. If you have questions or would like to go on this trip, please contact Jesse Pope by e-mail at [highcountrybirder@yahoo.com](mailto:highcountrybirder@yahoo.com).

### ADDITION TO WEBSITE

There has been a new addition to the "Explore Your World" pull down menu on [highcountryaudubon.org](http://highcountryaudubon.org). There's now a link to "Birding in the United Kingdom" by Richard Gray, which is his account of travels in Wales, England and Scotland, along with his bird list. Richard is a professor of astronomy at Appalachian State University and, we are proud to say, a member of the High Country



Audubon Society. His account is a very enjoyable description of his birding adventures and HCAS is thankful to be able to add this interesting essay to our website for all of our members and visitors to read and enjoy!



### High Country Audubon Society Board

**Anita Clemmer** - President

**Bob Cherry** - Vice President and Conservation Chair

**Brenda Combs** - Secretary

**Richard Paulette** - Treasurer

**Martha Cutler** - Field Trips & Social Programs Chair

**Doris Ratchford** - Education Chair

**Janet Paulette** - Membership Chair

- Publicity and Outreach Chair

**Jesse Pope** - Past President

**Mary Carol Ochipa**

**Bettie Bond**

**Janet Palmer**

**Ros Pevsner**

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

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<http://highcountryaudubon.org>

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### SPECIAL THANKS TO BLUE RIDGE WILDLIFE INSTITUTE

High Country Audubon Society owes a special thanks to Nina Fischesser and the Blue Ridge Wildlife Institute as they offered us a partner space for the most recent Woolly Worm Festival. Since 1995, the rehab program has cared for over 600 injured wild animals annually in our area. They release back into the wild whenever possible and HCAS was witness to this last September at our Swift Night Out when Chimney Swift fledglings were released.

BRWI conducts educational programs using non-releasable wild animals including hawks and owls. They organize and facilitate workshops and seminars for the education of rehabilitators, veterinarians and environmental educators. The Institute publishes a newsletter and rehabilitators listing to be used as networking tools for wildlife caregivers and educators. They also offer opportunities for volunteers and you can contact Nina at [fischessern@lmc.edu](mailto:fischessern@lmc.edu).

Thanks again to Nina and her crew of volunteers for the opportunity to be their partner at the 2011 Woolly Worm Festival!



## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The count for the 112th Christmas Bird Count will begin December 14 and continue through January 5, 2012. For over 100 years this data has made an enormous contribution to successful conservation efforts to assess the health of bird populations and guide conservation activities.

The long-term perspective informs strategies to protect birds and their habitat and helps to identify environmental issues that have implications for people, too. In the 1980s CBC data documented the decline of wintering American Black Duck populations and reduced hunting pressures on this species. In 2007 the data helped two Audubon State

of the Bird Reports "Common Birds in Decline" identify that some of our familiar birds have undergone serious decreases in numbers in the past 40 years and "Watchlist" identified 178 more rare species are at risk.

Evening Grosbeak numbers were stable or increasing until 1980 when they began to decline significantly and the rate of decline



Christmas bird count circles in the western hemisphere

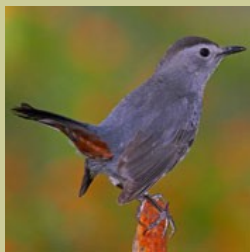
increased between 1990 to 1998. The cause of the decline is unknown but the most obvious possibility may be that they are not moving as far south during winter months due to warmer winter temperatures, or it may be that their food sources found in hardwood forests in Canada have been greatly reduced due to changes in their forestry practices.

This yearly assessment of bird populations is most important and if you would like to help out by going on a Christmas Bird Count this year, please contact Curtis Smalling at [csmalling@audubon.org](mailto:csmalling@audubon.org) in advance of the December 14 start day to find out which day our count will be held.

### It's Catbirds vs. Cats...and the Cats Are Winning

By Tina Gheen

Scientists from the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center and Towson University began a study to determine how well birds are surviving in suburban areas. Specifically, they wanted to determine the success of gray catbirds (*Dumetella carolinensis*) in areas with concentrated populations of people. They looked at nest success, the probability the baby birds will survive through incubation and as hatchlings, and post-fledging survival rates, the period after the birds leave the nest, but before they migrate.



From May to September, with the help of ordinary citizens participating in the Smithsonian's Neighborhood Nestwatch program, the team studied catbird nests in three suburban neighborhoods in Maryland: Spring Park, Opal Daniels Park, and Bethesda.

Catbirds typically build large, recognizable nests in the middle of dense shrubs or trees, so they are fairly easy to locate. The nests

were monitored every two to four days both during incubation, which lasts about 12 days, and the nestling stage, which lasts about 11 days, until the nests either failed or the baby birds fledged.

The chicks were banded and weighed, and some of the nestlings and juvenile catbirds were fitted with tiny radio transmitters. These transmitters allowed the researchers to locate and track the birds after they began to fly. It also allowed them to locate the transmitter after a bird had died.

This gave the researchers important insights as to how the birds died and revealed tell-tale clues about any predators involved. For example if the transmitter was found underground, the bird was most likely taken by a rat in a suburban environment.

Sadly, predators were responsible for 79 percent of the mortalities of the juvenile catbirds in the study. Of those deaths, nearly half were attributed to cats in Opal Daniels Park and Spring Park. Predation was highest the first week after the birds had fledged.

Since the baby birds are noisy and constantly receiving attention from the parents during that first week, domestic cats are most likely intensely monitoring and hunting the inexperienced birds during this time.

Most scientific studies attribute predation to native animals such as hawks, snakes, and chipmunks, but the D.C. study found that novel, or new, predators such as cats may be driving the survival rates of juvenile birds in suburban areas instead.

Since domestic cats can thrive in large numbers in suburban environments because they aren't under the usual environmental pressures of limited food resources, disease, and competition for survival, they are in a position to dramatically influence the success of bird populations.

After examining the results from each neighborhood, the scientists discovered something else. The results showed that habitat suitability for the catbirds varied from neighborhood to neighborhood in the suburban environments. The birds in the Bethesda neighborhood were much more successful than catbirds in the other two neighborhoods.

In particular, the nestlings in Bethesda had a very high survival rate. The study showed that although each neighborhood site provided the right kind of habitat, predators, especially cats, often tipped the balance against the young birds' survival.

This article summarizes the information in this publication: Balogh, Anne L., Ryder, Thomas B., and Marra, Peter P. 2011. Population demography of Gray Catbirds in the suburban matrix: sources, sinks and domestic cats. *Journal of Ornithology*.

This article and photos taken from: [http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/science\\_article](http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/science_article).



### 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  
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