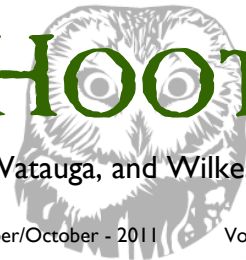


# HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

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



September/October - 2011 Volume 3, Issue 4

## A SWIFT NIGHT OUT SEPTEMBER 1

As autumn approaches we often hear a chittering in the sky at sunset. Chimney Swifts! Flying around in their distinctive bat-like way, their long



Photo courtesy of [www.humanesociety.org](http://www.humanesociety.org).

scythe-shaped wings support a short body with squared-off tail that has special bristles on the tips for clinging to rough vertical surfaces. Their claws and bristles on their tails make it impossible for them to perch or stand upright in passerine fashion.

Both sexes are gray to black and are identical. Mostly they have one brood per season, then their communal instincts kick in and they begin to flock

in hundreds and even thousands before they leave here to winter in the Amazon Basin of Peru. The aerial acrobatics they perform just before roosting for the night is what we enjoyed last year and hope to see once more.

Our local site to watch, just at sunset, is a large chimney on Lees-McRae College campus. On Thursday, September 1 we will be out there awaiting the elaborate process of their gathering to begin entering the roost. The group will meet at 6 p.m. at Lowe's Food in Tynecastle to go over to Lees-McRae together. The plan is to set up the HCAS chapter display and have snacks and social time before dusk. Bring a folding chair and some food and enjoy the evening watching Chimney Swifts and this natural phenomenon.

## SEPTEMBER MEETING: MONARCHS AND MIGRATION

September is all about migration, of Broad-winged Hawks and Warblers, of course, but also for Monarch Butterflies. Many HCAS members who go out to Mahogany Rock every year to hawk watch have noticed many Monarch Butterflies heading south in the same airspace as we observe many of the Broad-winged Hawks. Bill Keighton keeps a count of the Monarchs, as well as birds.

Our program for September, hosted by Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, will be "All About Monarchs" and will be presented by Jesse Pope, director of education and natural resource management at Grandfather and past president of HCAS. Pope has been involved in

work with Monarchs for the last three years, tagging and rearing the butterflies as well as offering educational programs to raise



Photo courtesy of Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

awareness of the unique life history of the Monarchs and their conservation issues.

Their journey is even more amazing

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### September

1	Swift Night Out at Lees-McRae	6 p.m.
20	Monthly Meeting at Grandfather Mountain	6:30 p.m.
22	Hawk Watching at Mahogany Rock	9:30 a.m.
24	Bullhead Mountain Hike with Blue Ridge Conservancy	10 a.m.

### October

6	Ridge Junction Overlook Field Trip	7:30 a.m.
18	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

### Swainson's Warbler



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- One of the most secretive and least observed of all North American birds, the Swainson's Warbler is a skulking bird of the southern canebrakes and rhododendron thickets. If it weren't for its loud, ringing song, the presence of the species in many areas would go completely undetected.
- One of the Swainson's Warbler wintering grounds is in the dry limestone forests of Jamaica. During the dry season some birds have trouble finding food there. Because the Swainson's Warbler digs under the leaf litter for insects, it is less affected by the dryness than birds foraging in the forest canopy or on the surface of the ground.
- The Swainson's Warbler holds a large territory for such a small bird, defending between 3 to 18 ha (7.4 - 44.5 acres). Measuring exact territory size is difficult, however, because of the extremely dense and vine-entangled habitat used for breeding.
- Clutch size is 2-5 eggs. Eggs are white, usually unmarked, but may have faint reddish brown spotting.
- The Swainson's Warbler flies directly from perch to perch instead of hopping through the branches like most warblers. It often flies directly across its territory, from one side to the other without stopping in between. On the ground it walks rapidly and rarely hops.

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

## SEPTEMBER MEETING CONT.

and hazardous than the long flights of the birds. Their flight times are greatly diminished because of the mere 1/2 gram average weight and the fact that they cannot fly in the rain for very long and fly only in the day time.

There are two distinct North American migration populations of Monarchs which are the Eastern (the largest) and the Western. The Eastern population is all of the Monarchs east of the Rocky Mountains. They migrate to 12



Photo courtesy of Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

Transvolcanic Mountain sites in Central Mexico. The Western population migrates to 300 small sites on the Pacific Coast.

There are websites which track the migration of all Monarchs on their spring and fall treks, one of which is [www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch](http://www.learner.org/jnorth/monarch). You can report your sightings of Monarchs to them

and they will begin posting the progress of the fall migration beginning August 25. This site reports that the first signs of migration begin on August 15 so keep an eye out and go online and report any monarchs you see.

Join us for what promises to be a most interesting and educational program which will include a live demonstration of banding and a walk through the native butterfly garden on September 20. The program begins at 6:30 p.m. at the Nature Museum on Grandfather. You may arrive a little bit early to get in some birding if you wish. Just tell the Entrance Gate staff that you are going to attend the High Country Audubon Society meeting and they will waive the admission fee.

## HAWK WATCHING FIELD TRIPS

Mahogany Rock in Alleghany County, at milepost 235 on the Blue Ridge Parkway, is the premier site for hawk watching in North Carolina during mid-September. Mahogany Rock's topography includes ridgelines that run east to west with deep valleys to the north that act as a funnel for the raptors riding the air currents southward over Stone Mountain.



Large numbers of raptors can be seen in the hundreds or even thousands when kettles are formed. Kettles are groups of birds flying in a spiral formation in order to catch the rising winds in an air thermal, to get lift and speed with less effort.

The annual trip is September 22 and the group will meet at the Cash Points at Lowes Foods in Boone at 8:15 a.m. The group will also stop at Food Lion on old 421 at 8:30 a.m. and will then be at Mahogany Rock around 9:30 a.m. Anita Clemmer will be the trip leader. Bring your scopes, binoculars, field guides, a packed lunch and a chair or blanket and spend the day with us watching for hawks!

On September 24 there will be a Bullhead Mountain Hike and Hawk Watch along with the Blue Ridge Conservancy beginning at 10 a.m. at the site. The group plans to meet to carpool at the Cash Points at Lowes Food at 8:30 a.m. Jesse Pope will be the trip leader for this Saturday field trip.

If you wish to keep an eye on the numbers for the hawk migration you may log on to [www.hawkcoun.org](http://www.hawkcoun.org), click "North Carolina" and then scan for Mahogany Rock.

### High Country Audubon Society Board

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**Mary Carol Ochipa**

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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>.



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## Extra Opportunities in the High Country

### Completion of the summit trail at Elk Knob State Park

- Sunday, September 4 @ 2:30 p.m.

This is the trail that HCAS has volunteered to help build over the past few years. Volunteers will work for about two hours shoveling the last .1 mile of gravel on the trail. Following the trail completion and ensuing hike down, there will be a celebration with hotdogs and all the fixings at the picnic area. Please let Kelly Safley know if you are interested in helping out! ([kelly.safley@ncdenr.gov](mailto:kelly.safley@ncdenr.gov) or 828-297-7261)

### Watauga River Clean Up

- Saturday, September 10 @ 9 a.m.

Contact Wendy Patoprsty ([Wendy\\_Patoprsty@ncsu.edu](mailto:Wendy_Patoprsty@ncsu.edu) or 828-264-3061) to sign up, get more information and be assigned a clean up site. Be prepared to bring: sunscreen, water, snacks, shoes that stay on your feet (no flip flops or Crocs) and clothes that WILL get dirty and wet. There are multiple clean up sites, but if you know of a place that needs cleaning, please contact Wendy.

## THE BIRDS AND BEACHES OF PANAMA

Come hear about a Birds and Beaches trip to Panama, where the Canal Zone sunset comes complete with red-crowned parrots roosting in trees near the balcony. The trip included the Gamba Rainforest, very close to the canal, the Bocas Inn at Bocas del Toro and the Canopy Tower in Soberania National Park. You'll hear about walks along Pipeline Road (home of record Christmas bird counts) and snorkeling among beautiful tropical fish just off Bastiamento Island.

Janet Palmer and Julia Mode, both members of HCAS, will be

the speakers for the October program.

The ladies were greeted by the keel-billed toucan in a tree just outside their room on the first morning at Canopy Tower. The natural wonders of the rainforest in Panama were matched only by the friendliness of the people there. The ladies learned a great deal and look forward to sharing some information about their experience.

The program will be at 6:30 p.m. October 18 at the Watauga County Agricultural Conference Center.

## RIDGE JUNCTION OVERLOOK FIELD TRIP

Ridge Junction Overlook is a fantastic place to see migrating birds from late August through early October! The ridge of the Black Mountains joins the Blue Ridge Parkway here and the valley between



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

the two ridges runs north-south. Migrant birds are funneled right over the Parkway milepost 355.8 overlook, just south of Mount Mitchell, 11 miles south of the Parkway junction with NC 80 (25 miles south of Spruce Pine).

Many of the migrants will fly across the overlook too quickly to identify, but some may use the spot as a stopover to rest and feed and hopefully give the group a chance to see warblers, orioles, sparrows, finches, raptors and many others.

The field trip is Thursday, October 6. Plan to have an early start in order to be onsite by 7:30 a.m. We will meet at Tynecastle Lowes Food at 6 a.m. This may be our last chance to see large numbers of fall migrating birds on their journey south, so come join us!

## Little Rabbit Key

By Mary Carol Ochipa

*It was a beautiful, crisp, winter day as I stepped off our boat and onto the dock of Little Rabbit Key. I had been looking forward to just such a day to take my camera and explore the island and it's birdlife.*

*The run from our home in Islamorada in the Florida Keys was a short one across Florida Bay into the eastern boundary of Everglades National Park. Little Rabbit is accessible by water only, and is one of the few mangrove keys within the Park that you are allowed to walk on. There are no sandy beaches, but the island is ringed by a crystal clear channel. Getting into the channel can be a little tricky, as the water in the Florida Bay can go from 8 feet to 8 inches in just a matter of seconds. Sand flats surround the island, and the birdlife on them is incredible.*



*At low tide these shallow waters are teeming with terns, gulls, roseate spoonbills, ibis, egrets...you name it. A kingfisher sat on the final entrance marker to show us the way, a great white heron sat on his perch making sure we didn't run aground, while a pair of magnificent frigates followed overhead. Once on the key we were greeted by a pair of nesting ospreys who began warning us with their calls that their nest was not to be disturbed by intruders.*

*The island itself is composed of marl and scrub bushes ringed on all sides by the mangroves. To look at it you wonder how anything at all could survive in such a harsh environment. But I was amazed at what I saw!*

*Tiny warblers began to show themselves in the dense shrub, trying to see who these intruders were. Staying low to the ground, they would poke*



*their heads up, and then quickly fly to the next hiding place for cover. It was hard to identify them because they were moving so fast, but later from my photos I identified some of them as yellowthroats and Parulas. The palm warblers, on the other hand, enjoyed watching and even following us as we made our way on the footpaths around the island. Occasionally a great blue heron would startle us as he flushed*

*from mangroves and let us know he was not happy to see us.*

*The sun was setting, the tide was dropping, the ospreys were back on their nest, and it was time for us to leave this little piece of Paradise while we could still get out. I had more than accomplished my goal and satisfied my curiosity as to what was on Little Rabbit. As they say in the Keys, "Life is Good."*

## 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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