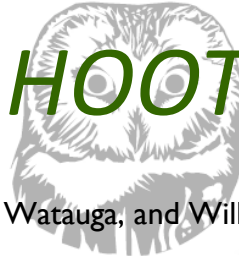


HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS



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

Aug-Sept-Oct 2015

Volume 7 Issue 3

President's Message: Flocking with Birders

By Bob Cherry

In July, I had the pleasure of attending the National Audubon Society's biennial Leadership Convention in Virginia with HCAS Board member Martha Cutler. This is a gathering of hundreds of Audubon volunteers and staff who get together to discuss issues important to birds and birders, share ideas and learn how to be a more effective organization.

Martha and I presented a workshop on HCAS's eBird Big Year but, more importantly, we attended several workshops on a variety of topics. These included such things as working with the faith-based community, leading a chapter, addressing climate change, and getting out our message. And this doesn't even include the information that comes from informal conversations during breaks and at dinner.

All in all it was a great three days with lots of ideas to consider and bring back to the High Country. But most importantly, it was a reminder for me and Martha about how much good work is being done around the nation to protect the birds that we love. At times it feels like we are just one Chapter taking on big problems. In reality we are just one Chapter among many, doing our part while hundreds and thousands of other people are doing their work elsewhere. Alone we can make a difference; together we can make a huge difference.

As I said, Martha and I have come back with some great ideas about how to be a more active and effective organization. But that will take participation from Chapter members to get these things done. We'll be talking about these ideas at our next Board meeting, selecting what we think are most important and then asking for your help.



Another type of "flocking with birders" at Valle Crucis Community Park. Photo by Don Mullaney

While it will take some work I think it will be fun w o r k a s w e see ourselves making progress helping the birds of the High Country. I hope you'll be able to join us as we take these next steps in our chapter's growth.

Bob

Frogs and Toads of the High Country

Tuesday, August 18, 2015, 6:30 pm

Holiday Inn Express, Boone



This cute little guy was found in my boot. I thought it was a sock!

Photo by Beverly Saltonstall

What's the difference between frogs and toads? **Doug and Connie Hall** will attempt to answer this age-old question when they present the program at the HCAS monthly meeting on August 18. They will provide information about North Carolina frogs and toads and, specifically, the species found in the High Country. These amphibians are important in our ecosystem, and the Halls have worked on projects with biologists at Appalachian State University to learn more about the role frogs and toads play.

They will also describe their educational activities with young people (pre-K through 5th/6th grades) which they've done in cooperation with Wendy Patoprsty, Watauga County Extension Agent.

Connie, who is a farm girl from central New Jersey, has had a life-long curiosity and love for critters, in particular, birds and amphibians. She passed this love for these critters on to Doug when they married. He grew up in the Washington, DC, area and is a "retired" broadcast systems engineer. Connie retired from the State of New Jersey after 30 years working at the Trenton Psychiatric Hospital. Now they both have the time to focus on frogs!

The Evolution of Fall Leaf Color

Tuesday, September 15, 2015, 6:30 pm
Holiday Inn Express, Boone



Dr. Howard S. Neufeld, currently a Professor in the Department of Biology at Appalachian State University, will present the program at the HCAS monthly meeting on September 15th. Dr. Neufeld has posed this question for discussion: *Is*

Nature's most colorful display adaptive or just the random consequence of old leaves dying?

It could be argued that Nature is at her most beautiful in autumn when trees in eastern North America and Asia turn brilliant colors before falling to the ground. According to Dr. Neufeld, for over a century, this display, limited primarily to the North Hemisphere, was simply thought to be just the inevitable consequence of leaves dying, a process known as senescence. However, in the past 20 years, researchers have begun to question this assertion, and nearly 100 scientific papers have been published that propose a variety of functions for the yellow and red pigments most associated with fall leaf colors.

He will describe how at one end of the spectrum are evolutionary hypotheses that suggest fall leaf colors are warnings to ward off potential herbivores. At the other end of the spectrum are physiological hypotheses that propose that these pigments, especially the red anthocyanins, protect leaves from excess light just prior to senescing, a function that may enhance the recycling of nutrients back into the twigs so they can be used again next growing season. Dr. Neufeld will also discuss how climate change may alter fall leaf color displays and what that may signify about the global impacts of humans on their environment.

Dr. Neufeld notes that whatever the outcomes of this research, fall leaf color displays are one of the true luxuries of life, providing inspiration and enjoyment to millions of people each year, not to mention ~\$800 million in economic impact in NC for those involved in fall color tourism.

Dr. Neufeld received a B.S. in Forestry from Rutgers University in 1975, a Master of Forestry in Forest Sciences from the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Science in 1977, and a Ph.D. in Botany from the University of Georgia in 1984. He has served as President of both the Association of Southeastern Biologists (ASB) and the Southern Appalachian Botanical Society. He currently serves as Chair of AppalAIR, the interdisciplinary atmospheric research group at ASU and is the first Director of the Southern Appalachian Environmental Research and Education Center which resides within ASU's Research Institute for the Environment, Energy and Economics.

My HotSpot

Babes in the Woods

Article and photos by Doris Ratchford



It amazes me how much work is required to maintain even the smallest of gardens. Most mornings during spring and summer you can find me in my kitchen garden with my list of chores. Luckily for me, lots of feathered friends visit my garden and keep me company. There is always a bold bird or two at the feeder or in the nearby trees to fuss at me. There might be a Black-throated Blue Warbler in the Rhododendron thicket or a male Indigo Bunting at the top of the pine tree to serenade me. It's true that I never get more than a handful of strawberries or raspberries to eat, but hey, you can always get those at the Farmer's Market.

Happily, this is one of my favorite birding spots, especially the last days of June and the first days of July. This is when my resident birds that have been busy nesting now bring their growing families to visit the garden. It's July 1 as I write this, and there are now five White-Breasted Nuthatches that chase each other up and around the Beech trees. I think in a couple of weeks the juveniles will leave to find their own territories. The usual three hummingbirds have expanded to seven. I can tell that there are some juvenile birds in the group and there seems to be less bullying than normal. I doubt if this tolerance will last too much longer. Soon the Cardinal Flowers will be blooming and they can fight over those as well as the feeders. Right now the juvenile hummers are bold and curious and will hover inches from my face while I'm pulling weeds, giving me a good looking-over.

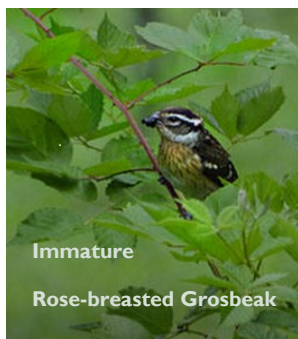


Song Sparrow

Earlier this morning, as I walked down the path to the mulch pile, I heard a commotion in the azaleas. Expecting to see one of the noisy baby Titmice (and their even noisier parents), I was surprised to find a recently-fledged Blue-headed Vireo. I waited hoping to see the parent arrive for a feeding. After quite a few moments, I thought I must be keeping the parent away so I moved on and was rewarded by hearing a singing Hooded Warbler. He seemed to have followed me back to the garden and made a brief appearance in the pea vines. I hope he found some unwanted caterpillar for breakfast.

Continued on page 3

My Hot Spot (continued)



Immature
Rose-breasted Grosbeak

For the past two years, there have been Rose-breasted Grosbeaks nesting nearby. The juveniles are now visiting the feeders but still beg to be fed when the adults are around. Their "whistling" can be heard throughout the day. They ignore my comings and goings, so they have either gotten used to me or are too busy with all these young birds to care. Also, the Red-

bellied Woodpeckers, which seem to have been absent for some time, are now back at the feeders and with them is a single juvenile with his all-gray head. The little guy doesn't come to the feeder yet but stays on the tree nearby. The male Red-bellied takes sunflower seeds from the feeder, flies to the trees, cracks open the seeds and feeds the kernels to his young. In between the feedings, dad gleans the tree bark as the young woodpecker watches and follows him around the tree. As dad finds food, he feeds the young bird, then it's back to the feeder and the cycle begins again.

Of course all this activity around me provides many opportunities for me to take a break and become an observer. Before I know it, it's time for lunch and there are still many things left on my garden to-do list. Oh well, I'll just have to do some more birding... I mean... gardening tomorrow.



Red-winged Blackbird feeding chick
at Valle Crucis Community Park



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and chick.



Yellow Warbler feeding
baby at Valle Crucis
Community Park



Eastern Kingbird flying off at Valle
Crucis Community Park



Jesse Pope's son on a birding trip.



Doris Ratchford's
grandson using his
very own "binocs"



A Very Big Year (So Far)

By Bob Cherry

We're a little more than halfway through our eBird Big Year and we've had a very impressive response so far. Through June 30, HCAS members have submitted 795 lists to eBird and have shared them with HCAS. Of those 499 were from North Carolina sites. Not too surprisingly, we submitted the most lists in January when this project was new and several of us attended the Carolina Bird Club meeting on the coast, and the second highest number when migrants returned in April.

So far HCAS members have seen 716 bird species around the world with 419 of them seen in the USA. More than half of those have been seen in North Carolina with that list up to 224 species. In our five-county area, we've seen 180 species. Watauga leads that list with 125 species followed by 110 in Wilkes, 101 in Avery, 86 in Ashe and just 35 in Alleghany.

As we get into the summer, the number of new species found each month has of course dropped off. Unfortunately, so has the number of lists submitted with just 27 lists shared in June.

Please keep the lists coming. Our eBird Big Year will continue through the end of the year so there is still plenty of time to get out, add some birds to your year list, and share them with HCAS. And in the process you'll be helping to add to the knowledge we have about birds in the High Country and around the world.

Our Littlest Birds and Littlest Birders

Bird photos by Don Mullaney. Birders photos by Jesse Pope
and Doris Ratchford

The Tennis Ball Tanager

by Mickey Shortt

My love and knowledge of birds was there, but I wanted to sharpen it. I recognized my decreasing amount of time in the field. In order to increase our time in the field, Jesse Pope excitedly accepted a friendly competition to see who could identify the most bird species in a year as well as a mutual goal to reach 300 species in North Carolina. To date, we're over 200 species each after several trips to find rarities (including the one below).



Photo of **Western Tanager** taken by Richard Gray
at the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon.

I wouldn't call our attempt to find a Western Tanager a rash or last-minute decision. In my mind, it was a calculated and intentional effort to find a bird that probably wouldn't present another opportunity during the rest of the year. There have been around a dozen records for the Piedmont of North Carolina through the years, and this one was an hour away at a state park and had been there consistently for a few weeks. At the time, there was also one on the coast too, but we wouldn't be visiting the coast until the end of January. The one at the coast was a female and the bird at Lake James was a male—admittedly, I'm charmed by beauty with birds.

There were discouraging elements about finding this bird too, though. First, Dwayne Martin had searched the previous day and had not located the showy bird. Additionally, the dogwood berries it was known for eating were now off the tree on the ground. We had a little encouragement from Dwayne that we should make an attempt at finding it, so we did.

We met at the Linville post office at 5:45 a.m. and slowly made our way down the Blue Ridge through dense fog. After a series of turns on country roads, we made our way to the **Catawba River Visitor Center**—the known location of the bird during December. We walked out to **Lake James** before sunrise and looked around awaiting a dawn chorus—though it's limited in January. As it began to lighten up a little, we walked back toward the visitor center. Carolina Wren song—expected. Carolina Chickadee call—expected. Then we heard a couple of call notes that we recognized were close enough to the Scarlet Tanager that we concluded had to be the Western Tanager. They reminded me of a piece of the “chick-burr” call of the Scarlet.

Once we acknowledged that we were near the bird, we both became nervous to the point of questioning our movements. We had driven to find this bird and were confident we heard it, so missing it now would most likely be a mistake on our part. Everyone has had that feeling before—they see something good within grasp and become fearful that they may lose it by not finishing the deal.

We looked around and saw a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. This bird is known to be viewable year-round in the mountains, but we hadn't found it in 2015 until now. After looking around more and not hearing the call notes, Jesse decided that we should go to the upper parking area to look across to the trees at the edge of the lot. This made sense and we started walking. Jesse noticed a bird fly up from the ground and through the breezeway. In his effort to communicate the flight to me, I thought he was joking—“that's it, that's it.” I checked with him and discovered that he was serious—he had seen a bright yellow bird fly from the ground, and we had flushed it. How did we not see it earlier?

We went back to that position of concern again—what should we do to find it again and confirm it. Jesse conceded that what he had seen was not enough to confirm. We decided to circle around and look for the bird in some tall shrubs behind the visitor center. I nervously looked back several times to see if it had returned before committing to round the corner of the building.

After walking back to the backside of the visitor center, we scanned the bushes with our binoculars. Nothing—except a tennis ball about 18 inches from the ground in one of the bushes. Why would a tennis ball be in there?

I kept scanning, acknowledged the tennis ball and then went back to it. “Jesse, that's not a tennis ball—that's our bird!” Western tanager: bird 27 on my year list. I had heard of leaf birds before, but this was a first for me. The bird had a bright yellow breast and a furrow on the breast that made it appear like the line in a tennis ball. We walked around and got better looks at the striking bird.

It was strange to see this bird here in January—maybe stranger was the thought that morning that we could possibly see one in January. I remembered seeing these birds in Yosemite Valley, and though this male was not in full breeding plumage like I remembered them, it was still striking with its yellow breast and rump patch, black wings and light wing bars. The orange-red color was faint below its beak, but it was present.

“Everything else is icing today!” I shared. We ended up seeing a Bald Eagle, Merlin and Brown-headed Nuthatches in the same morning. So the itch to chase birds had started on day three of the year.

Swifts Night(s) Out !

Thursday, Sep. 3, 6:30 pm: Lees-McRae College
Sunday, Sep. 13, 6:00 pm: Wilkesboro Elementary School

Chimney Swifts are residents in the Carolinas from early April through September. They generally start building their nests in May. Both sexes help build the nest by breaking off dead twigs, fastening them together with their saliva, and then fastening them to the insides of chimneys or large hollow logs. They lay 3-6 white eggs mid-June. Unlike most songbirds, incubation requires 18 days. Both adults incubate and care for the young, which stay in or near the nest for 24 days or longer. The babies brace their short tails against the vertical walls and exercise their wings until ready to emerge.

After nesting season, the Chimney Swifts start flocking together, and a thousand or more may roost in a single large chimney. There are numerous chimneys in the HCAS region which attract the flocks of Chimney Swifts. This year we have scheduled two viewing opportunities.



Chimney Swifts gathering at Wilkesboro Elementary School

Photo by Monty Combs

Thurs. Sep. 3 (Rain date Tues. Sep. 8)

Lees-McRae College, Main St. W, Banner Elk

Trip Leaders: Betsy Wauters & Betsy Murrelle

Come join members and friends of HCAS at Lees-McRae College to watch the amazing circling of "flying cigars" as they fly in and eventually descend into a chimney on the roof of one of the dormitories.

We will meet at the college on Sep. 3rd around 6:30 -7:30 pm. Bring a chair and picnic supper if you want, or just come and enjoy the show at sundown!

We hope to have a special treat for you this year: if the Chimney Swifts are a suitable age, Nina Fischesser, Director of the Blue Ridge Wildlife Institute at Lees-McRae College, will be on hand to release some Chimney Swifts.

Kudos Corner



**Kristen Content &
Ralph Wells**

Photo by Monty Combs

• The Sue Wells Research Grant has been awarded this year to Kristen Content, a graduate student at Appalachian State University. Kristen is working under the guidance of HCAS member Dr. Lynn Siefferman and is looking at the relationship between bird personality and avian stress hormones in Tree Swallows. She has been monitoring 107 active nest boxes at Valle Crucis and Meat Camp.

Kristen will use the \$1000 grant to help cover the gasoline needed for the frequent trips to these two sites throughout the summer.

Any funds left over will be used to help with the analysis of the blood samples she has collected. Congratulations, Kristen! We look forward to hearing about the results of your research at a future HCAS meeting.

• A big welcome to **Scott Hughett** of Boone, our newest member, who joined HCAS in July.

**Sun. Sep. 13: Wilkesboro Elementary School,
1248 School St, Wilkesboro**

Trip Leaders: Brenda & Monty Combs

Wilkes Swifts Night Out will be at Wilkesboro Elementary School on Sunday night, September 13. We will gather in the parking lot in front of the chimney of an old unused boiler that the swifts have adopted. The chimney is shorter and on the same level as the parking lot. The swifts circle closely overhead and the sound is fantastic. You get a much closer view of their activity.

If you would like to bring a picnic, we should start gathering at 6:00 pm. The swifts will start slowly and by 7:00 pm will start entering the chimney.

Directions from Boone: Come down highway 421 South and take exit 286 B for NC 268 which is the first exit after you cross the Yadkin River. At the end of the ramp, go straight across NC 268 onto School Street. Follow School Street to its end. The parking lot will be on the right. There will be plenty of room to set out chairs to enjoy the event.

Science of Birds: Murmurations of Starlings

by Bob Cherry

I'm sure you've all been amazed at a murmuration of starlings at some time in your birding lives. (If you don't know what these are, check out this video <http://tinyurl.com/nwqbser>) It's a mesmerizing sight to watch as thousands of birds form delicate patterns that dart and flow across the sky. While it's easy to just enjoy the beauty of these events it's hard not to be curious about how they occur. Fortunately, many researchers have also been enjoying and thinking about murmurations.



European Starling photo by
Beverly Saltonstall

Usually the first question that people ask about these large, fast moving flocks of birds is how do the birds manage to not fly into each other? While past theories included telepathic communications between birds, recent research has shed some light on the ability of starlings to fly in flocks of over one million birds without colliding with one another. Part of the solution is to have a fast reaction time of 100 milliseconds, about twice as fast as the average person.

One study found that birds react to the nearest seven birds, not just to the bird closest to it. And then the next group of seven birds around each of those seven respond, followed by the seven birds around each of those 49 birds. At this rate the movement spreads quickly through even a very large flock, much faster than if it was a single bird reacting to just one other single bird.

As you look at these large flocks you can probably notice that the birds are not evenly distributed. Denser clouds of birds tend to congregate in the center with fewer birds at the edges, though which birds are where is changing constantly as outside birds make their way to the center. Being in the thick of things in the center give the birds protection from predators who have difficulty picking out individuals in all of the commotion of hundreds or thousands of birds flocking together.

One effect that predators have on the flock is to create moving ribbons, or agitation waves, as nearby birds take evasive action to not be caught. These ribbons that are visible moving through the flock is not an increase in the number of birds that you see but instead are the birds' wings viewed at a different angle as they turn away from the predator. As the wave moves through the flock, it moves at 13.4 meters per second, faster than the flock is flying.

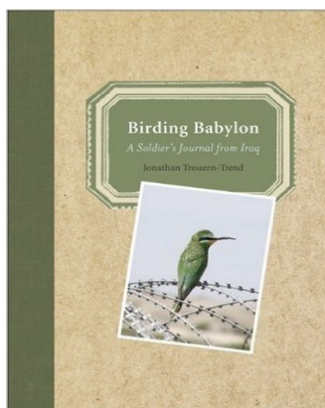
Birding Babylon: A Soldier's Journal from Iraq

By Martha Cutler

"I'm a soldier in Iraq...I have been birding since I was 12 years old...I plan to write about my nature observations during my time here, both birds and other critters." With these words, Jonathan Trouer-Trend began his blog from Iraq. The full blog from his deployment in 2004/5 and a second deployment in 2009/10 is available online at <http://birdingbabylon.blogspot.com/>.

In 2006 Sierra Club Books published a volume of selected posts from the first deployment. The volume is quite small (iPhone size), nicely produced and illustrated with tiny line drawings of some of the 122 species Trouer-Trend observed.

Anyone who has read a naturalist's journal (or kept one) will relate to these blog posts – the descriptions of the birds the author saw, notes on how they were behaving, etc. Then a comment like "the base is much safer than mine, almost never getting attacked" will suddenly remind the reader of just where Trouer-Trend is while he looks through his binoculars.



Trouer-Trend was not the only member of the military serving in Iraq to bring binoculars for personal use, and his blog provided a way for these amateur birders and naturalists to connect. They have played an important role in efforts to track and protect bird species in Iraq. More information about this work can be found in a National Wildlife article online at <http://www.nwf.org/news-and-magazines/national-wildlife/birds/archives/2010/iraq-birding.aspx>

I found both the book and the blog fascinating – a very different look at our involvement in the Middle East – and reassuring in that "the great cycles of nature continue despite what people happen to be doing."



Scarlet Tanager photo by
Kim Barley at
Valle Crucis
Community
Park

A Birding Trip to Texas and Arizona

Article and photos by Richard Gray

In late April and early May of this year, I took a road trip all the way from Boone, NC, to Tucson Arizona. Ostensibly, the purpose of the trip was five nights of observing on the Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope on Mount Graham, Arizona. The covert purpose was to bird at some of the most iconic birding hotspots in the southern tier of our country.

On April 18, I set off in my Prius, with binoculars, a spotting scope, my trusty camera, camping gear, and food and water. The first goal species was Bachman's Sparrow, and for that I headed for the Nature Conservancy's **Splinter Hill Bog Preserve** in southern Alabama.



Roseate Spoonbill at Smith Oaks

This is a wonderful lowland bog, known for the thousands of Venus flytraps that grow there, but also good for Bachman's Sparrows. It is also great for many other birds, but Bachman's Sparrow proved difficult, and I only saw it briefly just after an early morning rain shower.

Over the next day or two I visited **Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge** (MS), and the **Gulf Islands National Seashore** (MS), but I think my favorite place before entering the Lone Star State was the **Sherburne Wildlife Management Area Complex** just west of Baton Rouge. This complex consists of impoundments and fields scattered over a number of sites. The first site I visited was **South Farm**, an area of shallow ponds, woods and scrub. This place was full of Prothonotary Warblers, Black-bellied Whistling Ducks, Anhingas, Little Blue Herons, Cattle Egrets, White Ibis, Barred Owls, Loggerhead Shrikes, and Blue Grosbeaks. The second site was in **Pointe Coupee Parish**, and its attraction is that it is a good place for Swallow-tailed Kites. I managed to see one individual, flying overhead with a number of Mississippi Kites.

The Gulf coast of Texas is a place that all birders must visit before they die. My first stop was the **Boy Scout Woods on High Island** (neither high nor an island), southeast of Houston. This is a "fallout" area where warblers and other neotropical migrants first find land and trees after flying non-stop over the Gulf. It can be spectacular if the wind and weather is just right, but even if the weather does not cooperate, it can still be an



Red-knot at Bolivar Flats

excellent site during migration. Birders from all over the world congregate there, and I found hundreds. And the birding was great, with many warbler species, Scarlet and Summer Tanagers, Painted Buntings and many, many other birds.

After visiting there, I headed down the Bolivar Peninsula to **Audubon's Bolivar Flats Shorebird Sanctuary**. There I saw a Reddish Egret, hundreds of American Avocets, Wilson's Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, Whimbrels, Forster's and Royal Terns, and a single Black Tern. But the highlight, and one of the goal species of my trip, was a single rather lonely-looking Red Knot. There are a number of other sites of interest nearby, including the **Anahuac NWR**, where I picked up two other goal species of the trip, a Fulvous Whistling Duck and a pair of Dickcissels.

The next morning I headed to another iconic birding hotspot -- **Lost Maples State Natural Area**, west of San Antonio, an area of rolling hills and limestone cliffs. It is known for two rare and endangered species -- the Golden-Cheeked Warbler, which breeds only in the Juniper-oak woodlands of central Texas, and the Black-capped Vireo which has a similar very restricted breeding range. I actually saw the Black-capped Vireo at the **Nature Conservancy's Love Creek Preserve** (special permission required to enter). With the help of some friendly birders, I was able to observe a nesting pair of Golden-cheeked Warblers at Lost Maples. Other great birds I saw or heard at Lost Maples included Chuck-will's-widows, Rufous-crowned Sparrows, Can-



Vermillion Flycatcher
Sonoita Creek Preserve

yon Wrens, Nashville Warblers, and a White-tipped Dove, far north of its usual breeding area.

The next stop was **Dripping Springs Natural Area** in New Mexico (Gambel's Quail, White-throated Swift, Ash-throated Flycatcher, Curve-billed Thrasher, Canyon

Towhee) and then on to **Mount Graham**. I met my colleague, Chris Corbally, in Willcox, after driving through violent thunderstorms. At the base of the mountain, we learned that nearly 10 inches of snow had fallen at the summit of the mountain.

Mt. Graham, (10,700 ft), is an example of a "sky island" where a number of now-endemic species retreated at the end of the last ice age. Most famous is the Mt. Graham Red Squirrel, which is endangered. Visitors to the Mount Graham Observatory site (which includes the Giant Binocular Telescope, the Heinrich Hertz Submillimeter Telescope, and the Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope) must be careful not to stray off into red squirrel territory. My colleague and I got good data on 4 of our 5 nights, and I got a little bit of birding in. One of the "must-see" species on Mt. Graham is the Yellow-eyed Junco. I



Elegant Trogan

also saw Northern Flickers (red-shafted), Hairy Woodpeckers, Mountain Chickadees, Hermit Thrush, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, and Audubon (Myrtle) Warblers.

After the observing run on Mt. Graham, I had two good days in the Tucson vicinity. The first day was spent in the Patagonia area, near the Mexican border, exploring the **Sonoita Creek Preserve** (Gray Hawk, Northern Beardless Tyrannulet, Vermillion Flycatcher, Lucy's Warbler) and the **de Anza trail**.



Black-throated Gray Warbler

The next day I hiked up **Madera Canyon** and saw the "must see" bird of southern Arizona, the Elegant Trogan. Other highlights of that walk were an Arizona Woodpecker, Dusky-capped Flycatchers, Bell's Vireo, a Black-throated Gray Warbler and a Hermit Warbler (in migration).

The return trip was a bit more rushed, but I did make time to visit the **Davis Mountains** in southwestern Texas, and **Big Bend National Park**. These are wonderful areas, and I am planning to go back sometime in the near future. In particular, I want to find the Colima Warbler, found only in the United States at high elevations in the Big Bend National Park. **Chalk Bluff Park**, near Uvalde, TX, is also a great place (Golden-fronted Woodpecker, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Black-throated Sparrow). I paid a return visit to **High Island, Texas** where I saw a whole family of King Rails trying to cross the road, and, at **Smith Oaks**, a mixed species colony of breeding Great and Snowy Egrets along with Roseate Spoonbills. Two more days of driving and I got back to Boone on May 8.

If you haven't had the chance to visit these great birding sites in Texas and Arizona, I urge you to make your plans now!

Raptor Migration Fall 2015



In the fall of each year, thousands of raptors glide above our High Country mountain ridge tops, using thermal air columns as they migrate south. Two excellent viewing spots are **Mahogany Rock on the Blue Ridge Parkway, milepost 235, and Linville Peak at Grandfather Mountain**. Both of these are official count sites during September.

Join HCAS members and other watchers and counters on **Saturday, September 19, at Mahogany Rock**. However, **NOTE:** we will be monitoring migration conditions, and if conditions are good earlier in the month, we may change the date of the hawk watch to Saturday, September 12. As we get into September, please keep an eye on Yahoo group email for details of the hawk watch and any change in the date.

Whichever date we meet at Mahogany Rock, you'll have the opportunity to view migrating Broad-winged Hawks – and monarch butterflies! - plus the possibility of spotting Osprey, Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, American Kestrels, Merlins, Peregrine Falcons, Cooper's Hawks, and Sharp-shinned Hawks. See NC Birding Trail, Mountain Guide, p. 16 or click here <http://ncbirdingtrail.org/sites/2012/8/1/mahogany-rock.html>. Also, here's a link to a *Guide to Hawk Watching at Mahogany Rock*: <http://www.sparta-nc.com/PDFs/HawkWatching.pdf>

Grandfather Mountain also participates in the official Hawk Watch, and there will be trained counters and volunteers on Linville Peak daily in September who will record the number and type of raptors. If you'd like to volunteer to help with the count, please contact Jesse Pope, Executive Director of the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, at jesse@grandfather.com. Anyone who volunteers to help with the Hawk Watch and participates for at least 4 hours will receive a free pass to the mountain for that day. If you volunteer for 40 hours, you will get a free annual pass to Grandfather Mountain.

This year, instead of scheduling a rain date at Mahogany Rock, our "**rain date**" will be **Saturday, September 26, at Grandfather Mountain**. And you might want to do both of them! Click this link for tips on watching and counting raptors at Grandfather Mountain:

<http://www.grandfather.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Grandfather-Mountain-Hawk-Count.pdf>



A kettle of **Broad-winged Hawks**. Photo by Monty Combs

Birds of North Carolina Online

by Bob Cherry

Birders always seem to be looking for new tools to help them learn more about birds in their area or as they travel around our state. The *Birds of North Carolina* website is one of those great tools for people who are wondering if the bird they are seeing is something unusual or looking for information about what birds are found in a county they might be traveling to. *Birds of NC* can be found at : www.carolinabirdclub.org/ncbirds/accounts.php

The site states that the intended uses are: "1) out-of-state birders planning a trip to North Carolina, and wanting to know the best times, places, and chances to see target species; 2) in-state birders who are looking for information on new species on their life list, year list, etc.; 3) and all birders who want to find out specific information about a rare species, such as number of records or times and places when and where seen."

The information can be retrieved by county or by species. With the county option you can see a list of all of the species records or you can show the county-occurrence map for any species you choose. Looking through the five counties covered by HCAS will help you learn when our birds are expected to return or leave and how likely it is to find a specific bird in any of our counties.

The website can also show information by species. This could include a bird's relative abundance for each county, when they can be found there, breeding seasons and other information about each species. Lots of information to make it easier to bird in this area or to just become more knowledgeable about the area's birds.

The next time you find some unusual bird and you aren't sure if it is really rare or not, check out *Birds of NC* to find out. Or just spend a couple hours roaming through the different species pages to find out when birds are found in North Carolina and in what counties. It's a great place to learn more about our birds and to become a better birder.

Volunteer Opportunities

- **Curtis Smalling**, Director of Land Bird Conservation for Audubon North Carolina, passed along this request for volunteers: Audubon North Carolina is seeking additional volunteers for their private lands outreach work for Golden-winged Warbler and forest conservation projects.



Golden-winged Warbler

photo taken on Snake Mountain by
Jeri Smart, May 2015

Volunteers will receive training in partner programs that assist landowners in managing their lands for the benefit of birds and other wildlife. We currently have a great core team and are looking to expand our numbers in the High Country chapter territory. Contact Aimee Tomcho at atomcho@audubon.org or by phone at (828)419-0890 for more information and to get started.

- **Jesse Pope**, Executive Director of the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation, welcomes all who would like to volunteer to help with the **Grandfather Mountain Hawk Watch** in September. See the article *Raptor Migration Fall 2015* in this issue of *Hoots* for more details or email Jesse at jesse@grandfather.com

Construction Workers Ahead



American Redstart
(L) at the Boone
Greenway and **Cedar**
Waxwing (below)
on the Appalachian
Trail building nests.

Photos by Richard
Gray.



A Great Big Thanks to Our Sponsors !!



HCAS Travels Afar

In March, Sheryl and Wes McNair traveled all around eastern and mid-Australia for 4 weeks, including their own 11-day "caravan" tour (in a camper van) through Victoria and New South Wales.



Australian Pelican

Photo by Wes McNair



Wes McNair taking the photo of the **Australian Penguin** chicks (right) under the boardwalk.
Photo by Sheryl McNair



Photo of **Australian Penguin** chicks taken on Phillips Island
by Wes McNair

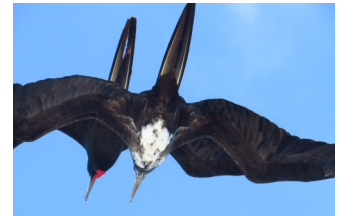
In June, Martha Cutler and Doug Blackford traveled to Ecuador where they visited on the mainland and then took a week-and-a-half trip to the Galapagos Islands. Photos by Martha Cutler.



Flightless Cormorant



Chatham Mockingbird photo taken on San Cristobal Island, Galapagos Islands



Magnificent Frigatebirds, Galapagos Islands
One of 50 shots taken by Martha while lying on her back on the top deck of the boat.

Bob and Pat Williams traveled to Alaska for 2 weeks at the end of June and beginning of July. The highlight of the trip was 3 days in Nome where they birded the highways that lead into the tundra. Photos by Bob Williams



Bald Eagle on navigation tower at Homer, AK



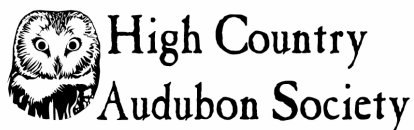
Harlequin Duck, Denali National Park



Spectacled Eider, Teller, AK,



Tufted Puffin, Kachemak Bay, AK,



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High Country Hoots is published four times a year by the High Country Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Group email members receive the newsletter via electronic mail. There is also access to the newsletter on our website.

Editors: Janet Paulette and Beverly Saltonstall.

Please visit our website for more information about HCAS and birding in the High Country.

A link on the homepage has instructions for joining our group email.

www.HighCountryAudubon.org

Webmaster: Doris Ratchford

All events and meeting times are subject to change.

A \$5 donation is suggested for field trip participation.

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You can now make donations to HCAS on our website, www.HighCountryAudubon.org, through PayPal.

You do not need a PayPal account to take advantage of this convenient way to donate.

You can donate using a credit card or using your PayPal account. Just go to the Join/Donate tab on the website, and you'll see four "Donate" buttons: Annual HCAS Membership; Annual HCAS Membership & Field Trips; Sue Wells Research Grant; and Other.

Choose a button and just follow instructions – it's that easy!

Calendar of Events

Please check HCAS Yahoo group email regularly for changes/additions to the calendar.

August		
1 – 31 Daily	HCAS eBird Big Year Location: wherever you find birds Who: all HCAS members www.ebird.org	
Wed. *Weekly	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk Trip Leader: Curtis Smalling, ANC *For dates call 828-265-0198 or check: http://booneweather.com/Life+Outdoors/Birding	8:30 am - 11:00 am
18 Tues.	HCAS monthly meeting Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: <i>Frogs and Toads of the High Country</i> Presented by Doug & Connie Hall	6:30 pm

September		
1-30 Daily	HCAS eBird Big Year Location: wherever you find birds Who: all HCAS members www.ebird.org	
1 - 30 Daily	Hawk Watch at Grandfather Mountain To volunteer, email Jesse Pope at: jesse@grandfather.com	
Wed. *Weekly	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk Trip Leader: Curtis Smalling, ANC *For dates call 828-265-0198 or check: http://booneweather.com/Life+Outdoors/Birding	8:30 am - 11:00 am
3 Thurs.	Swifts Night Out (Trip #1) Lees-McRae College Trip Leaders: Betsy Wauters & Betsy Murrelle Rain date: Tuesday, September 8	~ 6:30 pm

September (continued)		
13 Sun.	Swifts Night Out (Trip #2) Wilkesboro Elementary School Trip Leaders: Brenda & Monty Combs	~6:00 pm
18-19 Fri.-Sat.	Carolina Bird Club Fall Meeting, Hickory https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/meetings/2015/Hickory.html	
19 Sat.	Mahogany Rock Hawk Watch Blue Ridge Parkway, milepost 235 Trip Leader: Martha Cutler Check Yahoo group email for details Rain date: Sat. Sep. 26 at Grandfather Mtn	TBA
15 Tues.	HCAS monthly meeting Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: <i>The Evolution of Fall Leaf Color</i> Presented by Dr. Howard Neufeld, ASU Biologist	6:30 pm

October		
1 – 31 Daily	HCAS eBird Big Year Location: wherever you find birds Who: all HCAS members www.ebird.org/meetings/2015/Hickory.html	
Wed. *Weekly	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk Trip Leader: Curtis Smalling, ANC *For dates call 828-265-0198 or check http://booneweather.com/Life+Outdoors/Birding	8:30 am - 11:00 am
20 Tues.	HCAS Monthly Meeting Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: <i>Exploring the Galapagos</i> Presented by Wayne Van Devender, ASU Biologist and Martha Cutler	6:30 pm
28 Wed.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk Last walk of the year!	8:30 am - 11:00 am