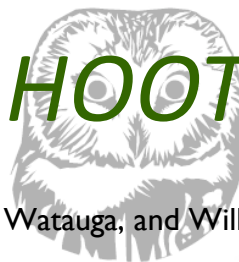


HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS



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

Bird Walk, Pot Luck, and Annual Meeting

Valle Crucis Community Park, July 19, 2016

A large group gathered at Valle Crucis Community Park for a fun evening of birding and yummy food. A big thank you to **Robin Diaz** who led the bird walk in the late afternoon heat. She thought the heat may have kept the birds rather quiet, but the very enthusiastic group of about 15 birders still identified 30 species during the walk.



Here's some highlights shared by Robin: a very late perched Tree Swallow and a late Yellow Warbler along Dutch Creek; opportunity to compare the Northern Rough-winged Swallows with nearby Barn Swallows; a chunky, speckled young Eastern Bluebird; and views of a very streaky (and clueless) young Chipping Sparrow checking for crumbs under the tables. Although Robin said that morning is a better time, they also walked along the new mowed path west of the park.

After the bird walk, everyone gathered around the tables for a delicious pot luck followed by the brief annual



Thanks to Monty Combs who, as usual, documented the evening with lovely photos.

Aug-Sept-Oct 2016

Volume 8 Issue 3

meeting. Bob Cherry was recognized and thanked for his many contributions over the years (including writing numerous articles for *Hoots* and keeping us informed of issues related to birds and their habitats), but especially for the two terms (4 years) he has served as President of HCAS. In appreciation, he was presented with a gift certificate for coffee from Birds & Beans which is shade-grown, organic Bird Friendly® certified coffee. So we were able to thank Bob and help our birds at the same time!



Bob Cherry presenting Martha Cutler with the Volunteer of the Year award.

Martha Cutler was recognized as Volunteer of the Year and was presented with a gift certificate from Buteo Books. Martha, who loves books, remembered that her father used to thumb through the printed Buteo catalog, making little marks beside interesting titles. When his order came, the books were always wrapped in brown paper -- something that Buteo Books was still doing the last time she ordered from them, giving her a great sense of continuity! For years, Martha has done an amazing job of planning programs and field trips and assisting HCAS in any way she can. She will continue in this role and would love to have suggestions from you -- and be sure to thank her for her efforts!

Bob Cherry then announced that ASU student Anna Pierce was the 2016 recipient of the Sue Wells Research Grant, and Anna was presented with a check for \$1,000. Please see page 10 for more info on the grant and Anna's research.

A fashion faux pas?
Three members with nearly identical shirts. Two with a squirrel saying "Excuse me but your bird feeder is empty", and one with a bird saying "Excuse me but the squirrels ate all the birdseed".



Brookshire Park Nature Walk

Article by Guy McGrane

The first-Saturday nature walks at Brookshire Park in Boone have been fun and birdy for the past few months, with June especially interesting. The group of 11 braved unseasonal heat to document 49 species, including nice pictures of Baltimore Oriole chicks which appear to have recently fledged. We also saw a



Willow Flycatcher
Photo: Chris Lytle

pretty Fox Squirrel in the woods at the far end of the greenway, and that section is now more accessible as a new trail has been added there.

These walks will continue on the first Saturday morning of each month - rain, shine, or snow - meeting at 8 a.m. at the picnic shelter in the main parking lot. These regular walks help us document the diversity of wildlife in an urban multi-use floodplain park and acquaint people with the wildlife all around them.

Upcoming Programs

By Martha Cutler

Fisheries Management in the High Country... with a Side of Fish Recipes and Duck Stamps

Tuesday, August 16, 2016



Kevin with Smallmouth Bass, photo by Chris Wood, NCWRC.

Our August program will feature Kevin Hining, the Northern Mountain Education Specialist in the Wildlife Education Division of the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. He will provide a summary of fisheries management by the Commission in northwest NC, highlighting fish surveys, fishing access information, and trout stocking details.

On several of Curtis Smalling's Wednesday walks at Valle Crucis, many of us have seen NCWRC employees emptying buckets of fish into the river. Now is our chance to find out more about this practice. Kevin will also give a quick tutorial in the use of the NCWRC website in case folks are interested in learning more. Finally he will talk about the Federal Duck stamp and NC Duck stamp programs. According to the NCWRC web site, Kevin also "knows a thing or two about cooking fish." Maybe we can get him to share some recipes.....

Upcoming Programs (continued)

Cliff-nesting Avian Community

Tuesday, September 20, 2016

September's program will be a report from the 2014 HCAS Sue Wells Research Grant recipient (and rock-climber!) **Angie Langevin**. She applied the grant money to assist her in studying "the interactions of the Western North Carolina cliff-nesting avian community with the cliff-face ecosystem they inhabit." She hopes to be able "to document the



Angie Langevin on Snake Mountain. Photos: Dr. Mike Madritch

potential link between cliff-nesting birds and cliff-face plant and lichen communities" and thus to assist conservationists "to better manage cliff habitats [and] avian cliff-nesting species." Angie first came to the attention of HCAS members when she posted on our group email asking if people knew the locations of any raven or vulture nests in the area which she could monitor for her study.

Falconry and Raptor Conservation in the Modern Era

Tuesday, October 18, 2016

For the final HCAS program of 2016, we are pleased to have Eric Harrold speaking about falcons and falconry. Eric Harrold holds an undergraduate degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences from NC State and an MS in Biology from UNCC. After completing his graduate work, he worked numerous seasonal field ornithology jobs until 2007 when he accepted full-time work at Douthat State Park as a park interpreter. For the past 4 years, he has been employed with the Virginia Natural Heritage Program as a preserve stewardship technician in the southwest region. He enjoys prescribed burns, hikes, trout fishing, birding, and yes, falconry. He currently flies a cast of Harris Hawks and a male Cooper's Hawk.

With a history that dates back over 4000 years and geographical span that includes all continents except Australia and Antarctica, falconry has influenced many cultures and is today practiced in societies worldwide.

Continued on page 3

Upcoming Programs (continued)

As with the practitioners of other hunting sports, falconers have become organized in order to embrace stewardship and conservation challenges affecting the resources they treasure.

The most notable example in North America is the recovery of the Peregrine Falcon from the plight it suffered due to exposure to DDT residue in ingested prey. Falconers came together and joined academic and government professionals to determine the cause and formulate a plan for recovery that included captive breeding and hacking (release) efforts. As it turned out, the model used for peregrine recovery became the blueprint for other imperiled species across the globe in efforts carried out by The Peregrine Fund/World Center For Birds of Prey.



Eric Harrold with JJ and his catch.

Today in North America, falconers continue to practice good stewardship of utilized raptor populations, contributing to work on American Kestrels, Gyrfalcons, and Aplomado Falcons among other species. The rewards for these efforts include the highest quality of falconry in the world, with relatively abundant quarry popula-

tions and healthy wild raptor populations that easily sustain falconry take. This creates an incentive for continued contributions to conservation challenges as it does for other groups with a utilitarian use of wildlife resources. The future of biodiversity preservation will be brighter if impassioned stewards like those in the falconry community have the opportunity to continue to lead the way when these challenges arise.

Swifts Night(s) Out!!

Chimney Swifts are residents in the Carolinas from early April through September or even October, in some places. 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 are again scheduling two viewing opportunities.



Tues. Sep. 6 (Rain date Thurs., Sep. 8)
Lees-McRae College, Main St. W, Banner Elk
Trip Leaders: Betsy Wauters & Betsy Murrelle

Come join members and friends of HCAS in front of the **North Carolina Building at Lees-McRae College** to watch the amazing circling of “flying cigars” as they fly in and eventually descend into the chimney of the North Carolina Building.

We will meet at the college on September 6th 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’re also hopeful that Nina Fischesser, Director of the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at Lees-McRae College, will have some Chimney Swifts ready for release that evening.

Sun. Sep. 11: 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 11. 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 very close view of their activity.

Bring a picnic if you’d like; we will start gathering at 6:00 p.m. The swifts will start circling slowly and by 7:00 p.m. will start entering the chimney.

From Boone, follow 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.

The Marvelous Word of Birdsong (continued)

hear in the field, but they do not substitute for field experience itself. You will never gain the fullest possible comprehension of a species' song until you experience it yourself in nature. Also, taking advantage of every opportunity to listen, in detail, to songs of a common species will greatly enhance your ability to distinguish sound-alikes. After you have listened to American Robins sing hundreds of times in your neighborhood, a Scarlet Tanager or a Rose-breasted Grosbeak will not sound so similar anymore!

It's Not Too Late!

By late summer, most birds have stopped singing for the year. The breeding season is over, and they are preparing to undergo their fall molt and begin migrating south for the winter. However, it's not too late to begin or enhance your experience with the marvels of birdsong.

As I have mentioned earlier, *The Singing Life of Birds* by Donald Kroodsma provides an excellent introduction to the world of sonagrams and how to interpret them, as well as to the intriguing details of avian singing behavior. If you have never attempted to learn birdsong, sonagrams will make your learning process much easier and much more enjoyable; if you bird by ear already, they will broaden the horizons of your knowledge and fine-tune your ability to truly listen to a bird's song. For sources of recordings, I have found the Peterson *Birding by Ear* and *More Birding by Ear* CD sets to be an excellent springboard both for learning the rudiments of birdsong and for more in-depth study of similar-sounding species (especially when you can view sonagrams of the songs in the free Raven Lite program). I have also used the *Stokes Field Guide to Bird Songs* CD set along with the recordings available through the National Audubon Society's online Bird Guide to appreciate the diversity of a species' songs and discover common patterns among them. If you spend these silent months learning how to listen, you will be well prepared to enjoy to the fullest the flood of birdsong awaiting you next spring.

Birds (and Classic Cars) of Cuba

Article and photos by Martha Cutler



Cuban Green Woodpecker

no hot water) in search of the 27 species of birds endemic to Cuba as well as the two dozen West Indian endemics also found in Cuba. Thanks to the hard work and incredible preparation of the trip leader, Derb Carter, our success rate was almost 100%. Members of the group managed to spot all of the Cuban species with the exception of the highly elusive Zapata Rail, which we did not even expect to hear. We also spotted all the possible West Indian endemic species with the exception of the White-cheeked Pintail.

We had the assistance of several knowledgeable Cuban guides during the course of the trip and were accompanied by a very amiable bus driver, Raúl. Luck also played a part in our success. At one point, when we were temporarily stranded while waiting for a replacement part for our bus, we got excellent looks at and recordings of the Cuban subspecies of the Eastern Meadowlark. It is possible that these birds, which sing a different song than the one we are accustomed to, may be split into a separate species in the future, so they were of particular interest. On another occasion, rain forced us to take shelter under the roof of a pavilion from which we observed a

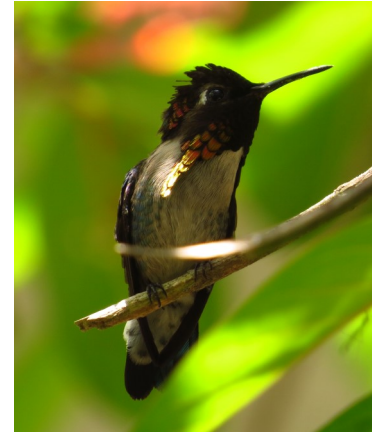
(very wet) Antillean Nighthawk on a nearby branch.



One of my favorite birds of the trip was the smallest bird in the world, the Cuban Bee Hummingbird, locally called "Zunzuncito", (above) which we were able to see close up in the backyard of a family with many feeders made from beer and soda bottles. I also liked another of the very small birds, the colorful Cuban Tody. (left) At the other end of the size spectrum was the attractive Great Lizard-cuckoo, a West Indian endemic.

The final night of our trip was spent in Havana (coincidentally we stayed in a hotel right next door to the hotel I had stayed in on my previous trip to Cuba). We were able to spend some time walking through the city, admiring the buildings and, of course, the cars. Overall, I enjoyed the trip tremendously and would recommend Cuba as a destination.

This past April I was lucky enough to get a last minute space on the Carolina Bird Club's trip to Cuba. For nine days we travelled through the Cuban countryside staying at a variety of lodgings (from all-you-can-drink tourist resorts to an ecolodge with



HCAS Partners with BRC to Protect Wetland

by Bob Cherry

Local land trust Blue Ridge Conservancy recently acquired a wetland near Foscoe, and we are happy to join them in making this a site for local birders to enjoy. The 10-acre property is located on the Watauga River and includes riparian habitat and pockets of wetlands that are used by migrating and resident birds.

According to a story in the BRC newsletter, "The property was generously donated by local attorney Eric Eller and the heirs of Ronald Murrelle. Mr. Murrelle always wanted to see the property protected for its ecological value and his son and daughter were happy to work with BRC to make his dream a reality."

HCAS members have been discussing options for the property development, including how to make it more accessible for birders and other users, and how to improve wildlife habitat on-site. This property has a lot of potential to be a nice birding spot and we will be moving slowly as we work with BRC to determine what is needed and what steps to take to reach those goals.

As we move forward we will be seeking volunteers to help with trail building, removal of non-native species, and similar work. Requests will be posted on the HCAS group email and additional stories with updates will be provided in future editions of *High Country Hoots*.

Raptor Migration Fall 2016

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.

Mahogany Rock

During September, on any day, join other watchers and official counters at Mahogany Rock. In addition, we're planning to have an HCAS Hawk Watch at Mahogany Rock, but we will be monitoring migration conditions before we schedule a date. As we get into September, please keep an eye on the Yahoo group email for details of the hawk watch.

Whatever day you go to Mahogany Rock, you'll (hopefully!) have the opportunity to view migrating Broad-winged Hawks – and monarch butterflies! - plus the



Merlin which crashed through screening on back porch (FL) and was released unharmed. Photo by Beverly Saltonstall

possibility of spotting Osprey, Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, American Kestrels, Merlins, Peregrine Falcons, Cooper's Hawks, and Sharp-shinned Hawks. For information on Mahogany Rock, see NC Birding Trail, Mountain Guide, p. 16 or click here:

[North Carolina Birding Trail/Mahogany Rock](#)

Here's a link to a [Guide to Hawk Watching at Mahogany Rock](#):

Grandfather Mountain

Daily in September at Grandfather Mountain, there will be trained counters and volunteers on Linville Peak who will record the number and type of raptors. If you'd like to volunteer to help with the count, please email Lesley Platek at volunteer@grandfather.com or call 828-733-2013.

There will be a **Hawk Watch Orientation on Friday, September 2, at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.** at the Top Shop Visitor Center, 2nd floor. Please RSVP with Lesley if you're interested in attending that volunteer session, so that she can leave your name at the gate. The training is typically around 1.5 - 2 hours and includes some field time on Linville Peak. It's an orientation to in-flight raptor identification, the impact of weather conditions on migration, site geography for spotting, data recording and more! There will be printed resources available as well as books for sale. Jesse Pope and/or Mickey Shortt will lead the training.

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.

For more information on the hawk watch, email Mickey Shortt at mickey@grandfather.com or call him at 828-733-4326. Also, for hawk watch information, visit

[Grandfather Mountain Hawk Count](#)

My Bear Blessing

Story and photo by Francie Troy

Francie is a new HCAS member who has jumped right in to help with Hoots. Francie has had a home in Blowing Rock for 15 years and has a background in photography, writing, and working with art and music therapy in a mental health center.

He was a quiet unexpected visitor. Bears roam occasionally below my deck at night and several years ago, a three-hundred pound mamma bear chose our deck to explore. We never leave doors open, windows are secure, and no strong food smells to tempt hungry critters. Bird feeders are brought indoors at night. This foraging bear decided there was more for her cub and self beyond our turf. Last week, late afternoon, this half-grown cub tried to open the bird feeder hanging conveniently on the deck rail.

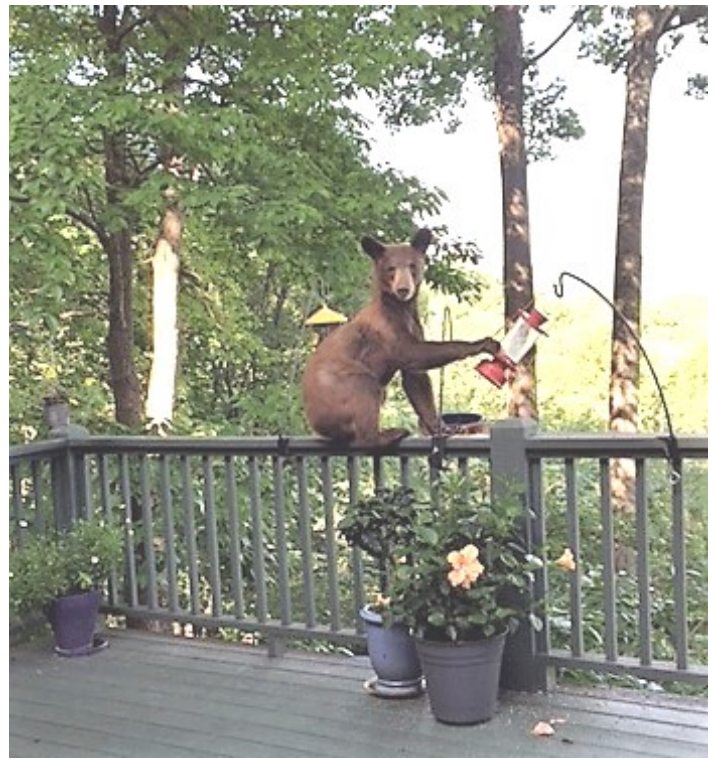
I am alone now, on ten acres looking over Globe Valley, in a beautiful home my husband gifted me. There is solitude as well as the activity and company of raccoons, possums, skunks, flying squirrels, chipmunks, snakes, rabbits, deer, beaver, birds and the pesky squirrel – a – yes – now and then a bear. I grew up in Tennessee with all of the above for company. My father, a dedicated lover of wildlife, taught me to “never be afraid” of wildlife. Common sense was the tool best employed. I have never been afraid of wildlife.

The bear in the North Carolina High Country is found only in this particular pocket of the world (or so I have always been assured). Bears, my dad insisted, are just like people. They look for food when they are hungry. They protect their offspring from danger, and if threatened or cornered, bears, like us’ns, seek freedom. Also, like us’uns, they like to sleep in the winter season.

I don’t recall ever being afraid of a bear and I have never been threatened by one. This young bear on my deck rail was hungry but there was little left in the bird feeder for him. I stepped onto my deck, he posed for a picture and then after we studied each other for a brief twenty seconds, he departed.

I am sad for those urbanites who never know the charm and the joy found in wildlife settings. There is a growing scarcity of wildlife in Western Carolina and those moments shared with the birds and the bear and the deer and all the creepy crawlers are held most dear by me.

Thomas Merton said “Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order and harmony.” This is what this cub and I shared last week on my deck at the top of Globe Valley.



Great Blue Herons of Powder Horn Mountain

by Beverly Saltonstall



Photos are of Great Blue Herons nesting far off in the distance on a high ridge across from Powder Horn Mountain. Nests were at the extreme range of spotting scopes and 1200 mm cameras. Guy McGrane and Curtis Smalling have confirmed that this is only the second known nesting colony of Great Blue Herons in Watauga County.

At least three nests with chicks were seen along the ridge. Last year during the *Come Bird @ My HotSpot* bird walk at Powder Horn Mountain, a flock of five Great Blue Herons was seen flying in the same vicinity as this year’s observed nesting colony.



Top photo by Guy McGrane & lower photo by Beverly Saltonstall

An MWRC First: Successful Release of a Baby Belted Kingfisher

by Amber McNamara, DVM



Vulnerable Belted Kingfisher fledgling in need of help. Photo: Brandy Cox.

On the evening of May 18, coming home from work, Brandy Cox saw something flapping in the grass near Roaring Creek. Unsure if the bird was too young or too injured to fly, she scooped him up, placed him in her lily bed, and waited. The next morning, wet from the rain, she knew he needed help and brought him to the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center. A brief examination revealed a very lethargic, dehydrated, and pale Belted Kingfisher. Students and staff

administered fluids and pain medications, then placed the fledgling in the center's Intensive Care incubator to give him a chance to rest.

Within two hours, the baby looked brighter, shuffling around the incubator as only kingfishers can do. He was offered slivers of cut smelt by hand, which he took readily.

After three days, supplemental fluids were discontinued and he was moved out of the ICU.

Although a consistent eater (being hand-fed pieces of smelt, trout, and shrimp every two hours) he was reluctant to eat on his own.

A breakthrough came on May 27, when the kingfisher finally picked up a fish out of his bowl. Live minnows caught by a Lees-McRae student did the trick. From there, he never looked back. He was soon noted to be testing his wings and attempting escape from his cage.

On June 9, three weeks after being admitted, the kingfisher was given the green light to move to an outdoor enclosure. The MWRC's 20-foot cage was chosen to give him ample space to fly and maneuver; several "fish pools" were added to encourage fishing behavior. He flew soundly and perched well. Within minutes, the familiar chatters of the kingfisher could be heard several cages away.



Enjoying some smelt. Photo: Jen Sleeman, LMC Class of 2017



Photo: Samantha Maue, LMC Class of 2017

After a little over a week of round-the-clock practice, flight was stellar and arrangements were made for release.

MWRC volunteer Char Walker met up with the finder and together they returned

him to the location he was found. After opening the box, the youngster flew strongly to a nearby tree. Almost immediately, an adult (presumably a parent) was heard chattering nearby; within seconds, the adult came to investigate, then flew away and returned, "talking" the whole time. According to Walker, the reunion was "magical".

Fishing lessons in Roaring Creek are sure to follow!



Last veterinary check-up before release. Photo: Char Walker

The May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center's summer clinical program is a 12-week, 12-credit immersion course at Lees-McRae College. Students learn all aspects of wildlife medicine, including physical exams, medication administration, baby feeding, appropriate diets, injury assessment, and release criteria.

With many of our hundreds of young patients, much of the care is (sometimes as often as every 15 minutes), diet preparation, cleaning, laundry, monitoring of weight, and more. In this case, the dedication of our wildlife students contributed greatly to the successful rehabilitation and release of a species that can be very finicky in a rehabilitation setting. Their perseverance also led to a reunion of this baby with his parent – the best possible ending we could hope for.

HCAS Member on Nat Geo Wild

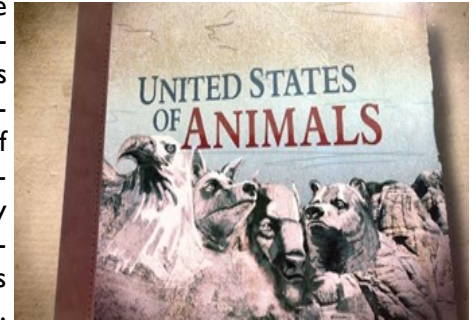
Article and photo by Beverly Saltonstall



film a segment for a new TV show *United States of Animals*. This new series would highlight the many unique animals that call the US their home. Their arrival coincided with the Annual Burrowing Owl Festival which is held to honor Cape Coral's Official City Bird.

. For those of you who have never heard of Burrowing Owls, they are a small owl, only about 7-9 inches tall. They are unique in the fact that in Florida, they live underground in burrows that they dig themselves, and, unlike most owls, can be readily seen during the day. People from all over the world come to see these beautiful and charismatic birds.

The photography team spent three days filming the owls, the festival and members of the organization that looks after the Burrowing Owls, Cape Coral Friends of Wildlife. The photographers spent a lot of time following me around. They went on the guided bus tour that I lead during the festival, and they also spent about an hour and a half interviewing me. They taped the segment in the local park, during an on and off sprinkling rain. I could just feel my hair curling up from the extreme humidity. Fortunately none of that segment was used in the video portion, but much of the information I provided was used for the narrative about the owls. They did manage to have several shots of me speaking, my 15 seconds (at best) of fame on national TV. If you have dropbox, you can view the segment, copied from the TV, by going to this link. [NatGeoWild Burrowing Owls](#)



HCAS Plantings at Valle Crucis Community Park

Article and photos by Richard Gray

The mission of the National Audubon Society is to "conserve and restore natural ecosystems, focusing on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity." Part of that mission is responding to the challenge of climate change. Audubon has recently published the "Birds and Climate Change Report" (<http://climate.audubon.org/>) which details the threats that global climate change poses for birds and their habitats. High Country Audubon applied for and received a \$555 Toyota Together Green climate-change grant to "increase the resiliency of bird habitat at Valle Crucis Community Park". Toyota Together Green was founded by the National Audubon Society and Toyota in 2008.

We have used the grant to purchase native woody and perennial plants from the Audubon *Bird-Friendly Native Plant List*, including Arrow-wood Viburnum, Flame Tree, Downy Serviceberry, Virginia Sweetspire, as well as others. See [Audubon Bird Friendly Native Plants](#)

We have planted those trees and bushes behind the new VCCP Welcome and Environmental Education Center and along a berm bordering that area. To date, all the plantings have survived (!), and we look forward next year to abundant blooms and fruits that will attract birds and pollinating insects.

The purpose of these plantings is two-fold. First, to make Valle Crucis Park an even better place for birds; and, secondly, to showcase native plants that people can plant in their own yards to attract birds and beneficial insects, thereby helping birds adapt to climate change. We plan to install an informational sign by the Welcome Center describing the project.



ASU's Anna Pierce

Receives 2016 Sue Wells Research Grant

by Bob Cherry, photos by Monty Combs



Anna Pierce, (left) receiving check from Jan Rhoney.

Anna Pierce, a senior majoring in Biology at Appalachian State University, is the 2016 recipient of the Sue Wells Research Grant. The grant has been provided annually since 2012 to students doing research on birds in the North Carolina High Country. Anna is the first

undergraduate to receive the grant.

Anna's research will investigate "whether Eastern bluebirds and tree swallows...could be insightful wild bird model species for understanding how host density and individual personality traits influence disease prevalence." Results will hopefully provide some answers to how bird diseases are spread and whether transmission is "more likely in individuals that breed in higher density and that have more aggressive personality types."

In past years the Sue Wells Research Grant has helped students fund their research, which has included research on cliff-nesting birds and cliff face ecology; Song Sparrow mating success; and Tree Swallow hormone responses to aggression.

The grant program was created by HCAS in 2012 and named in memory of Sue Wells, one of the founding Board members of High Country Audubon Society who served on the Board of Directors until 2010. Sue was also instrumental in creating the National Bird-Feeding Society and led the movement to help make backyard bird feeding the successful hobby it is today.



Sue's husband, Ralph Wells, passed away on June 29, 2016. Ralph generously supported the HCAS research grant and joined us at our membership meetings the last three years to help present the Sue Wells Research Grant to the selected student.

Ralph Wells with 2015 recipient Kristen Content

Kudos Corner

We have so many people to recognize and thank in this issue. First, we have a wonderful group of **new members** and are so glad they've joined us. Please welcome them!

Brenda Clary	Jan Hayes	Christopher Lytle
Cindy Darling	Jonathan Jordan	Francie Troy
Beth Gacek	Lauren Lampley	
Ginger Hall	Chiaki Lytle	

We are so appreciative of the following people who have made **donations to HCAS**:

Doug Blackford	Beth Gacek	Janet Palmer
Anita Clemmer	Richard Gray	Janet Paulette
Brenda Combs	Jan Hayes	Richard Paulette
Monty Combs	Van Joffrion	Beverly Saltonstall
Martha Cutler	Margaret Joffrion	Curtis Smalling
Robin Diaz	Jonathan Jordan	Francie Troy

Thank you also to the **Beech Mountain Ladies Golf Association and Audubon North Carolina** for their recent donation given in appreciation for a presentation to the group by Aimee Tomcho, Conservation Biologist for Audubon NC.

The fund for the **Sue Wells Research Grant** received two recent gifts: special thanks to **Lynn Siefferman** for her generous donation and to the **Sugar Mountain Community Association** for its donation in memory of Ralph Wells, who passed away on June 29, 2016. Ralph had been very supportive of the research grant named in memory of his wife and had been on the Board of the Sugar Mountain Community Association.

Miscellaneous Matters Online

- The July 2016 issue of *Bird Watcher's Digest* includes a review by Michael and Diane Porter, "Affordable 8x42 Binoculars Review". There's an excellent discussion of things you should consider when purchasing binoculars.

[Affordable 8x42 Binoculars Review](#)

- See the review on Audubon.org of the new book by Roger Lederer, *Beaks, Bones & Bird Songs*.

[How Birds Brave the Extremes, All Day, Every Day](#)

- Check out some birding spots you may have missed in *Birding the United States*, a state-by-state guide to the best birding hotspots around the country. [Audubon Travel](#)

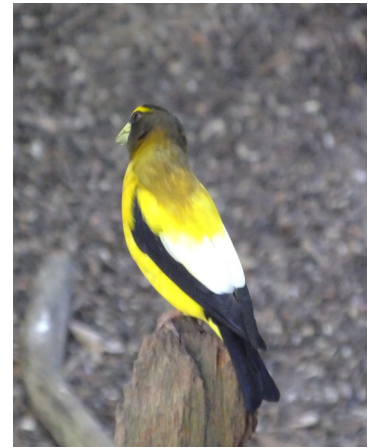
Through Our Lens



Spot-breasted Oriole. Photo: Don Mullaney



Black Vultures. Powder Horn Mountain
Photo: Guy McGrane



Evening Grosbeak

Photo: Wes McNair



Black Bear at the Combs' feeder. Photo Monty Combs

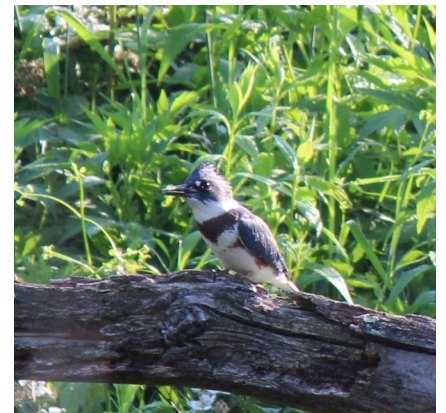


Northern Flicker
Photo: Cindy Darling

Belted Kingfisher

Brookshire Park

Photo: Cindy Darling



This **Brown Booby** was an exciting find on the rocks across from the Sharon Access area at Lookout Shoals Lake in Iredell County.
Photo by Jim Siefferheld taken from a kayak.

[Video by Monty Combs](#)



Tricolored Heron chicks

Photo: Don Mullaney



Blackburnian Warbler(c)



Indigo Bunting(c)

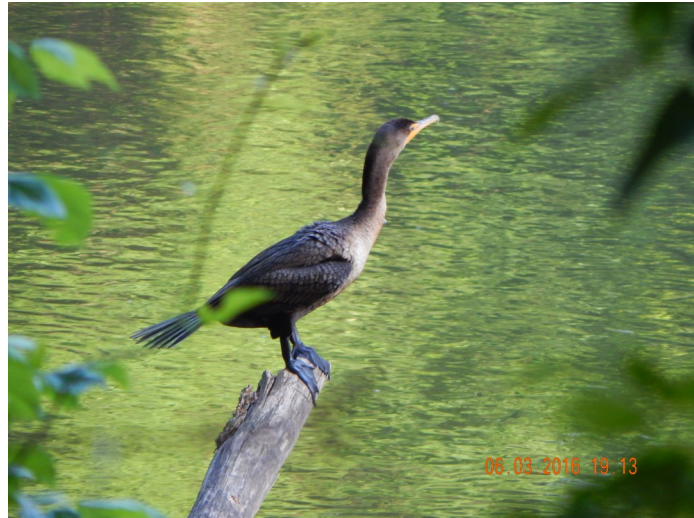


Eastern Kingbird(c)

Photos: Teddy Wilcox, father of Audrey Wilcox, author of the article *The Marvelous World of Birdsong*, found on page 4.



3 Juvenile Osprey. Photo: Wes McNair



Cormorant, Yadkin River Greenway. Photo: B Owens



Breeding **Anhinga**
Photo: Beverly Saltonstall



Appropriately named **Cattle Egret**. Photo: Beverly Saltonstall



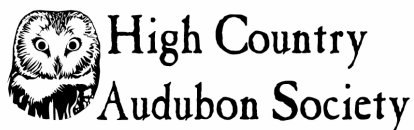
Loggerhead Shrike

Photo: Cindy Darling

This **Redhead** has an unusual plumage -- possibly a very reddish female or a first year male, seen at Bass Lake on Feb. 28.

Photo: Guy McGrane





PO Box 3746
Boone, NC 28607

www.HighCountryAudubon.org

E-mail: contactus@highcountryaudubon.org

High Country Hoots is published four times a year by the High Country Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

Newsletter Editors: Janet Paulette and Beverly Saltonstall

Website: www.HighCountryAudubon.org

Webmaster: Beverly Saltonstall

E-mail: contactus@highcountryaudubon.org

Visit our website for more information about HCAS and birding in the High Country. Group email members receive the newsletter via electronic mail. A link on the homepage has instructions for joining our group email, and for archived newsletters.

www.HighCountryAudubon.org

High Country Audubon Society Board of Directors

Vacant - President

Richard Gray— Vice President

Janet Palmer - Secretary & Education Chair

Janet Paulette - Treasurer & Membership Chair

Martha Cutler - Programs & Field Trips Chair

Guy McGrane - Conservation Chair

Bob Cherry - Past President

Brenda Combs

Kristen Content

Sheryl McNair

Beverly Saltonstall

Support Our Birds and High Country Audubon Society!

\$10 / year / person

Please renew your support by July 31st of each year.

HCAS appreciates any additional contributions you make to support our local efforts related to protection of birds, their habitats, and our environment.

The High Country Audubon Society is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Donations to the High Country Audubon Society are tax-deductible as allowed by applicable law.

For sponsorship information, please email

contactus@highcountryaudubon.org.

Make your donation online at www.HighCountryAudubon.org

or

Mail your check, name, address, telephone number, and email address to:

High Country Audubon Society

Attention: Membership

PO Box 3746

Boone, NC 28607

Donate with PayPal

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 three "Donate" buttons: Annual HCAS Membership; Sue Wells Research Grant; and Other.

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

Support Our Sponsors



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August-September-October 2016

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

August		
Weekly Wed.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk Leader: Curtis Smalling Watauga Birding Hotline 828-265-0198	8:30 a.m.- 11:00 a.m.
6 Sat.	Brookshire Park Nature Walk, Boone Trip leader: Guy McGrane Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter Directions: http://tinyurl.com/j4u7waf	8:00 a.m.- 10 a.m.
16 Tues.	HCAS monthly meeting Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: <i>Fisheries Management in the High Country with a Side of Fish Recipes and Duck Stamps</i> Presented by Kevin Hining, Education Specialist, NC Wildlife Resources Commission	6:30 p.m.
21 Sun.	Audubon North Carolina Chapter Day Haw River State Park	10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

September		
1-30 Daily	Hawk Watch at Grandfather Mountain. To volunteer, contact Lesley Platek volunteer@grandfather.com or call 828-733-2013 For more info, contact Mickey Shortt mickey@grandfather.com or 828-733-4326	TBA
2 Fri	Hawk Watch Orientation Grandfather Mountain, Top Shop Visitors Center RSVP: Lesley Platek (see above for contact info)	10:00 a.m. & 2:00 p.m.
3 Sat.	Brookshire Park Nature Walk See Saturday August 6th info above.	8 a.m.– 10 a.m.
Weekly Wed.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk See August Weekly Wed. info above.	8:30 a.m. – 11 a.m.

September (continued)		
6 Tues.	Swifts Night Out Lees-McRae College Trip Leaders: Betsy Wauters & Betsy Murrelle Rain date: Thursday, September 8	6:30 p.m.
11 Sun.	Swifts Night Out Wilkesboro Elementary School Trip Leaders: Brenda and Monty Combs	6:00 p.m.
mid-Sept	Mahogany Rock Hawk Watch Blue Ridge Parkway, milepost 235 Check Yahoo group email for details	TBA
mid-Sept	HCAS Grandfather Mountain Hawk Watch Check Yahoo group mail for details	
20 Tues.	HCAS monthly meeting Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: <i>Cliff-Nesting Birds: What is the Impact of their Guano in the Cliff Ecosystem?</i> Presented by Angie Langevin, recipient of 2014 HCAS Sue Wells Research Grant	6:30 p.m.
9/30-10/1 Fri-Sat.	Carolina Bird Club Fall Meeting Beaufort, SC	

October		
1 Sat.	Brookshire Park Nature Walk See Saturday August 6th info above.	8:00 a.m.– 10 a.m.
Weekly Wed.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk See August Weekly Wed. info above.	8:30 a.m.– 11 a.m.
18 Tues.	HCAS monthly meeting Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: <i>Falconry and Raptor Conservation in the Modern Era</i> Presented by Eric Harrold, Virginia Natural Heritage Program Last meeting until March 21, 2017	6:30 p.m.
Wed.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk Last walk of the year!	8:30 a.m.– 11 a.m.