

# HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

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

January/February - 2010 Volume 1, Issue 6

## HCAS TO HOST TWO GREAT EVENTS IN JANUARY

High Country Audubon Society's January calendar features two exciting events. A field trip to W. Kerr Scott Dam and Reservoir will take place Sunday, January 10 and a monthly meeting with a literary spin will be held Tuesday, January 19.

HCAS members Monty and Brenda Combs have organized the January field trip in their neck of the woods. The group will be led on a guided tour of W. Kerr Scott Dam and Reservoir in Wilkes County and will go to the new waterfowl impoundment at Marley's Ford, the Boomer Wildlife Management area and the main body of the lake at the dam.



Ring-billed Gulls  
Photo by Monty Combs

The folks coming from Boone are asked to meet Monty and Brenda at the Citgo Travel Center, on the right at the HWY 16 stoplight right across from Foothills Auto Spa, at 8:45 a.m. Everyone else is asked to meet at the visitor's center at W. Kerr Scott at 9:00 a.m.

The group will begin at the visitor's center where a Bald Eagle has been

seen lately. The rangers say they often see it fishing behind the center. Birders will also probably see Ruby and Golden Kinglets, Brown-Headed Nuthatch, Downy Woodpeckers, Hairy Woodpeckers, Killdeer and much more. There's also the possibility to see Pied-billed Grebes, Wood Ducks, Ring-billed Gulls and possibly Bonaparte's Gulls.

During the December 12 birding trip, a Sharp-shinned Hawk was spotted near the Marley's Ford waterfowl impoundment. Brenda also adds that there should be a large number of Canadian Geese and Blue Heron at the main body of the lake.

We hope many of you are planning to join the group. A \$5 donation is requested with field trip attendance.



Photo by Doris Ratchford

The January Monthly Meeting has a great theme for winter as folks are being asked to bring their favorite books to share with the group. What's better than curling up with a great book by the fireplace during the cold winter? Hopefully you'll get

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**Please note that the January and February monthly meetings are going to be at the Watauga County Library, located at 140 Queen Street in Boone. La Quinta Inn & Suites no longer has meeting space available. Starting in March the meetings will be held at the Watauga County Office of NC Cooperative Extension.**

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### January

10	W. Kerr Scott Field Trip	9:00 a.m.
19	Monthly Meeting at Wat. Library	6:30 p.m.

### February

6	Audubon NC Chapter Day	
12-15	Great Backyard Bird Count	
16	Monthly Meeting at Wat. Library	6:30 p.m.
21	Burke's Garden Field Trip	TBD

### March

16	Monthly Meeting at Coop. Ext.	6:30 p.m.
21	TVA Lakes Field Trip	TBD

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

### Northern Goshawk



- A powerful raptor of northern forest, the Northern Goshawk is the largest North American accipiter. It maneuvers through dense woods, taking prey as small as squirrels and as large as grouse, crows, and snowshoe hare.
- The Northern Goshawk is found across northern America and Eurasia. Some lucky birdwatchers in Western N.C. have spotted the bird on frigid winter days.
- Attila the Hun wore an image of the bird on his helmet.
- The bird is well known for its fierce defense of its nest. It commonly attacks people and other animals that approach the nest too closely.
- The name "goshawk" comes from the Old English word gos, meaning goose, and hafoc meaning hawk. It is pronounced as if the words are still separate, without any "sh" sound.
- The Northern Goshawk can be very persistent in pursuing prey. One goshawk was seen pursuing a snowshoe hare for 45 to 60 minutes along a hedgerow until finally the hare ran into a clearing and was seized.

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

## MOVIE NIGHT CONT.

ideas for new reads at this meeting!

Those attending the meeting are asked to bring their favorite bird books to share with the group. Field guides are welcomed, along with any other type of literary work. This is a great chance for everyone to get ideas from other members on interesting books that they might enjoy.

We hope everyone can attend! The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. at the Watauga County Library.

## NC STATE PARKS DECLARE 2010 'YEAR OF THE BIRDS'

North Carolina's state parks will pay tribute to its winged residents and visitors in 2010 by celebrating the "Year of the Birds," according to the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation.

Throughout the year, birds and bird-watching will be the focus of special education programs and activities in the state parks, many of them in partnership with Audubon North Carolina, which works with the state parks system on research and management projects involving bird habitats. The state parks system is also making available a special bandana of some of the signature birds found in parks. The bandana can be purchased online at <http://www.ncparkstore.com/coba20yeofbi.html>.

Whether they are wild turkeys in the mountains, bald eagles in the Piedmont or piping plovers on the coast, birds greatly contribute to the nature experience in state parks. They're also "indicator species," reflecting the health of the natural resources and ecosystems on North Carolina's publicly-held lands.

"Putting this special emphasis on birds in 2010 can give added depth and clarity to our interpretive programs and education efforts," said Lewis Ledford, state parks director. "They're a beloved part of the natural resource mosaic in our state parks."

State parks are regularly involved in annual bird counts, and the parks are among Audubon's Important Bird Areas, sites for research about the health of bird populations and habitats. Audubon North Carolina, the state parks and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission were also among partners that are establishing three distinct birding trails in North Carolina in an effort to combine eco-tourism and natural resource protection. (<http://www.ncbirdingtrail.org>)

"Birds and state parks share some of the most important habitats in our state," said Chris Canfield, executive director of Audubon North Carolina. "They also share the distinction of providing a pathway for people to connect with nature. I'm excited by this focus for 2010 and hope all North Carolinians take advantage of it."

In addition to preparing interpretive programs, state park rangers and natural resource biologists are actively involved in projects to protect and restore habitats for some of our rare and threatened birds, such as the red-cockaded woodpecker and colonial nesting shorebirds. Park rangers and biologists also



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### High Country Audubon Society Board

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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>.

participate in multi-year bird tagging projects.

State park educational programs hope to appeal to North Carolina's bird enthusiasts, as well as inspire new bird-watching families. A 2009 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report estimated that one of every five Americans is a "bird-watcher," defined as someone who took a trip of at least one mile for the primary purpose of observing birds, or someone who closely observed and tried to identify birds around their home. These enthusiasts contributed \$36 billion to the national economy in 2006, according to the report.



News release courtesy of N.C. Department of Environmental and Natural Resources

Are you a member of Facebook? Audubon North Carolina has created its own fan page. Just log on to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and search for "Audubon North Carolina" to become a fan and read updates!

## GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT FEBRUARY 12-15

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent and in Hawaii. Anyone can participate, from beginning bird watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event.

Participants count birds anywhere for as little or as long as they wish during the four-day period. Then tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time. To report the counts, fill out an online checklist at the Great Backyard Bird Count website. ([www.birdsource.org/gbbc](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc))

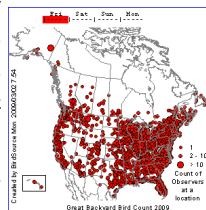
As the count progresses, anyone with Internet access can explore what is being reported from their own towns or anywhere in the United States and Canada. One can also see how this year's numbers compare with those from

previous years. Participants may also send in photographs of birds they see.

Scientists and bird enthusiasts can learn a lot by knowing where the birds are. Bird populations are dynamic; they are constantly in flux. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to document the complex distribution and movements of so many species in such a short time.

Your data can help answer questions such as 'How will this winter's snow and cold temperatures influence bird populations?' or "Are any birds undergoing worrisome declines that point to the need for conservation attention?'

Scientists use the counts, along with observations from other citizen-science projects such as the Christmas Bird Count, Project FeederWatch, and



eBird to give us an immense picture of winter birds. Each year that this data is collected makes it more meaningful and allows scientists to investigate far-reaching questions.

HCAS members are encouraged to participate this year February 12-15. You can conduct counts in your backyard or at any feeder. HCAS President Jesse Pope will be counting at the feeders at the Grandfather Mountain Nature Museum and invites those interested to join him.

In 2009, GBBC participants sent in record numbers of checklists for the fifth year in a row. As of March 15, 2009, counters across North America had submitted 93,629 checklists reporting 11,550,200 individual birds of 616 species. This represented a 9% increase in checklist submissions from 2008, as well as a new high number of individual birds counted.

It's As Easy As 1, 2, 3!

1. Plan to count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count.

You can count for longer than that if you wish! Count birds in

as many places and on as many days as you like - one day, two days, or all four days. Submit a separate checklist for each new day. You can also submit more than one checklist per day if you count in other locations on that day.

2. Count the greatest number of individuals of each species that you see together at any one time.

You may find it helpful to print out your regional bird checklist to get an idea of the kinds of birds you're likely to see in your area in February. You could take note of the highest number of each species you see on this checklist.

3. When you're finished, enter the results through the GBBC website.

You'll see a button marked "Enter Your Checklists!" on the website home page beginning on the first day of the count. It will remain active until the deadline for data submission on March 1st.

For a list of FAQs, additional info, forms, etc. please visit: [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org).

## FEBRUARY EVENT DETAILS

### Great Backyard Bird Count

Friday, February 12 - Monday, February 15

See story on this page for more details.

### February Monthly Meeting

Tuesday, February 16 at 6:30 p.m.

Watauga County Library in Boone

The group will watch a film about the Whooping Crane.

### Burke's Garden Field Trip

Sunday, February 21

Burke's Garden is a small community in Tazewell County, Virginia, located in the bowl of a large valley. The group has taken field trips here before and it is an excellent spot for birding.

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

Let us know!

## OUTER BANKS TRIP RECAP

A total of seven people journeyed to the Outer Banks for the December 6-8 trip led by Jesse Pope and Bob Cherry. Below is Bob Cherry's account of the trip.

We started off at Pungo Lake, part of the Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, and the agricultural fields that surround it. Here the attraction is the incredible numbers of Tundra Swans and Snow Geese. While the geese did not seem to be there in the same numbers as last year, there were swans everywhere we looked, plus numerous Northern Harriers, a few Bald Eagles and lots of waterfowl including Northern Pintails and Buffleheads.

From there we headed to Lake Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuge where we again searched the lake, surrounding fields and woodlands. We had many of the same birds as at Pungo Lake but even more waterfowl with the swans and geese. Rafts of Ruddy Ducks, Pintails, Northern Shovelers and American Wigeon took a lot of time to go through as we hoped to find something rare. The woods added woodpeckers and a few warblers (especially Yellow-rumped Warblers) to our list.

The last day was spent at Pea Island NWR and Bodie Island, a part of Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The ponds provided thousands of more birds to look through with mostly the same species we found at Lake Mattamuskeet. While we weren't able to find any rails or sora at the pond, Jesse did manage to find an American Bittern later in the day. The beach and jetty got us Northern Gannets, Ruddy Turnstones, Purple Sandpipers and a few other shorebirds. The heavy surf kept us from finding the Harlequin Duck that has been hanging out near the jetty. But this was partially offset by finding five brants on a sea wall near the Oregon Inlet, a lifer for most of the group.

The list of 106 birds from the trip can be found at <http://highcountryaudubon.org>. Glide your mouse over "Activities" and then scroll down to "Trip Reports."



### HCAS Member Photo Gallery

#### Images from the Outer Banks Trip by Doris Ratchford

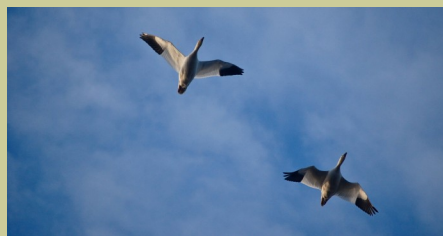
Bodie Island  
Lighthouse



Pea Island south pond



HCAS Board  
Member Martha  
Cutler



Snow Geese

### MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

An annual membership to the High Country Audubon Society is \$10 per person and due June 1 of each year. Membership and support gives you access to the group's listserv and the HCAS e-newsletter High Country Hoots. Mail check and information (name, address, telephone number, e-mail) to:

High Country Audubon Society  
Attention: Membership Dues  
PO Box 3746