

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

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

March/April - 2011

Volume 3, Issue 1



THE BIRDS OF COSTA RICA

Aaron Simon will present on the "Birds of Costa Rica" during High Country Audubon Society's March Meeting. The meeting will take place at 6:30 p.m. on March 15.

Simon has been birding for seven years and has birded South Texas (Rio Grande Valley), Southern Arizona, South Florida and all over Southern California. He also lived in Costa Rica for a year and a half.

Simon says that he isn't a big bird chaser but does pursue them when it is convenient. He also loves to take photographs of birds.

"I love birds and birding, for it allows me to be outdoors," said Simon. "The

stress of life seems to dissipate when I bird. It's my form of meditation."

He started birding with Curtis Smalling in the High Country many years ago and after living in other areas he now finds himself back in North Carolina.

Some of our HCAS members will actually be on a birding trip in Nicaragua on the night of this presentation and will be seeing many of the very same birds that Simon will talk about.

We hope that everyone who is not in Nicaragua will join us at 6:30 p.m. as we learn about the birds of Costa Rica!



Blue Tanager

Large Macaws

Yellow-throated Euphonia

MARCH FIELD TRIPS

New River State Park

The field trip on Thursday, March 3 is to New River State Park. Attendees will see the American Woodcock's evening display to establish territory and impress females.

A HCAS group has seen the Woodcock's behavior once before while at New River State Park. They were in a picnic area near an open, low-growing grass area just as the sky was growing darker.

"First I heard the twittering," said HCAS President Anita Clemmer. "I didn't see the bird take off or fly around in circles but I did see him on his way back down to the ground."

The woodcock is a curious looking bird that is a relative to sandpipers and

phalaropes. The males will display at dawn and dusk in a field or clearing. He gives repeated "peents" on the ground, often on remaining patches of snow in the early spring. They actually start their display with an explosive takeoff then fly in larger circles rising higher and higher until reaching 200-300 feet, then he starts to descend in smaller circles. That's when the twittering sounds are made by the three outer-wing primary feathers. The bird starts chirping as he descends. He comes down in a zig-zag, diving fashion, chirping as he goes. As he comes near the ground he silently lands, near a female if she is present. Then he starts peenting

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March

3	New River State Park Field Trip	6 p.m.
15	Monthly Meeting at Watauga County Ag. Conference Center	6:30 p.m.
31	Meat Camp Environmental Studies Area Field Trip	8:00 a.m.

April

7	Boone Greenway Field Trip	8:00 a.m.
16	Shady Valley, TN Field Trip	TBD
19	Monthly Meeting at Watauga County Ag. Conference Center	6:30 p.m.

May

17	Monthly Meeting at Watauga County Ag. Conference Center	6:30 p.m.
19-22	Audubon NC Annual Meeting at the Blowing Rock Conference Center	

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

Rusty Blackbird



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- Rusty Blackbird is one of North America's most rapidly declining species. The population has plunged an estimated 85-99 percent over the past 40 years and scientists are completely puzzled as to what is the cause.
- They are relatively uncommon denizens of wooded swamps, breeding in the boreal forest and wintering in eastern U.S. in winter, they travel in small flocks and are identified by their distinctive rusty feathered edges and pallid yellow eyes.
- Like most members of the blackbird family, the Rusty Blackbird undergoes only one molt per year. The change in appearance between winter and summer results from the rust-colored feather tips of "winter plumage" wearing off and leaving behind the smooth black or gray "breeding plumage."

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

MARCH FIELD TRIPS CONT.

again.

The male American Woodcock gives no parental care, but continues to display long after most females have laid eggs. Some males display at several, widely separated singing grounds and will mate with several females. A female may visit four or more singing grounds before nesting, and she may keep visiting even when she is caring for her young.



Photo from

The group going on the field trip will meet at <http://www.birds.cornell.edu> the New Market Cash Points at 4:15 p.m. The group needs to be at New River State Park by 6 p.m. A ranger has told Clemmer that the birds have been displaying around 6:30 p.m. pretty consistently.

Meat Camp Environmental Studies Area

The Meat Camp Environmental Studies Area is the field trip destination on the morning of Thursday, March 31.

Since 1999, over 170 species have been sighted at MCESA. The site is listed in [The North Carolina Birding Trail Mountain Guide](#).

The area is a 9.5 acre wetland where maintained grass paths with boardwalks over wet areas meander for almost one mile through the dense wetland. Dense cover provides roosting for many nocturnal migrants with most eastern warblers observed here.

The dense cover makes it especially attractive to birds but notoriously hard for beginning birders. Sightings are often brief so being familiar with vocalizations will help to add to species totals. On the other hand, the dense cover and close access to usually difficult habitats (marsh, beaver ponds, etc.) can yield extraordinarily close views for patient birders.

The paths are grass so wear shoes for dew or frost. The group will be meeting at the New Market Cash Points at 7:45 a.m. and will arrive at MCESA around 8 a.m. Please remember to allow extra time since this is a heavy school traffic area.

Martha Cutler will lead the group on the bird walk. Cutler will be accessible at her home phone number (336-877-4031) in case of rain issues.

High Country Audubon Society Board

Anita Clemmer - President

Bob Cherry - Vice President, Conservation Chair, & Event Chair for Audubon North Carolina Annual Meeting

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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>.

The Blog is the Word

Have you visited Audubon North Carolina's blog?

www.ncaudubonblog.org

Get the latest bird and conservation news!



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HCAS Member Photos



Tundra Swans

By Doris Ratchford

Red-headed Woodpecker

By Monty Combs



American Robin

By Drew Sumrell

Hooded Merganser

By Richard Gray



WATER QUALITY TALK IN TIME FOR APRIL SHOWERS

Water quality is the topic for the April monthly meeting. Watauga County Extension Agent for Natural Resources and Environmental Education Wendy Pataprsty will lead the discussion.



Photo from www.highcountrypress.com

Pataprsty received her Bachelor of Science degree in Agricultural Studies from the University of Georgia. She then moved in the High Country and began her work with the extension office in 2001 as a

grant-funded Water Quality Technician. She was hired to be an Extension Agent in 2003. In 2008, Pataprsty was hired as Environmental Extension Agent by NC A&T University and now collaborates with community development projects, storm water projects and community environmental education.

She coordinates the Kids in the Creek Program that involves all 4th graders in Watauga County and the Big Sweep river cleanup which removes tons of trash from our area streams every year.

She is highly involved in our community and HCAS is grateful that she is making time to come speak to us April 19 at 6:30 p.m. about this very important conservation issue.

USING SUPER-SCIENCE TO TRACK THE RUSTY BLACKBIRD

Tina Gheen has summarized an academic article on the Rusty Blackbird for the Smithsonian National Zoological Park (www.nationalzoo.si.edu). The text and graphics provided below can be found at that website.

The original publication is:

Hobson, K. A., R. Greenberg, S. L. Van Wilgenburg, and C. Mettke-Hoffman. 2010. *Migratory connectivity in the Rusty Blackbird: isotopic evidence from feathers of historical and contemporary specimens.*

The rusty blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*) is disappearing, and we don't know why. Scientists believe that the birds may be declining because of changes in their habitat. Specifically, the



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APRIL FIELD TRIPS KICK OFF SPRING BIRDING

Boone Greenway

The first field trip of April will be to the Boone Greenway on Thursday, April 7. Martha Cutler will lead the group.

For those who are not sure where the Greenway is, a group will meet at the New Market Cash Points at 7:45 a.m. to be at the Boone Greenway by 8 a.m.

The group will bird the new wetlands area and other sections of the extensive Greenway. It is sure to be a fruitful weekday bird walk since the spring migrants are due to be returning by then.

In case of rain issues, Martha's home phone number is 336-877-4031.

Shady Valley, TN

A trip to Shady Valley on Saturday, April 16 will provide folks with the opportunity to do some weekend birding.

Shady Valley is located in the northeastern corner of Tennessee in Johnson County, just outside the Cherokee National Forest.

After the Pleistocene ice ages, species and ecosystems that had shifted southward often survived in local refugia. As a result, cold-adapted ecosystems, such as cranberry bogs, remain in Shady Valley, far south of their usual range. Shady Valley once contained an estimated 10,000 acres of boreal cranberry bogs.

Today most of this area consists of small farms, woodlots and home sites with a pleasant rural

feel. The Nature Conservancy owns several tracts in Shady Valley which provide excellent birding opportunities. The best of these are the Orchard Bog, Quarry Bog and Schoolyard Springs preserves.

On the valley floor, thickets along streams have nesting Willow Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat and Gray Catbird. Grassy fields may have nesting Grasshopper, Savannah or Vesper Sparrows. Yard and field edges host nesting Eastern Bluebird, Chipping and Song Sparrows, House Wren and Tree Swallow. Virginia Rail may be found in Quarry or Orchard Bog year-round, although spring is best. Woodcock call and display at dusk (February-March) at these two sites, also. Migration season brings other warblers, sparrows, etc.; American Bittern, Sora and Northern Harrier are possible in bogs at that season. Wood Ducks occur on ponds and Beaverdam Creek. Wild Turkeys are found throughout. Common Ravens may fly over at any season. Whip-poor-wills and owls may be heard calling at night from adjacent ridges.

Merrill Lynch of the Nature Conservancy or HCAS Past President Jesse Pope will lead the group. HCAS offered a similar field trip to Shady Valley in July 2010. Watch the listserv for more information on the trip. The group will meet in Boone on April 16 to carpool from the New Market Cash Points.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

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

High Country Audubon Society
Attention: Membership Dues
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