

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS



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

May-June-July 2017

Volume 9 Issue 2

Nesting Bald Eagles at River Pointe



Photo: Martha Cutler

On January 18, 2017, HCAS received an email from **David Rominger**. He wanted to let interested persons know about a Bald Eagle nest visible from Old Shull Mill's Rd. near the entrance to River Pointe, a private gated community near Hounds Ear Club. The pair of eagles had been there for about a month. He told us that on the left side of the River Pointe entrance there are two trees, a hemlock on the left and a bigger white pine on the right. The nest is about two thirds of the way to the top of the white pine, fifty-five to sixty feet off the ground.

Unfortunately, there is no public parking anywhere close to the nest. There is a small area at the power substation where you might park for a short time without causing trouble,

and there are a couple of places close by where you could just pull off and park.

Various HCAS folks have since gone by to see the adult pair of Bald Eagles around the nest and some have gotten photos. On April 13, 2017, after being alerted by **Steve Dowlan** to the presence of nestlings, **Guy McGrane** and **Al Hooks** were able to view at least two eaglets in the nest, and Al got photos of one. They also saw both adults in the vicinity. Here's part of their description from their eBird post at <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S35899724>

Within the nest, we observed two downy covered eaglets, believed to have been hatched within the past 5-7 days. The eaglets appeared to be mostly at ease, with one of the eaglets appearing more active than its sibling. They did not appear to be hungry as they were not begging for food despite one of the parents in close proximity.

Since the eaglets hatched in early April, and it usually takes about 3 months for them to fledge (take their first flight), they will likely do so in early July. So, will anyone be lucky enough to see the eaglets fledge!!!



Eagle Chick Photo: Al Hooks

Addendum: on April 25, **Curtis Smalling** posted the following:

I wanted to send a quick note, thanks to some concerns expressed to me by a couple of folks, regarding access to the eagle nest and how much activity is taking place under and around the nest almost every day. We are entering the most critical period as the young move into the later nestling period and eventual fledging. I would recommend that folks start to back off a bit and see if you can see adults from the Shull's Mills Road area (in front of the substation or road pull-off). Here is a link from the USFWS regarding disturbance. https://www.fws.gov/midwest/eagle/conservation/baea_nhstry_snstvtvty.html

Let's all try to make sure they come back next year to the same spot! What a gift to have them so close.

Come Bird @ My HotSpot

by Martha Cutler

We birded in Wilkes County at ~ 1100 feet, then at Powder Horn Mountain at ~ 2000 feet, and now we'll head to **Todd** to bird at ~3000 feet.

Martha Cutler and Doug Blackford (336-877-4031)

You have two opportunities to join us at our house in Todd this May: **Tuesday, May 9** (rain date Thursday, May 11) and, for folks who can't get away during the week, **Saturday, May 13**. If the weather seems less than ideal, be sure to give us a call at 336-877-4031 since conditions can vary from one side of the hill to the other.

As in the past, we will start by birding from the deck at **8:00 am** with Stick Boy goodies and coffee, then walk up the back yard and down the driveway. If there is time and interest afterward, we can go along the river in Todd and look for Acadian Flycatchers and Northern Parulas on our way to Curtis Smalling's property on Meat Camp Creek.

Keep an eye on the Yahoo group email and the HCAS calendar for updates on details and directions.

Third Tuesdays

"I Never Finished Walden" and Other Confessions of an English Major Naturalist

Tuesday, May 16, 2017



Get ready for a special treat when **Amy Renfranz** presents the program at the monthly HCAS meeting at 6:30 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Express in Boone. Amy is currently working as the Director of Education and Natural Resources with the Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation. She also writes the award-winning weekly column *Dear Naturalist* in the Mountain Times publications.

Amy shared the following: "The goal of my writing and programs is to connect people with nature and to help facilitate personal connections with it. I aim to teach people that even the average English major can be a top-rate naturalist if she finds her passion, and that the possibility of a relationship with nature is there for them, too. This can happen even if they have not read *Walden*, do not own the best binoculars or camera, or did not go camping as a kid!"

Amy received a B.A. in English from Appalachian State University and a Master of Parks and Recreation Management from North Carolina State University. She is a Certified North Carolina Environmental Educator and a Yellowstone Association Institute Certified Naturalist. She has wide experience as a naturalist, so come out May 16 to hear how **you** can be a naturalist, too!

Wildlife Rehab @ LMC

Tuesday, June 20, 2017

We've been enjoying **Dr. Amber McNamara's** stories and photos in Hoots about her patients at the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center (MWRC), but we'll have the opportunity to see and hear Dr. McNamara in person on June 20th.

The wildlife rehabilitation program at LMC is a one-of-a-kind educational opportunity that combines classroom learning with hands-on wildlife rehabilitation. Dr. McNamara's talk will illustrate the uniqueness of this program and the MWRC, where students help to provide care for over 1,400 injured and orphaned wildlife patients every year. Patient statistics, integrative medicine for wildlife, volunteer opportunities, and success stories will be included.



Dr. McNamara is a graduate of DePauw University and Purdue University's School of Veterinary Medicine. She worked for over eight years at the Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife in Sanibel, FL and studied at the Chi Institute, becoming a Certified Veterinary Acupuncturist in 2010. Since 2013, she has been a faculty member of Lees-McRae College as well as veterinarian for the college's MWRC. She instructs students from a One Health perspective, recognizing that the well-being of humans, animals and the environment are intricately dependent upon one another.

Third Tuesdays

Bird Walk, Pot Luck & Annual Meeting

Tuesday, July 18, 2017

We've decided to return to Valle Crucis Community Park (VCCP) for our 2017 Annual Meeting and Pot Luck Dinner. We've reserved the covered picnic shelter (Cooper Pavilion) and the conference room in the new Welcome and Environmental Education Center from 3 pm until dusk on **Tuesday, July 18**.

More details will be posted on Yahoo's HCAS group email, but plans now are for a bird walk in the late afternoon before eating at about 6 p.m. Dinner will be followed by a brief business meeting to elect officers and announce the recipient of the 2017 Sue Wells Research Grant. You can stay around afterwards for more birding or just enjoying the park.

This will give us all an opportunity to see the new Chimney Swift Tower and the native plants which HCAS planted behind the Welcome Center

Please bring food to share plus your own plate, cup, and utensils, so we can minimize waste. HCAS will provide sweet tea, unsweetened tea, water, and ice.

HCAS's fiscal year runs from July 1 through June 30, so the annual meeting is a good time for members to renew their memberships or for others to become members. Annual membership is \$10 a year. You also have the option of paying your dues or making donations online on our website, www.HighCountryAudubon.org, through PayPal.

HCAS @ Work

We want to spread the news about the many activities and projects in which HCAS is involved, so we're starting a new *Hoots* feature intended to highlight some of these. Maybe you'll see something that particularly interests you, or maybe this will help you imagine something new that you'd like to help HCAS do. We appreciate the many HCAS volunteers who contribute their time and skills to support birds and their habitats. So please say "thanks" to these volunteers next time you see them...and become a volunteer yourself!

HCAS @ Work: Getting Ready for Chimney Swifts

by Martha Cutler

High Country Audubon has just completed construction of a swift tower at Valle Crucis Community Park. A grant from Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina covered most of the cost of materials, and labor was provided by HCAS volunteers. And thanks to **Bob Cherry** for applying for the grant! The 15-foot tower, which consists of a 12-foot wooden chimney on 3



Photo: Martha Cutler

-foot metal legs, is located in the corner of the park behind the Visitors Center. It was built following plans from Paul and Georgean Kyle's book *Chimney Swift Towers: New Habitat for America's Mysterious Birds*.

HCAS member **Doug Blackford** began constructing sections of the tower at his home. With the help of **Jimmy Shetterly** and **Al Hooks**, the tower was set in place, insulated, and sided. The goal was to have the tower in place so it could be used this season.

Though Chimney Swifts are social birds – many of us have enjoyed the sight of hundreds, even thousands, of swifts descending into large communal roosts as they migrate south in the fall – this is not the case where nesting is concerned. The new tower will only have one active nest each year. Once it has been discovered and used by the first nesting pair, it will somehow be known as an acceptable nest site in the future.



Photo: Richard Gray

HCAS @ Work: Bluebirds @ Brookshire



Guy McGrane, leader of the monthly *Come Bird @ Brookshire* bird walks, imagined bluebird houses at Brookshire Park. He then took steps to create a partnership between HCAS and Watauga County Parks and Recreation to install four bluebird houses along the greenway at the park, creating a kind of "Bluebird Trail". Each house is spaced about a

quarter mile from the last, and recently two of the houses were observed to contain completed bluebird nests, while another hosted a tree swallow with no nest or eggs. Guy and volunteers are checking these boxes at least weekly to record condition and presence of birds/nest/eggs; to clean out any pests that might get in there, such as blowfly larvae; and to insure the predator baffles are in good shape. Anyone who wants to help with the monitoring should contact Guy. (badgerboy@wilkes.net).



HCAS @ Work: Boone Birding Festival

For the second year in a row, the Boone Birding Festival, held at Valle Crucis Community Park, had some pretty crummy weather. With temperature in the forties, attendance was light in the morning, but as the day progressed, the temperature rose and so did the attendance. HCAS volunteers **Janet Palmer** and **Beverly Saltonstall** set up an HCAS birding display and were there to talk with people and answer any questions.

Lees-McRae College (LMC) students brought live animals from the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center (MWRC) located on their campus. In addition to a Merlin, Great Horned Owl, Red-tailed Hawk and American Kestrel, they brought a pair of Cedar Waxwings. Seeing those beautiful birds up close was such a treat for everyone! And look at the signature red tail on the Red-tailed Hawk in the photo taken by Beverly.

The LMC students were on hand to answer the many questions about their animals and the MWRC, and they also led several very popular bird walks around the park.



HCAS @ Work: Garlic Mustard Pull

Garlic mustard is a non-native invasive plant which loves growing in the High Country! HCAS volunteers started pulling garlic mustard at Valle Crucis Community Park in 2010, and have done it every year since. When garlic mustard showed up at Meat Camp Environmental Studies Area, HCAS volunteers began pulling there as well. After the April 26 VCCP bird walk with Curtis, a group of seven filled bag after bag with garlic mustard, which needs to be pulled up by the roots and removed from the area in bags. In addition to **Betsy Murrelle**, **Anita Clemmer**, and **Curtis Smalling** (in photo), **Pat Geiger**, **Jimmy Shetterly**, and **Janet and Richard Paulette** helped with the removal. We always need more volunteers for this job, so let us know if you want to help!



HCAS @ Work: HCAS Partners with Habitat

Guy McGrane led an effort to establish a partnership between HCAS and Wilkes County Habitat for Humanity to install bird-friendly native plants at Habitat houses and facilities. He has been working with Isaac Kerns, director of Wilkes Habitat, to develop plans for appropriate plantings. As a trial project, we have proposed a native prairie planting on the back lot of Habitat's new clothing recycling store on School Street in Wilkesboro. To accomplish this, we plan to smother the existing lawn type vegetation with plastic sheeting, and then sow seeds for a wide variety of native wildflowers and herbaceous plants. Anyone interested in helping out with the work should contact Guy at badgerboy@wilkes.net.

HCAS @ Work: Weekly Wed. Bird Walks

HCAS will be helping out this spring with Curtis Smalling's very popular bird walks at Valle Crucis Community Park. Curtis is the Director of Conservation for Audubon North Carolina and will have to miss some Wednesdays. HCAS will be arranging for bird walk leaders when Curtis has a conflict in his schedule. We will be posting the arrangements regularly on our Yahoo group email and also plan to include them on our calendar at <http://www.highcountryaudubon.org/> **Martha Cutler** and **Steve Dowlan** have already filled in for Curtis, and we expect others to help when necessary.



Photo: Judi Sawyer

HCAS @ Work: Bird Surveys



Wikipedia: Photo of Eastern Whip-poor-will by Tony Castro taken at Magee Marsh, Ohio.

HCAS participates in various types of surveys of the birds in our area. *Point Counts*, in which a single birder stops at several specific locations and counts birds seen and heard for a certain amount of time, include the Wilson Creek IBA Point Count, two Breeding Bird Surveys, and three Nightjar (Whip-poor-will and Chuck-wills-widow) Surveys.

Christmas Bird Counts, where several parties take to the field around Christmas and count all the birds they can find in a single day within a fifteen-mile-diameter count circle, are done at Grandfather Mountain., Stone Mountain., Mt. Jefferson, Wilkesboro, and Sparta. In the *Great Backyard Bird Count*, people count all the birds seen in their backyards on a single day and send the results to Cornell University.

Each of these surveys adds to our knowledge of bird populations and trends. HCAS volunteers who have participated in these surveys include **Curtis Smalling, Jesse Pope, Bob Cherry, Stewart Skeate, Robin Diaz, Doris and Jim Ratchford, Guy McGrane, Pat Geiger, Martha Cutler, Beverly Saltonstall, Steve Dowlan, Judy Sawyer, Al Hooks, Amy Cook**, and all those who submit their lists in the Great Backyard Bird Count. (We apologize to anyone we've missed – please let us know, so we can include your name in a future Hoots.)

HCAS @ Work: Birding Presentation for Newcomers of Catawba Valley

Newcomers of Catawba Valley is a very active social club which meets monthly in Hickory but includes members from Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba counties. This club recently made the following request for a speaker from HCAS:

We are talking about a half-hour talk and slide presentation for bird enthusiasts, most of us backyard feeder fans. We would appreciate tips on bird identification, improving habitat, feeders, field guides, good walking areas locally, binoculars, etc.

HCAS member **Bob Williams**, who lives in Hickory, agreed to present the program on behalf of HCAS on **Wednesday, May 10, at 10:30 a.m.** at the Hickory Regional Airport. Bob has put together a PowerPoint presentation with at least 33 slides. His presentation will be publicized in the *Hickory Daily Record* and is open to the public. Bob has since learned that the club plans to make a donation to HCAS in appreciation for his program. If you have the opportunity, drop by on May 10 to hear Bob, see his photos, and meet some new friends! Photo: Bob Williams



Raising the Barn Chimney Swift Tower at VCCP (see story page 3)



Photos; Debbie Shetterly, Martha Cutler & Richard Gray

My HotSpot: Roan Mountain

Article and photos: Judi Sawyer

I woke up at 5:00 a.m. last April to the sound of birds singing loudly and persistently outside my window. I had moved the day before from my suburban lot in Austin, TX, into my small house on an acre of rural landscape outside of Roan Mountain. I already had one “lifer”—the House Wrens that were singing their bubbly song from the tops of the trees as if to welcome me to my new home. That first bright morning, I was greeted at the steps of my front porch by a Ruby-throated Hummingbird buzzing about 6 inches from my nose as if to say, “Hey Lady! Where’s the food?” Good grief...gimme a minute...and then I headed out to unpack the feeders. It would take me a few days to ID the morning wake-up call (Gray Catbirds) but I already knew that I had moved into this birder’s dream home.



It was hard not to get distracted. There were birds everywhere. I was so excited to see Tree Swallows (another lifer) swooping around the yard. The minute I got the finch feeders up, I was inundated with Pine Siskins, over 100! Lifer number three!! I heard the drumming sound of a Pileated Woodpecker reverberating through the woods across the road; a sound that, to this day, puts a huge smile on my face. There were Song Sparrows, Brown Thrashers



and much more, mostly birds I had seen in the winter in Austin but never as regular visitors to my yard.

I spent a good amount of time that spring and summer digging up non-native plants and replacing them with native species meant specifically to attract birds, bees and butterflies. The large vegetable garden was turned into a wildflower meadow. Since that day I have identified 55 species on my little acre and the area surrounding it within the view of my binoculars. The icing on the cake is that I have been rewarded with an additional 33 species on my life list!

I’m so grateful for this past year and all of the amazing people and incredible experiences that have helped make it so special. It took a huge leap of faith leaving my home of 25 years and my job of 22 years and moving across the country. It has been challenging at times but every step of the way I received affirmations that this is where I am meant to be. I truly love my mountain home. So come on by some time...I’d love for you to meet the feathered residents and show you just why my Roan Mountain Hotspot is so special to me!

Pond Mountain Game Lands

Article and photos: Clifton Avery



Pond Mountain Game Land is located in the north-western corner of North Carolina in Ashe County. The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission began acquiring the property in 2008 and continues to add parcels. The acquisition is a story unto itself which you can read about in a feature article in *Our State Magazine*: <https://www.ourstate.com/pond-mountain/>. Prior to this the New River Tree Company managed the property for commercial Fraser Fir growth. The Commission is now managing the nearly 3,000-acre game land for the benefit of wildlife species. The mountain is teeming with game species including Black Bear, White-tailed Deer, Ruffed Grouse, and Wild Turkey. Interesting non-game bird species breed there such as Veery, Vesper Sparrow, Canada Warbler, and Common Raven. The Commission hopes to improve habitat for these species and many more.

Pond Mountain’s forests are northern hardwoods on the upper slopes and Southern Appalachian oak and cove forest on the mid to lower slopes forest. There are still some Fraser Fir plantations and some open fields from recently harvested Fraser Firs. One of the birding highlights of Pond Mountain is the population of breeding Vesper Sparrows birders can find in the open fields at the highest elevations of the game land. Some areas of early successional habitat host Alder Flycatchers and have the potential to host Golden-winged Warblers.



Northern Saw-whet Owls have not yet been detected here but the habitat is quite suitable for them. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and Hermit Thrush (left) are also suspected of nesting here. Birds aside, the views are incredible!

(continued on page 7)

Since Pond Mountain was acquired, **Chris Kelly**, a Wildlife Diversity Biologist with the Commission, has been conducting breeding bird surveys up at Pond Mountain. I am a Mountain Wildlife Diversity Technician with the Commission, and this year I worked with Chris to begin to develop a 4-season bird checklist.

I reached out to the High Country Audubon Society and other birders in the region for assistance in surveying the remote game lands. Many folks have responded with great enthusiasm, which Chris and I greatly appreciate. **Doris and Jim Ratchford** have taken it upon themselves to get up to the game lands as often as possible, which has been a huge help towards creating the bird checklist. I try to get up to Ashe County once a month (if the weather allows) and lead other birders on a walk through the game lands.

On any given visit, you may run into one of the Commission's Wildlife Diversity biologists surveying for birds or salamanders; members of the Wilkes Wildlife Crew marking boundaries, burning, or mowing; or a Surveys and Research biologist checking a wildlife camera. Stop by and say hello! Pond Mountain Game Land is open to hunting Monday through Saturday. We recommend wearing blaze orange during open hunting seasons. You can find out more at: www.ncwildlife.org/hunting.

Chris and I will be leading a **public bird walk at Pond Mountain on Sunday, June 4th**. The rain date is scheduled for June 10th.



Kudos Corner

A big thanks to **Houck and K.B. Medford** and **Van and Margaret Joffrion** for their donations to HCAS !!

Miscellaneous Matters

Audubon Mural Project

According to the website of National Audubon Society, the *Audubon Mural Project* is a collaboration between the National Audubon Society and the Gitler & _____ Gallery to create murals of climate-threatened birds throughout John James Audubon's old Manhattan neighborhood. (And, yes, that is actually the name of the gallery – we didn't forget to fill in the space!) To see the wonderful photos of these murals, go to <http://www.audubon.org/news/the-audubon-mural-project>

Bird-Friendly Nursery Blitz



It's spring and time to plant...native plants! Want to see more bird-friendly native plants in our local nurseries and garden centers? Come on out to **The Local Lion in Boone at 9:00 a.m. on Thursday, May 11**, and learn all about Audubon North Carolina's Bird-Friendly Native Plants of the Year program from **Kim Brand**, Bird-Friendly Communities Coordinator for Audubon NC.

After meeting for coffee, Kim will talk about the program and let participants know what to say to the nursery owners and managers – including answers to their most frequently asked questions – and then volunteers will go out in pairs to visit nurseries and sign them up. Nursery owners have been very receptive to this program. They identify their native plants with these lovely bird-friendly plant tags. Everyone wins – nurseries sell more plants and birds get more of the plants they need. For more information, email Kim at kbrand@audubon.org.

Access a list of native plants for your area by going to National Audubon Society's *Native Plants Database* at <https://www.audubon.org/native-plants>.

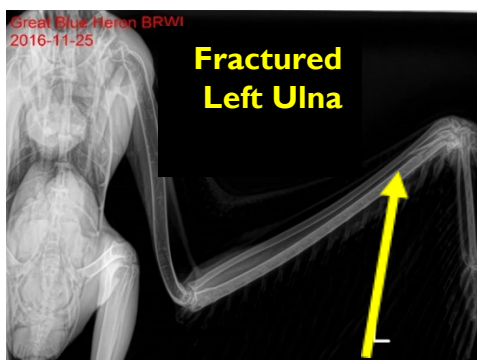
Global Big Day

The Cornell Lab's eBird *Global Big Day* is May 13, 2017. Learn how to participate at <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/globalbigday/>

Injured Great Blue Defies the Odds

by Amber McNamara, DVM

There is an adage in wildlife rehabilitation that “A down Blue is a dead Blue” – referring to the challenges inherent in restoring sick or injured Great Blue Herons back to health. In November, the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center received an injured Great Blue Heron from Hickory, NC, found “fluttering” in the road near the fire station. Staff identified a fracture in the swollen left wing, and radiographs confirmed the severity and proximity to the wrist joint. Shortly after arrival, LMC wildlife rehabilitation students wrapped the wing with a “figure of 8” bandage and administered pain medications and fluids. Time would tell if the trauma had caused internal injuries.



With damage so near to the joint, diligent physical therapy would be essential for this bird's recovery. In order to return to robust flight, the healing of the soft

tissue would be equally important as the healing of the bone. Given the enormous length of the wing (over a 6-foot wingspan!), coupled with the high-stress nature of this species, staff chose gas anesthesia to facilitate complete range-of-motion exercises. Using a repurposed water bottle as an anesthesia mask, they performed physical therapy approximately once per week to prevent contracture near the injured area.

Thankfully, the Great Blue was extremely cooperative during her rehabilitation. She was quiet in her cage, left her bandages alone, and was a champion eater. Thanks to the Hump Mountain Trout Farm in Elk Park, NC, she had a bounty of fish to supplement mice, smelt, and shrimp.

After approximately 5 weeks, the Great Blue was transferred to an outdoor enclosure – big enough to stretch her wings, but not big enough for her to fly. After aching the next recheck, she moved to a 60-foot enclosure. She climbed onto the low perches and began to glide down, exercising the wing with each movement. Regaining her strength (and grace), she was soon seen flying from end to end of this flight enclosure. As soon as her stamina had returned, it was time to think about release.

Lees-McRae Wildlife Biology senior **Keenan Freitas** returned the Great Blue Heron to Rhodhiss Lake, near where she was injured. As soon as he



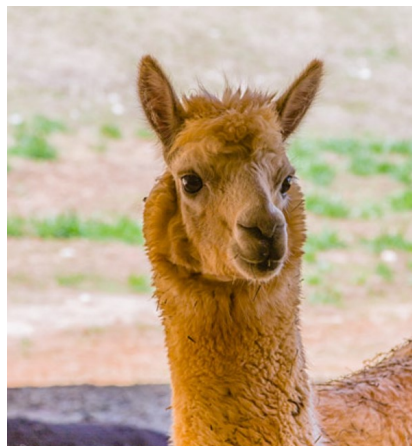
opened her transport box, she took a few glances around and headed for the sky. She flew across the lake, banked right, and landed near another Great Blue. View the

beautiful release here: <https://youtu.be/nE2LgW0QgTg>.



The Dan and Dianne May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center is situated adjacent to the Elk River on the campus of Lees-McRae College in Banner Elk, N.C. While serving as a learning laboratory for wildlife biology and rehabilitation students, the Center cares for more than 1,400 injured and orphaned wild animals per year, including songbirds, raptors, waterfowl, reptiles and small mammals from Western North Carolina.

Birds & Beverages 2017 Recap



Brenda and Monty Combs led eight HCAS friends on a tour to the Shiloh General Store, Shadow Springs Vineyard, Jones Von Drehle Vineyards, and Ridenour Ranch (where they saw alpacas!). Despite the wind and 46-degree temperature, they identified 30 species at their various stops and

enjoyed beverages with their birding. Highlights: 11 Eastern Meadowlarks within 20 minutes at Shiloh General Store; 3 types of swallows at Shadow Springs - Tree, Barn and Northern Rough-winged Swallow; and a White-crowned Sparrow.



Photos: Monty Combs

Birding by Ear: Identifying Trills

by Audrey Wilcox

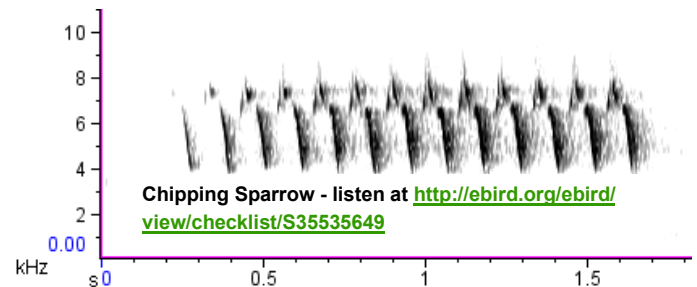
Trills can be some of the most difficult bird songs to identify - primarily because the individual elements are so brief that our ears often fail to pick up on their details. However, sonagrams and singing behavior provide incredibly powerful tools for learning to distinguish them. In this article, I will share a few tips I have learned about three familiar trillers - Chipping Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, and Pine Warbler.

Many of these points are much easier to see in a sonagram than they are to perceive by hearing alone. Therefore, recording the songs of these species and viewing their sonagrams with the free Raven Lite program will greatly speed up the process of learning them and training your ears to pick up on the differences. I am still not 100% confident in identifying some trills by ear alone, but a sonagram always points me in the right direction.

Pitch Range

A pure whistle spans a very narrow pitch range and is seen in a sonagram as a horizontal line, while a harsh noise (such as a door slamming) spans many frequencies simultaneously and is seen as a vertical line.

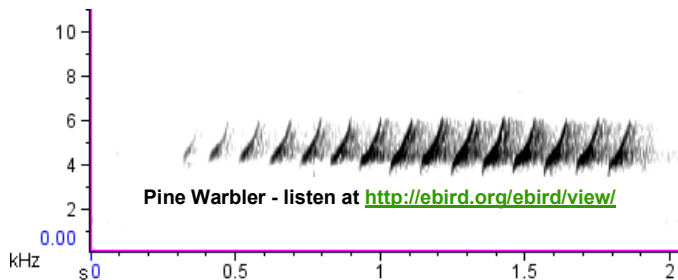
The individual elements of a Chipping Sparrow's song span a wide range of pitches in a short amount of time, creating tall, steep lines approaching the vertical line of a noisy door slam. This is why the song usually sounds harsh, dry, or unmusical, and is the best way to distinguish it from the songs of Dark-eyed Junco and Pine Warbler. The songs of these two species span a much narrower pitch range and therefore have a more musical sound. (Certain Pine Warbler trills may sound unmusical simply because they are so fast, but the narrow pitch range is still obvious in a sonagram.)



Pitch and Volume Trends and Element Complexity

One of the main identifying points for the Pine Warbler's song is the fact that its individual elements always rise in pitch. The elements may be simple upward-pointing lines or may have a slightly more complex shape, but the overall pitch trend is always rising. In contrast, Dark-eyed Junco and Chipping Sparrow often have elements that fall in pitch (although some variations may have rising elements). In other words, if the elements of the song fall in pitch, the bird is not a Pine Warbler.

Some Pine Warbler fast trills may waver obviously in pitch, and this is usually a distinguishing point. (However, from late summer through early spring, beware of pitch wavering in practice songs from young birds of any of these species.)



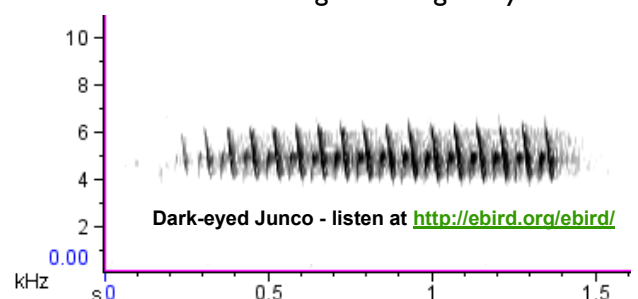
Pine Warbler slow trills have a tendency to begin soft and increase dramatically in volume by the end of the song, much more so than the other two species.

One identifying point for Dark-eyed Junco is element complexity - often (but not always), each element is composed of multiple discrete parts. Pine Warbler never has elements composed of multiple discrete parts, and Chipping Sparrow rarely does (and then the Chipping's expanded pitch range should be obvious in a sonagram).

Singing Behavior

Listening attentively for several minutes and noting singing behavior yields further important identification clues. Chipping Sparrows can sing only one song and will never switch to a different song type (although I did once hear a young Chipping Sparrow practicing two songs for a while before finally deciding on one to perfect). Dark-eyed Juncos can sing multiple songs, but they will repeat one song type many times and then move on to another.

The singing behavior of Pine Warblers is more variable. I have heard Pine Warblers sing one song many times in a row like a Chipping Sparrow or Dark-eyed Junco, but I have also heard them intermingle up to four different song types in a varied performance. The slowest trills, which are easiest to identify, have a much louder volume than the faster trill types (of which there may be several), and the effect of a loud, slow trill interspersed with soft, fast trills can be striking.



Combining Traits

When identifying birds by sound, as when identifying them by sight, a combination of traits must be considered to arrive at an accurate identification. Because both birds and their songs are so variable, relying too much on just one field mark can often lead to error. As one example, multi-parted elements alone would not be enough to identify a Dark-eyed Junco song, since some Chipping Sparrows can have elements made of multiple discrete parts. You must combine the traits of multi-parted elements and a narrow pitch range to identify the junco's song.

With effort, practice, and the indispensable help of sonagrams, seemingly identical trills will begin to take on distinctive characteristics and increase your confidence in birding by ear.

Wild Turkey

Article and photo by Francie Troy



The North American Wild Turkey is termed 'wild' as to not be confused with the 'butterball' we find in the supermarket freezer. Flocks of these birds are often seen throughout the year on our mountaintop.

The turkey's habits and behaviors are often mistaken for stupidity, possibly coming through its awkward size, limited flights, and small head. In fact, the wild turkey is intelligent and socially well-organized.

Several years ago I discovered the Wild Turkey, my neighbor here above Globe Valley, demonstrating exceptional parental skills, maybe for my benefit. The male turkey offers a more distant interest in his chicks, but the mother turkey is totally involved in caretaking.

Late spring the chicks, escorted by their parents, arrive in our long gravel driveway from the surrounding woods. The father is easily identified by brighter tones of color and flecks of gold in his feathers. He is bald and has spurs on his heels, his mark of defense. The mother's muted feathers are her identity, plus her obvious devotion to her chicks. In parade form, this family marches up our driveway to the road uphill and beyond. The gobbler leads, never looking back. The chicks follow single file, and the hen close behind, covers the rear. When a chick hops out of line, the long skinny neck of the mother darts forth with a peck and the chick returns to its place in line – and without argument!

I am impressed. I am a parent of four, now grown, but never, ever, could I manage a single file of my brood, in orderly fashion, for even a brief walk from the car to a restaurant!

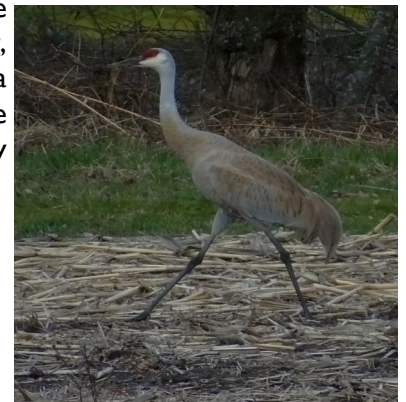
Sandhill Cranes



The last *Hoots* had a story and photos about the Sandhill Cranes at Hiwassee. But there's more: during a winter break in Florida, Mark and Dolly Rose were fortunate to see and photograph a Sandhill Crane sitting on a nest with two eggs along the St. John's River in the

Blue Spring State Park.

Then on March 18, **Audrey Wilcox** and her parents, **Teddy and Linda**, were walking along Deerfield Road in Boone on the way home from the Greenway when they were surprised by a Sandhill Crane which flew up from the edge of the golf course and flew away heading west. See <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S35264208> for Teddy's photos and Audrey's recording of the crane's call. The next morning, they relocated the crane in a corn field just east of the Boone Golf course and Teddy got this photo (right).



An hour later at this same location, Richard Gray located and photographed the Sandhill Crane (left).

"Connect With HCAS" Postcard



National Audubon Society assigns each national member to a local chapter, and HCAS has access to a list of all members assigned to our chapter. In March this year, the HCAS Board decided to send postcards to all these 220 national members in our five-county region, giving them information about our chapter and inviting them to connect with us. This is one side of the postcard with photos by our members.

Science of Birds: Better to Have Loved and Lost?

by Bob Cherry

We all know that destroying a bird's habitat will have immediate impacts on their lives. But did you know that the effects are more than just physical loss of their homes? Even their love lives can be ruined, too.

Professor John Marzluff of the University of Washington and his team studied the effects of urban sprawl on "avoider" birds that had established territories directly in its path. They define avoider birds as those species that decline as urbanization spreads. The decline is not just from the obvious loss of native habitat, as would be expected, but also because of effects on their mating and reproduction abilities.

The loss of habitat and of their established territory causes the birds to flee to new territory, traveling longer distances than they normally would, where they renew their efforts to reproduce. Dr. Marzluff found that these birds abandoned their old mates along with the old territory and sought new ones at the new sites. While birds frequently abandon mates if the match is reproductively unsuccessful and go on to have a beneficial relationship, the divorces that occur due to forced relocation, as in Dr. Marzluff's study, generally have negative results. When these avoider birds relocated they largely failed to reproduce for at least one year after moving, often resulting in the loss of half their lifetime breeding opportunities.

Fortunately not all birds fail to adapt to these human-caused changes. "Adapter" (species that tolerate people) and "exploiter" (species that thrive around people) birds also move around as humans cut down native habitat and erect subdivisions. Instead of being forced out of their desired habitat though they move around to take advantage of the new opportunities that are created, resulting in continued successful reproduction.

As with most events in nature there are winners and losers. Unfortunately the losers often seem to be the ones that lose over and over, in this case as more native habitat is replaced with man-made developments. While native landscaping around the new buildings and neighborhoods is not a substitute for the native habitat that is lost, it may at least provide some benefit to the avoider birds as they are forced to move.

(The research was published December 28 in the journal *PLOS ONE* and reported on ScienceDaily.com)

Burrowing Owls' Response to Loss of Habitat

Article and photos: Beverly Saltonstall



This is a typical Burrowing Owl site, located on an empty lot behind a bank in Cape Coral Florida. Several years later the bank turned this area into a parking lot. The owls were forced out of their home and dug a new burrow across the street.



This is their new home across the street. The first owl is on the perch watching the constant flow of traffic. The second owl is in the burrow, barely visible, between the front of the fire hydrant and the edge of the curbing.

Through Our Lens



Killdeer by Al Hooks



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher by Al Hooks



Tufted Titmouse by Doris Ratchford



Snail Kite, Wes McNair, Panama



Rufescent Tiger Heron, Wes McNair, Panama



Common Gallinule
by Don Mullaney

Black-necked Stilts by Bill Ehmgig

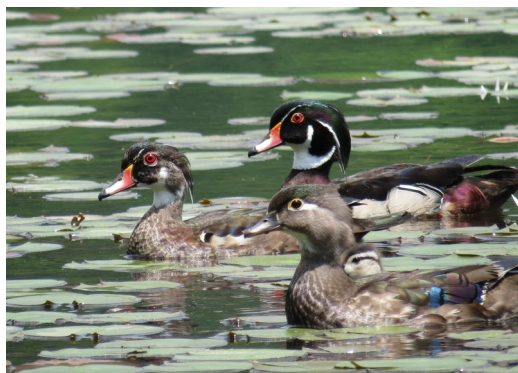


Great Egret triplet chicks by Bill Ehmgig



Crested Caracara eating carrion, Gator Hole, (FL)

By Beverly Saltonstall



Male and Female **Wood Ducks** Photo: Jan Hayes



American Robin in the cherry blossoms
at VCCP by Christopher Lytle



Score: **Woodrow the Woodpecker** - 1
Starling - 0

The starling vacated the premises shortly after
this shot was taken by Judi Sawyer.



Great Blue Heron with Fish; Merritt Island NWR

By Cindy Darling



Ovenbird by Richard Gray



Tree full of **Cedar Waxwings** at VCCP

by Alyson Browett



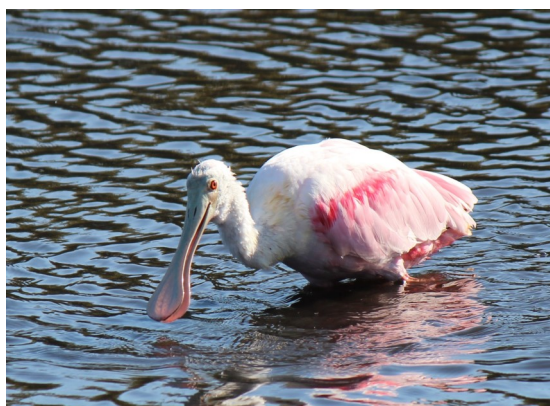
Tennessee Warbler by Judi Sawyer



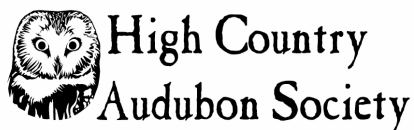
Eastern Bluebird by Jan Hayes



Two Florida **Scrub Jays** on HCAS member
Beverly Saltonstall



Roseate Spoonbill Merritt Island NWR
by Cindy Darling



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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

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

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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!

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Please support our sponsors and let them know of your support!! For example, if you have dinner at Vidalia's, tell them you're from HCAS and that you appreciate Vidalia's sponsorship of HCAS!



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May-June-July 2017

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

May			June		
3 Weekly Wed.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk Leader: Curtis Smalling/HCAS member Watauga Birding Hotline 828-265-0198	8:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	3 Sat.	Brookshire Park Nature Walk Trip leader: Guy McGrane See Saturday, May 6 info left	8:00 – 10:00 a.m.
6 Sat.	Brookshire Park Nature Walk Trip leader: Guy McGrane Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter Directions: http://tinyurl.com/j4u7waf	8:00 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.	4 Sun.	Pond Mountain Game Lands Bird Walk Leader: Clifton Avery Rain date: Sat. Jun 10	TBA
9 Tues.	Come Bird @ My HotSpot Todd, NC Trip leaders: Martha Cutler & Doug Blackford Rain date: Thursday, May 11	8:00 a.m.	7 Weekly Wed.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk Leader: Curtis Smalling/HCAS member Watauga Birding Hotline 828-265-0198	8:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
11 Thurs.	Bird-Friendly Nursery Blitz The Local Lion, Boone Contact: Kim Brand, kbrand@audubon.org .	9:00 a.m. - noon	20 Tues.	HCAS monthly meeting Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: <i>Wildlife Rehabilitation at Lees-McRae College</i> Presented by: Dr. Amber McNamara	6:30 p.m.
12 Fri.	Spring Bird Count Grandfather Mountain Contact: Lauren Lampley, 828-733-4326 naturalists@grandfather.com	All day	July		
13 Sat.	Global Big Day		1 Sat.	Come Bird @ Brookshire Trip leader: Guy McGrane See Saturday, May 6 info left	8 a.m. – 10 a.m.
13 Sat.	Come Bird @ My HotSpot Todd, NC Trip leaders: Martha Cutler & Doug Blackford	8:00 a.m.	5 Weekly Wed.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk Leader: Curtis Smalling/HCAS member Watauga Birding Hotline 828-265-0198	8:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
16 Tues	HCAS monthly meeting Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: “I Never Finished <i>Walden</i> ” and <i>Other Confessions of an English Major Naturalist</i> Presented by: Amy Renfranz	6:30 p.m.	14-17 Fri.- Mon.	2017 National Audubon Convention Park City, Utah http://www.audubonconvention.org/	
			18 Tues.	Bird Walk, Pot Luck Dinner & Annual Meeting Valle Crucis Community Park Check Yahoo group email in July for details	TBA