

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS



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

Volume 10 Issue 2

May-June-July 2018

President's Message

By **Debbie Shetterly**

Is it possible that spring might actually have arrived in the High Country? For sure, this means that one of our favorite times for birding – spring migration – is upon us! HCAS has a lot of activities planned for this exciting time, so please take advantage and come bird with us! Check the calendar in this issue of *Hoots* for dates and times, and then keep checking the website calendar for updates and added activities. Of course, the listserv will no doubt also be active, as new migrants are discovered and posted. Your board is also working on a fabulous new interactive map for the website which will let us click on a birding area for directions and the best time to visit each site. This should help new residents and new birders, and even experienced birders, better understand where and when to find our birds.

As we've discussed in the previous *Hoots* issue, HCAS is involved in more than just birding activities. A major part of our mission is the protection and advancement of bird populations. To that end, we applied for and received a \$1,000 Burke Grant from National Audubon Society (NAS) to establish a native garden at **Hardin Park School** which will be utilized as a focal point for a correlated educational curriculum. This grant is part of NAS's *Plants for Birds* program. Eventually, we're hoping to expand the program throughout our region. We're excited that **NC Representative Jonathan Jordan** will be with us to



American Bluebird Photo: **Judi Sawyer**



Prairie Warbler Photo: **Bill Dunson**

help announce the project at **3:30 p.m. on Thursday, May 3rd** at the school. I hope many of you can attend.

In addition, HCAS received an Audubon Collaborative Funding Grant to plant native plants at **Green Valley Community Park** near Todd. Plan to attend our **Bird Walk, Pot Luck, & Annual Meeting July 17th** at the park, and you'll be able to see the new plantings!

We're also working on several wetlands projects which, in the long term, should greatly enhance the habitat for waterfowl in the High Country. HCAS is partnering with Blue Ridge Conservancy to create access for birders to the **Eller Wetlands** in Foscoe, fondly known internally as Betsy's Bog. Stay tuned, as we will probably have a couple of workdays to build the trail into the wetlands. We're also working with Watauga County to shape the planned wetland restoration at **Brookshire Park**.

This project could attract large numbers of migrating and wintering waterfowl to our area. It's an exciting time!!!!

With all the projects in the queue, we're hoping that many of you become more involved with our chapter. We have some great times, as you can tell by reading about some of our field trips in this issue, plus we're poised to make some serious impact on bird populations. We hope you'll take part! As a reminder, Bill Dunson is available to help you create a more bird-friendly yard, so please take advantage of his expertise.

I hope to see many of you at our upcoming activities. Happy Birding!

A handwritten signature, likely of Debbie Shetterly.

Come Bird @ My HotSpot

After the March bird walk in Wilkes County (elevation ~ 1100 feet) and the April bird walks at Powder Horn Mountain (elevation ~ 2000 feet), we'll move higher to Ashe County and Todd at about 3000 feet. Then we'll climb a little higher for a new destination near Roan Mountain (elevation ~ 3200-4000 feet). These are great birding spots, so come join us!

Tues. May 8 (rain date Thurs. May 10)

Sat. May 12

8:00 a.m. - 11 a.m. both days

Martha Cutler & Doug Blackford (336-877-4031, cutford@skybest.com)

7932 3 Top Rd, Todd, NC 28684, USA ([map](#))

Meet at the Cutler/Blackford house in Todd. We'll walk around the property and perhaps go into Todd afterward to see what is along the river. Check the Yahoo group email for carpooling arrangements.

Sat. May 26, 7:30 a.m. - 12 p.m.



Chestnut-sided Warbler, Photo: Grayson Patton

Yellow-throated Warbler, Photo Bill Dunson



Judi Sawyer (423-481-1184, jsawyer105@gmail.com)

Hampton Creek Cove, Carter County, TN.

Judi will lead us around this Tennessee Natural Area near Roan Mountain, TN, where we hope to see **Golden-winged Warblers** among other species. Meet at Judi's house, **197 Perkins Hollow Road, Roan Mountain, TN**, at 7:30ish. She'll have some fruit and snacks, but please bring your own coffee – Judi is an herbal tea-drinker, not coffee! We'll try to leave at 7:45 and carpool from there to Hampton Creek Cove (about 10 minutes away). We'll bird until 11 or 12. Plan on a decent hike, but the birding will keep us from moving fast. Read more information on their website [Hampton Creek Cove](#). Check the Yahoo group email for carpooling arrangements to Judi's house.



Birding Powder Horn Mountain, Photo: Beverly Saltonstall



How many birds can be seen in one day all across the globe? You can help answer that question by submitting to eBird the birds **you** see on May 5, the **2018 Global Big Day**. For more information: visit [Global Big Day](#).

A Naturalist Buys an Old Farm

Tuesday, May 15

Come hear the story of **Bill and Margaret Dunson's** 14-year "romance" with their 107-acre farm and its 120-year-old farmhouse near Galax, VA. Margaret and Bill are both biologists who taught at Pennsylvania State University before retirement. Bill will present the program at the May 15 HCAS meeting at **6:30 p.m. at the Holiday Inn Express in Boone.**

Bill and Margaret renovated their antique farmhouse and outbuildings in Galax and extensively managed the fields, wetlands and woods to benefit wildlife, primarily birds, butterflies, dragonflies/damselflies, and herps. They partnered with the National Resources Conservation Service of the USDA under the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP)

to plant shrubs, trees, and three wildflower-grass/pollination meadows. They also restored a wet meadow by diverting a channelized stream and built eight small ponds of different types, some with and others without fish.

The greatest threat to many of their plants was herbivory and horning by deer which was countered by use of 4-5-foot-tall cages and hunting. They maintained some forest gaps created by logging and found these definitely attracted certain birds such as chats and Kentucky warblers. They also conducted surveys of birds and insects and discovered a migratory pathway for nighthawks over the farm.

After selling their Galax farm, Bill and Margaret recently purchased a house and two acres just east of Boone where they will spend six months during the summer. In the winter they live in Englewood, FL, where they have a wildlife-friendly yard with about 160 species of plants selected to benefit birds and butterflies. Bill leads nature walks and presents programs on various ecological topics. He will lead his first **Birds, Bugs & Blooms** walk at the Boone Greenway on **May 19 from 9-11 a.m.** He also writes a nature blog [Nature Notes by Bill Dunson](#), illustrated with his own photos.



The Farm, Photo: **Bill Dunson**



Margaret Dunson and Friends
Photo: **Bill Dunson**

Whooping Cranes and Hurricanes:

A Photo Tour of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge Post Hurricane Harvey

Tuesday, June 19

Expect a visual treat when HCAS member **Judi Sawyer** presents the program at the June HCAS meeting. Judi will show photos of the **Whooping Cranes** that winter each year on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and many other bird species which are seen there. She will also talk a little bit about the effect that the hurricane had on the Whooping Cranes and other wildlife as well as the status of the endangered cranes.

Judi moved to this area from Austin, TX, two years ago and lives in Roan

Mountain, TN. She is an avid photographer and is passionate about the natural world. She has been birding since 2014. Since moving here, she found her dream job working for Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation and is grateful to be a part of the mission of Grandfather Mountain.



Whooping Cranes, Photo: **Judi Sawyer**

3rd Tuesdays

HCAS Bird Walk, Potluck, & Annual Meeting

Green Valley Community Park

Tuesday, July 17



Green Valley Community Park, Photos: Janet Paulette

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 has received a grant to purchase native plants to improve the habitat at Green Valley Community Park, so the Board decided to hold our **2018 Bird Walk, Pot Luck, & Annual Meeting** at Green Valley Park. We've reserved the covered picnic shelter there from 4 p.m. until 8 p.m. on **Tuesday, July 17**.

More details will be posted on HCAS Yahoo group email, but plans now are for a bird walk at 5:00 p.m. before we gather to eat at about 6 p.m. Our potluck will be followed by a brief business meeting to elect officers and announce the recipient of the 2018 Sue Wells Research Grant. You can stay around afterwards for more birding or just to enjoy the park



2018 Sue Wells Research Grant

by **Bob Cherry**

For the seventh year, HCAS is offering a grant opportunity to support bird research in the High Country of North Carolina. The Sue Wells Research Grant awards up to \$500 to a high school or college student to support research or field work in ornithology or in an area of study that will directly benefit birds or bird habitat in this area of North Carolina.

The Sue Wells Research Grant was created in 2012 to support local students involved in bird research in the High Country. Typically the recipient has used the funds to buy gasoline for all the traveling they have to do as they visit their research sites, but some have also bought special equipment or used the funds to pay for testing of samples. See the story on page by the 2017 grant recipient, Tyler Pyle.

The late Sue Wells was a driving force in the creation of HCAS and 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.

If you know of anyone interested in applying for the grant, please refer them to www.HighCountryAudubon.org under the Grants and Scholarship tab where they can find more information and the application.

Update: 2017 Sue Well Research Grant Recipient, Tyler Pyle

by Tyler Pyle



Tyler Pyle @ Buffalo Gap
National Grasslands, SD

Tyler Pyle is a first-year graduate student working under **Dr. Lynn Siefferman** of App State and was awarded the 2017 Sue Wells Grant for his research with Eastern Bluebirds. Tyler graduated from App State in the spring of 2016 with a degree in Ecology/Evolutionary/Environmental Biology, but his research started long before. Here's his story.

As an 18-year-old, I had the opportunity to study the effects of habitat fragmentation on the conservation of **Howler Monkeys**, **White-face Capuchin Monkeys** and **Right-handed Spider Monkeys** in the jungles of Costa Rica. Following my return, I spent the next two years working with Dr. Siefferman on the influence of pair personality in provisioning coordination and reproductive success in **Tree Swallows** for my honors thesis. Post-graduation, I traveled to Southeast Asia to conduct biodiversity studies in Vietnam's national parks, and within 24 hours of my return to the U.S., I moved to South Dakota to conduct research on the effect of the Black Plague on the conservation of **Black-footed Ferrets**, **Black-tailed Prairie Dogs**, and other small mammals.

Through all these amazing experiences, I found that studying birds and diseases was my true research passion; hence, I began graduate school under the mentorship of Dr.

Siefferman. I cannot describe how lucky I am to be able to work with Dr. Siefferman once again, because without her mentorship I would not be the scientist I am today. My current project is determining how personality in birds and breeding density influence disease prevalence. I am studying the pathogen *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* in the **Eastern Bluebird** populations of the High Country. *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* is a pathogen that does a lot of damage each year to the poultry industry by spreading and infecting chickens with a chronic respiratory disease.

I am in the midst of finalizing my results, and I am excited to share them at the HCAS meeting on **October 16th**. For this upcoming breeding season, I will be collecting data again at our field sites to back up my findings as well as incorporating additional methods that will help further the understanding of the dynamics of bird personality, breeding density and disease. Ultimately, I hope to provide insight on how to prevent and control emergent avian diseases. Hence, don't be surprised this summer when you see someone running in Valle Crucis Park, checking all the nest boxes, with birds in their hands. Feel free to ask myself or anyone on the field crew any questions as well, but I respectfully ask that you make sure it is not in the midst of an ongoing experimental trial.



Rio La Suerte, Costa Rica



Van Long Nature Reserve Vietnam

After I earn a master's degree, I hope to continue my education and earn a Ph.D. in my field of expertise, eventually becoming a professor. I hope to one day have my own lab with graduate students, thus shaping the next generation of scientists. In my free time, I ski as much as I can during the winter months, but once the weather warms up (and I'm not in the field or lab), I enjoy various outdoors activities including, backpacking, fly fishing, and birding of course. I have been birding for about two years now and am trying to learn as much as I can. I definitely struggle with identifying warbler and flycatcher species, but I'm very enthusiastic about learning from the more experienced birders in the community. I will definitely join in on the bird walks in Valle Crucis Park as well as other birding get-togethers this summer whenever I have free time.

NC Wildlife Rehab Network Collaborates, Restores Northern Flicker to Flight

Article and photos by **Amber McNamara, DVM**, May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center



On February 19, a Good Samaritan in Raleigh found an adult Northern Flicker on the ground at Wilkerson Nature Preserve in Raleigh. She took the injured woodpecker to a local emergency veterinary clinic; the emergency clinic in turn transferred the patient to Ann Rogers, a rehabilitator with Wildlife Welfare in Durham. Rogers, also a member of the Board of Directors of the Wildlife Rehabilitators of North Carolina (WRNC), admitted the injured bird, placed a wing wrap, and provided temporary housing.

Coracoid fractures, although they can be repaired surgically, will often heal well by limiting the bird's activity and offering increasingly larger spaces for flapping (and eventually flight) as the fracture heals. **Dr. Amber McNamara** (also a WRNC board member) removed the Flicker's wrap on February 28 and performed physical therapy on the left wing. She felt comfortable to leave the wrap off at this time, allowing the woodpecker more freedom to stretch and exercise the wing on her own, but not yet enough room to fly.

On March 20, just 4 weeks after the initial trauma, the Flicker was ready to move to a small (8-feet by 8-feet) outdoor flight enclosure. Here, she could hear other birds, acclimate to the still chilly temperatures, and start to rebuild her stamina. Two weeks later, she was moved to a 20-foot by 8-foot space; flight was undulating and strong, and staff could tell that with spring fast approaching, she was starting to get antsy.

Unfortunately, winter wasn't finished and snow delayed the Northern Flicker's release until early April. On April 6, MWRC director and former WRNC Board president **Nina Fischesser** released the Flicker in a beautiful habitat just off the mountain. Per the director regarding the release, "She flew like a champ!"



Birding with Al

Article by **Martha Cutler**, photos: **Wes McNair**



American Bittern

Pond was our final stop for the morning. We were lucky enough to locate a female **Common Goldeneye** amidst the hundreds of waterfowl on the pond.



American Wigeon

Lunch at **Jennette's Pier** was followed by birding off the pier. Of course, many of the birds were not as close as we would have liked. We were hoping for a **Murre** but no such luck. **Bodie Island - Coquina Beach**. On our way back to Boone Monday morning, four of us stopped at the Observation Tower area of the **Pocosin Lakes NWR - Pungo Lake Unit**. The stop

was a life bird for at least a few of us. We finished the day with a stop at the **Roanoke Island Marsh Game Land**.

Sunday we returned to the **Alligator River NWR** and spent over 5 hours driving through the reserve where we added a **Northern Bobwhite** to our trip list. After lunch we birded was well worth it for the incredible spectacle of thousands of **Snow Geese** taking off and circling around before dispersing to feed for the day.

Al was a great host, finding a place for most of us to stay and planning our birding locations. The weather was reasonably good and the trip was a definite success. We hope to return next winter.

This January, ten of us joined former High Country resident Al Hooks for a long weekend of birding on the NC coast. Friday at dusk we met on **Milltail Road** in the **Alligator National Wildlife Refuge** to watch as **Short-eared Owls** took over from (and occasionally scuffled with) **Northern Harriers** hunting low over the fields.

The following morning we started out with a visit to the **Bodie Island Lighthouse and Pond** where we got good close looks at a very cooperative **King Rail** and counted 7 species of ducks. (We'll be happy to share our trip lists with anyone who is interested.) We followed this up with stops at the **Oregon Inlet Fishing Center** – a nesting **Great Horned Owl** – and the **Bonner Bridge** (South Rock Jetty) – a **Purple Sandpiper**. **Pea Island NWR North**



King Rail

We did see a couple of **Razorbills**, which

Kudos Corner

Welcome to new HCAS member,
Charlie Sykes, Boone, NC.

Thank you to the following who have supported HCAS with **donations:**

Jim Haselton

Debbie & Jimmy Shetterly

We appreciate the continuing support this year of **HCAS sponsor**

Daniel Boone Native Gardens

Special thanks for the following grants to HCAS which support our *Plants for Birds* initiative:

National Audubon Burke Grant
NC Native Plant Society B. W. Wells Grant
Audubon Collaborative Grant



Orchard Oriole on Silk Cotton,

Photo: **Bill Dunson**

In Celebration of Blackbirds

Article & photos by Steve Dowlan



Yellow-headed Blackbird

I lived in the “high desert” of eastern Oregon, a sometimes austere and grand landscape full of sweeping vistas and harsh weather between 2006 and 2009. My home was in a town at the edge of a great complex of freshwater marshes and alkaline lakes. Each spring around late March, vast flocks of **Snow, Ross’s and Greater White-fronted Geese** mixed with thousands of **Tundra Swans** and **Sandhill Cranes** at the edge of town. They crowded the fairgrounds and filled the hayfields and pastures that would become flooded by the Silvies River. It is quite a spectacle to behold, and I will always remember that time with great fondness and awe.

As much as I enjoyed this show, another avian family caught my attention and changed the way I watch birds. It started when I noticed the dramatic display and amazing sounds of male **Red-winged** and **Yellow-headed Blackbirds** on thousands of fence posts that lined roads along the flooded

pastures. These guys really know how to entertain and persuade with their red epaulettes and bright yellow hoods! These displays encouraged me to pay attention to their less dramatically-colored relative, the **Brewer’s Blackbird**.

Brewer’s Blackbirds are almost the “background noise” of bird communities around Oregon. I had watched them scramble for picnic scraps that escape tourists along the rocky basalt coast. I observed them lurking among cars in Walmart parking lots, dodging pedestrians while chasing spilled popcorn pushed around by the wind. I saw them calmly graze among livestock and catch flies that hovered over manure piles. One day, while driving to the summit of Steens Mountain, I watched the same inconspicuous, mundane, pedestrian species foraging for prey near the top of this extremely wild and remote 9,000-foot massif.

This realization truly impressed me. Brewer’s Blackbirds don’t have any boldly contrasting colors, don’t have melodious or even interesting songs, and don’t have particularly interesting courtship displays. What they do have is tenacity... they can thrive in the harshest habitats from the coast to the high mountains; they can subsist



Brewer’s Blackbird

on a huge variety of foods; and they can co-exist with people. They disappear in plain sight because they are everywhere.



Bobolink

So I began to pay extra attention to the many species of blackbirds. In North America, we refer to some of them as **meadowlarks, grackles, cowbirds, bobolinks, and orioles**, but they are all in the family **Icteridae**, and they all belong to the New World. North Carolina provides breeding habitat for just eight of the 97 species that mostly inhabit tropical and subtropical places. There, they go by such names as **Cacique, Oropendula, Troupial, Baywing**, and **Marshbird**. Beautiful names and beautiful sounds... they are a grand family, and deserve our appreciation and respect.

So I say, salute the Red-winged Blackbird when he shows off his beautiful epaulettes. Cock your ear to the Halloween-colored **Baltimore Oriole**. Bid safe travels to the **Rusty Blackbird** on its way to boreal forests. Give them respect and appreciate them as good neighbors. Celebrate the blackbird!

Recap: Carolina Bird Club, Wrightsville Beach, NC, January 26–28 2018

by HCAS Birding Scholarship Recipient, Nate Watkins

I was awarded the privilege of a scholarship that allowed me to visit Wrightsville Beach for a weekend with the Carolina Bird Club. I had an unbelievable weekend for so many different reasons. I was exposed to all types of birders and got to go out on field trips with fellow birders of various levels of experience. I only started birding about a year ago, and it has led me to some amazing and crazy places. When I started I never would have expected that I would've had an opportunity like this. It's really something special to be surrounded by other people who have the same passion as you. As a young birder in college I have very few friends who enjoy birds on the same level I do, so it's really refreshing to be with others. I feel like I had a big smile on my face the whole weekend.

I was able to explore **Greenfield Lake, Wrightsville Beach**, and **Oak Island/Fort Carswell**. All of them were amazing sites for birds and in total I saw 26 life birds. That was much more than I anticipated to come home to the mountains with! My favorite of the whole weekend was the **Loggerhead Shrike** - this bird and I have a short history. It was one of three birds that I set as a goal for myself while I was in Texas for a week last summer. I got the other two, but the whole week as I was studying up and watching for this neat bird, it unfortunately was a dip*... that is, until I went to Fort Carswell.



Loggerhead Shrike, Photo: **Nate Watkins**

We had been there for about an hour or so and were heading back to move to another location. Jon, our field trip leader, had mentioned the possibility that one might be there, so we

kept reminding ourselves “check every Mockingbird”. Even with that in mind, I never would have expected I'd see one just across the way. I heard someone shout “Shrike” and I quickly jogged over to the open area where, not one but two, Loggerheaded Shrikes were in different trees in the grassy common area of some houses. It was an exciting time for all of us on the trip and was a life bird for many of us. I even managed to get a photo through the spotting scope. I thought I was going to have to revisit Texas to see this bird, but thanks to the High Country Audubon Society I was able to get him in the state I call home!



Loggerhead Shrike, Photo: **Beverly Saltonstall**

***dip** - 1) *n.* An attempt to see a reported (often rare) bird and fail to see it. 2) *n.* The actual bird that one has missed. <http://earthdesign.ca/dict.html>. For more birding “slang”, check out the **Audubon Dictionary for Birders**. <http://www.audubon.org/news/the-audubon-dictionary-birders>

Recap: Carolina Bird Club, Wrightsville Beach, NC, January 26–28 2018

by Sheryl McNair



Red-Cockaded Woodpecker,
photo: **Richard Gray**

One of the trips I signed up for, the **Holly Shelter Gameland** trip, was an all-day excursion to an area frequented by **Red-Cockaded Woodpeckers (RCWO)**. I had never seen one before and was quite anxious to see one. But, first...it was about 33 degrees outside, and we arrived there about 7:30 -so the sun wasn't very high in the sky, or providing much warmth. So, of course, the birds decided to sleep in, despite our presence. While we were waiting for an appearance, we examined the habitat. They prefer old-growth pines. In this case, we had long-leaf pines, which are a species that requires fire to further the habitat. There was plenty of burn evidence around - some had green buds at the top and would continue growing. Others had too much fire, and were totally blackened. There were also some young long-leaf pines

The RCWOs use the pines to keep out predators. They drill many holes up and down the nesting tree to allow sap to flow down the tree. The very sticky sap gums up the works, sticking the scales of snakes together so they can't move and making it very uncomfortable for other climbing predators. So the sap provides natural protection for the RCWOs. However, the Eastern Bluebirds also value those nice nest cavities that the RCWOs make in the trees. They compete for them and are not adverse to killing baby RCWOs or messing with their eggs.

The RCWOs need trees with heartwood rot, so that they can more easily drill out a cavity. There have been studies to determine whether the RCWOs bring the fungi to the trees to start the rot or whether they harbor all the fungi because of their proximity to the trees with fungi, but our biologist guide had not seen any convincing results yet.

Around 9 a.m. or so, we started hearing the RCWOs, and shortly after that, found two together. They were happy to let us take photographs, and then they moved on. They generally nest in colonies and, perhaps, travel together.

Also on this trip, we ran into many carnivorous plants: **pitcher plant**, **Venus flytraps**, and some **butterworts**. As soon as we started seeing some, we kept seeing more. Once one knew what to look for and were in the right habitat, they just popped out all over. It was winter, though, so they probably would look much more exciting in their spring plumage.



Venus fly-trap, Photo: **Bill Dunson**



Pitcher Plant

Young plant on left
and dried up plant on
right.

Photos: **Bill Dunson**



Science of Birds: The Trouble with Hybrids

Article by Bob Cherry, and photos by Steve Dowlan

Several bird species look so similar to us that we often identify them on our eBird list as part of a group rather than as an individual species. The **Empidonax flycatchers** and **Lesser/Greater Scaup** fall into this group with identification sometimes made just to the genus level. For birders, figuring out the difference is part of the fun of birding. For the birds, it can be a matter of survival.

Many birders have a hard time telling a **Black-capped Chickadee** from a **Carolina Chickadee** without having a range map or a checklist from the area in front of them. The differences between the birds' bibs, greater coverts, and outer tail feathers are often so subtle that a confident identification is difficult, and sometimes impossible.

The areas where the two species both exist, the hybrid zone, generally runs from New Jersey to northern New Mexico, with Black-capped Chickadees to the north and Carolina Chickadees to the south. But the hybrid zone also has an altitudinal line in the Central and Southern Appalachians with Black-capped Chickadees at the higher elevations above roughly 4,500' to 5,000'. It's in this zone where the two species might mate and produce offspring with genes from the two different species.

Sometime hybridization, which occurs in about 10 percent of animals, produces an offspring that is better able to adapt to conditions than either of its parents could do. The result can be a brand new species that continues into the future. But more often hybridization creates offspring that are weaker than the parents and are less able to survive or produce young of their own. In these cases, mating with members of your own species has long-term survival and reproductive benefits.

Pd.D. candidate **Michael McQuillan of Lehigh University's Biological Sciences Department** conducted a memorization experiment for the hybrid offspring of Carolina and Black-capped Chickadees. The experiment looked at how well chickadees remembered where seeds were hidden, using hybrid birds as well as purebred birds of the two original species. This is a trait that wild birds need to have so they can hide seeds during the summer when food is abundant and then find the food again during the winter when food is scarce.

McQuillan hid a seed in one hole in a board with 60 holes drilled into it. Each hole was covered with a cotton ball so the seeds were not visible and each bird was allowed to pull out the cotton balls to find the hidden seed. The next day the experiment was repeated with a new seed put back into the same hole.

At the end of the nine days, McQuillan found that the purebred birds were able to improve the speed at which they found the hidden seeds. The hybrids, however, learned much more slowly and never got much faster than the average random speed. In the wild, this could mean trouble for the bird's survival or reproductive health if they are unable to find enough seeds to get them through the winter.

After releasing the birds back to their capture sites, McQuillan continued to follow the birds. He noted that the hybrid chickadees had a lower hatching success rate than purebred birds, but that's another study and another story.



Black-capped Chickadee



Carolina Chickadee

Chickadee Nest, photos Judi Sawyer



Update: Somewhere Warmer Than Boone

Article by Martha **Cutler**, photos by **Richard Gray**



Snail Kite

the better part of two days taking us around Sweetwater as well as getting us access to the Lake City Treatment Wetland, a restricted area. We were joined at Sweetwater by HCAS members **Cindy** and **Chuck Darling** and **Beverly Saltonstall**, winter residents of Florida.



Anhinga



Black-bellied Whistling Duck

The desire to bird somewhere warmer than Boone led us to head farther south than ever for the 2018 spring break birding trip. Some of you, especially those who were there (!), may remember how cold South Carolina was for our last spring break trip. Inspired by Debbie Segal's September 2017 HCAS meeting presentation on the development of the Sweetwater Wetlands Park, we decided to head to Gainesville, Florida, to bird at Sweetwater.

Debbie and **Jimmy Shetterly**, **Richard Gray**, and **Martha Cutler** headed south, stopping the first night just past Savannah, Georgia, in order to spend the following morning at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge. We stopped at several spots in the refuge and were treated to large colonies of **Wood Storks**, and **Great** and **Snowy Egrets**.

In Gainesville we were hosted by **Debbie Segal** and her husband **Bob Knight**, both members of Sweetwater's design team. Debbie spent

A highlight of our two visits to Sweetwater, and a life bird for several of us, was a **Snail Kite** which we were able to observe as it ate a large Apple Snail. Additionally, we had good looks at a very cooperative **American Bittern** and several opportunities to make side-by-side comparisons of **Greater** and **Lesser Yellowlegs**. We saw numerous waterfowl and wading birds and will be happy to share our eBird lists with anyone who is interested. Follow [link for Sweetwater](#) for more Information. Those of us who went highly recommend a visit to this area. Perhaps we will even return next spring as we head again to somewhere warmer than Boone!



American Bittern

Birds, Bugs, & Blooms

Bill Dunson will offer his first ***Birds, Bugs, & Blooms*** interpretive nature walk at the **Boone Greenway** on **May 19 from 9-11 a.m.** Come learn about the birds along the Greenway and the ecological communities that support them. We will walk a leisurely two-mile loop on trails with some gentle inclines. Meet at the **Clawson-Burnley Park** parking area on Hunting Hills Lane at 9:00 a.m. In **order for all to be able to experience nature at its best, we ask that people refrain from smoking or bringing their pets.**

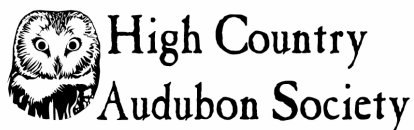
????????

Photo ????



[Boone Greenway Trail Map](#)

[Directions](#)



PO Box 3746
Boone, NC 28607

www.HighCountryAudubon.org

E-mail: contactus@highcountryaudubon.org

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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.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS May- July 2018

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

| May | | | June | | |
|-----------------|--|----------------------|-----------------|---|----------------------|
| 2 Wed. | Come Bird @ Valle Crucis Park Weekly Wednesday bird walk Valle Crucis Community Park Every Wednesday through mid-October Directions to VCCP | 8:30 a.m. 11 a.m. | 2 Sat. | Come Bird @ Brookshire For info, see May 5th. | 8 a.m. - 10 a.m. |
| 3 Thur. | Native Plant Garden Project Hardin Park School, Boone Announcement of project with Rep. Jonathan Jordan | 3:30 p.m. | 6 Wed. | Come Bird @ Valle Crucis Park Weekly Wednesday bird walk. For info, see May 2 | 8:30 a.m. 11 a.m. |
| 5 Sat. | Come Bird @ Brookshire Trip leader: Guy McGrane Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter Directions [HERE] | 8 a.m. - 10 a.m. | 16 Sat. | Birds, Bugs, & Blooms Boone Greenway nature walk | 9 a.m. - 11 a.m. |
| 5 Sat. | Global Big Day | | 20 Tues. | HCAS monthly meeting Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: Whooping Cranes & Hurricanes Presented by: Judi Sawyer | 6:30 p.m. |
| 8 Tues. | Come Bird @ My HotSpot Todd, NC Trip leaders: Martha Cutler & Doug Blackford Rain date: Thurs. May 10 | 8 a.m. - 11 a.m. | July | | |
| 12 Sat. | Come Bird @ My HotSpot Todd, NC Trip leaders: Martha Cutler & Doug Blackford | 8 a.m. - 11 a.m. | 4 Wed. | Come Bird @ Valle Crucis Park Weekly Wednesday bird walk. For info, see May 2 | 8 a.m.- 11 a.m. |
| 15 Tues. | HCAS Monthly Meeting Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: A Naturalist Buys an Old Farm Presented by: Bill Dunson , Professor Emeritus, Pennsylvania State University | 6:30 p.m. | 7 Sat. | Come Bird @ Brookshire For info see February 3 | 8 a.m. - 10 a.m. |
| 18 Fri. | Spring Bird Count, Grandfather Mountain For info & to register, email amy@grandfather.com | All day | 17 Tues. | HCAS Bird Walk, Pot Luck, & Annual Meeting Green Valley Community Park http://www.greenvalleypark.org/location | 5 p.m. |
| 19 Sat. | Boone Greenway Nature Walk Trip leader: Bill Dunson Meet at Clawson-Burnley Park parking area Directions | | 21 Sat. | Birds, Bugs, & Blooms For info, see May 19 above | 9 a.m. - 11 a.m. |
| 19 Sat. | Hardin Park School Workday | TBD | | | |
| 26 Sat. | Come Bird @ My HotSpot Hampton Creek Cove, Carter County TN Trip leader: Judi Sawyer | 7:30 a.m. - 12 p.m. | | | |



Black necked stilt, Lesser Black Backed Gull, Female red-breasted Merganser , Snowy Egret,
White Pelicans,, white winged doves, yellow throated warbler Bill Dunson



Juvenile Red-tailed Hawk Grayson Patton ?
Grasshopper Sparrow

Bobolink

Through Our Lens



Green-winged Teal, Dowlan



MoDo, Song Sparrow, RBWP, Photo: Drew Sumrell

_____ Bittern, Wes McNair



King rail, Wes

RTLO Sheryl



American Wigeon, Wes



Hooded WarblerMale, Dunson



Prothonotary Male, Dunson



Orchard Oriole on Silk cotton Dunson



Black—throated Blue Warbler Dunson



Prairie Warbler Dunson



Female Northern Pintail, McGrane



Eastern Blue Bird, Snow Goose, Canada Goose walking on water (actually landing).

Blue-winged Teal & Northern Shovler in flight, male & female Northern Shovlers. M0nty



Adult Cooper's Hawk, Photo Stever Dowlan



Anhinga chick, black-crowned night heron, great white heron, cindi darling