

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS



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

HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS OF BOONE TO HOST HCAS MEETINGS

Beginning with the June 19th meeting, Holiday Inn Express of Boone will be hosting our meetings for one year! As our first corporate sponsor, they will have their logo on the newsletter and on our website and be featured in this issue of our newsletter so that we can get to know them better.

Holiday Inn has been a presence in the High Country for almost 50 years, since the original owner Dr. Joseph Baggett first had the idea to build a hotel here. Many of us remember when there weren't many restaurants or places to stay on the mountain but in 1963 the Holiday Inn was here as a full service hotel that facilitated tourism when Boone was little more than Appalachian State Teachers College.



Then in the late 80's, Lowe's Hardware was built where the old Holiday Inn stood and the Holiday Inn Express was built next door on its present site. The 5 story hotel features all the modern amenities and a beautiful tree embossed on the main lobby wall. The owner is the son of Dr. Baggett and he takes an active role in the daily

business of the hotel, along with Jason Nichols, the General Manager.

Our meetings will be held in the "Azalea Room" which you may find easily as you walk past the registration desk, then turn left. It can be enlarged to accommodate a larger audience.

Holiday Inn Express practices conservation by recycling all batteries, paper products and ink toners. Almost all lights are CFL's and they use low-flow shower heads and encourage guests to use towels more than once to reduce the use of electricity.

We are not the only non-profit that has benefited from the donation of a meeting room on a regular

basis. "We try to help out where we can," says Jason. It is wonderful to know that a local family owned business has managed to not only survive in the economic conditions of today, but thrive. And we are most appreciative of their generosity.

UPCOMING HCAS PROGRAMS TO FOCUS ON CONSERVATION

On May 22nd Curtis Smalling will discuss "Putting Your Landscape to Work for Birds: Opportunities, Partnerships and Programs". Curtis is the Important Bird Areas Coordinator and Mountain Program Manager for Audubon North Carolina. He also works closely with a small coffee farm in Nicaragua called El Jaguar with Golden-winged warbler studies. HCAS all know him as the guy who leads the Wednesday bird walks at Valle Crucis Park almost every

Wednesday at 8:30am from April through October every year.

Curtis is a phenomena unto himself. He knows almost everything about birds and he provides anyone who is interested with information about birds and a lot more. He is a positive force for birds here as well as the world!

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March/April 2012

Volume 4 Issue 3

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May		
2 Wed	3 rd Annual Valle Crucis Garlic Mustard Pull. After the bird walk with Curtis Smalling.	
8 Tues	Daniel Boone Native Gardens Bird Walk Trip Leader: Janet Palmer	8:30am
10 Thurs	Blue Ridge Escarpment along Wilson Creek. Trip Leader: Jesse Pope	
22 Tues	HCAS Monthly Meeting at Watauga County Library. Program: Curtis Smalling, guest speaker on "Putting your Land to Work for Birds".	6:30pm
29 Tues	Field trip to Martha Cutler and Doug Blackford's home in Todd. Meet at Cash Pts. in New Market Center.	Time TBA

June		
1-3 Fri-Sun	Audubon North Carolina meeting. Host Cape Fear Audubon Society in Wilmington, NC.	
12 Tues	Daniel Boone Native Gardens Bird Walk. Trip Leader: Richard Gray.	8:30am
19 Tues	HCAS Monthly Meeting at Holiday Inn Express of Boone. Program: Walter Clark of Blue Ridge Conservancy.	6:30pm

Swainson's Warbler

- Swainson's Warblers are extremely shy and prefer dense habitats. They are often heard singing a loud ringing song, rather than being seen. Cornell Lab, says it is "One of the most secretive and least observed of all American birds."
- Even though their nests are one of the largest of the North American Warblers, they are extremely difficult to find.
- William Swainson (1789-1855) was an English ornithologist, artist, and author. His friend, John James Audubon named the Swainson's Warbler after him.
- Here in the Appalachians, the Swainson's Warblers breed in the thick rhododendrons and mountain laurel readily found in western NC.



Information gathered from Cornell Labs and WordIQ

Why are Invasive Plant Species Bad?

By Anita Clemmer

First of all, what is an invasive plant species? They are non-native plants that are introduced in a new location that begin to grow and reproduce rapidly, causing harm to native plants and ecosystems. They will adapt quickly to a variety of habitat conditions and compete aggressively with native plants for available resources. Often invasives have the ability to alter its growth forms to suit the new habitat.

Displacement of native wildlife habitat can affect bird species and have detrimental effects on forest health which will upset nature's balance. If there are no natural pests to the new invasive species there is a loss of controls which would normally slow down the process of growth and rapid reproduction.

Seeds which have the ability to survive under adverse conditions can take over a large area with incredible speed and efficiency. Some plants are capable of reproducing in multiple ways besides seeds. Their roots and stems will send out underground shoots which take root. Some plants release chemicals that will slow down growth of surrounding native plants or even kill them.



Just a few of the 137 invasive plants listed in the USDA National Agriculture Library for our state are:

Multiflora Rose was native to Japan, Korea and Eastern China and was introduced as an ornamental in the 1800's.

Chinese Yam, also introduced in the 1800's as a possible food source, was used as an ornamental and medicinal.

Hairy Vetch is an invasive in all 50 states. It was used as a ground cover and for erosion and weed control.

Kudzu was native to Japan and China and was used to control erosion and for livestock feed.

Bull Thistle can grow in a wide variety of conditions and is pervasive in all 50 states. It came from Europe, West Asia, and North Africa.

Garlic Mustard, which is the plant we are working to eradicate at Valle Crucis Park and other sites in Watauga County, was introduced from Europe in the 1800's for medicinal purposes.

What can you do about invasive plants? Get to know the plants in your area and learn to identify the invasive species. Landscape with native plants or non-invasive exotics. Don't relocate things like plants or animals into the environment. Avoid disturbing natural areas because they have are vulnerable to invasive which could have seeds attached to your clothing or boots. Don't bring in plants or fruits from abroad without allowing quarantine officials to inspect them. Clean boots and gear before setting out on outdoor activities and after returning home. Spread the word. Get involved!

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High Country Audubon Society Board

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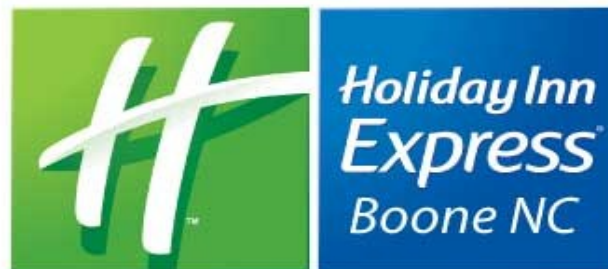
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Holiday Inn Express Corporate Sponsor

High Country Hoots is published six times a year by the High Country Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society. Group email members receive the newsletter via electronic mail. There is also access to the newsletter on our website, and it is archived at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/highcountryaudubon>.

Visit our website at <http://highcountryaudubon.org> to join our group email.



High Country
Audubon Society

PO Box 3746
Boone, NC 28607

<http://highcountryaudubon.org>

E-mail: highcountrybirder@yahoo.com

A \$5 donation is requested for
field trip participation.

All events and meeting times are subject to change.

For updated information please visit
<http://highcountryaudubon.org>.

Writing Letters and Making Phone Calls

By Bob Cherry

Occasionally we ask HCAS members to write letters or make phone calls to their elected officials or others who can make an impact on the birds we enjoy. It's not always clear why this is important or even if the letters and calls make a difference. But recent events show it is important and it does make a difference.

In the last couple of years we asked you to contact officials at Cape Hatteras National Seashore to comment on their efforts to protect nesting shorebirds from visitor impacts. Public comments not only helped to push park managers to do the right thing but also showed them that they had the public's support in taking steps necessary to protect nests and fledglings.

Your phone calls and emails encouraged the park to write a management plan that protected nesting birds and turtles. While the plan allowed fishing and other uses of the seashore, on much of the Seashore's beaches it kept inappropriate activities out of areas that were needed by piping plovers and other birds to raise their young.

In 2002 and 2004 no piping plover young survived. But after the beach management plan was enacted in 2008, with input from birders across the state and the nation, fifteen chicks fledged in 2010 and another ten in 2011. In addition to the successful increase in plovers, the number of sea turtle nests increased from 44 nests in 2004 to 153 in 2010.

The need for calls and letters is not always as obvious as it was in protecting nesting shorebirds and sea turtles. There have been times that you've been asked to contact officials about matters that don't seem to directly affect birds. One of those times was contacting state officials about the licensing of new coal-fired power plants and power plant emissions.

Even though the coal industry is pushing the "clean coal" mantra to the American public, burning coal to produce electricity is harmful to many animals (including humans). A byproduct of burning coal is mercury, which is carried out of the smokestacks far downwind where it is deposited and taken up by plants.

When the leaves fall off the trees, the mercury is converted to methyl mercury by bacteria and this is taken up by small organisms. As each level of predator eats its prey, the mercury accumulates and higher levels of it occur in their blood and organs. Animals high in the food chain have been shown to contain unsafe levels of mercury that can inhibit reproduction and other functions.

In a February 8 column in the Boston Globe, Derrick Z. Jackson wrote about research by David Evers into mercury's effects on birds. While mist-netting kingfishers to determine how much mercury they had in their systems from eating contaminated fish, Evers caught a couple of red-winged blackbirds. Even though he was pretty sure they wouldn't have mercury in their bodies he decided to test them anyway.

The results were shocking. The blackbirds, who are seed and insect eaters, had seven times the amount of mercury in their blood as the kingfishers.

After several more years of research Evers found that many insect-eating birds had levels of mercury that could interfere with reproduction. And these effects were found from the coast all the way to the tops of mountains.

The Environmental Protection Agency recently issued new rules to cut mercury emissions by 90 percent. As they were debated, we asked HCAS members to support these regulations and to oppose new coal-burning power plants. Once again your letters and phone calls had an impact on the people making these decisions that affect our birds.

It will take time to see the benefits of your efforts since mercury lasts in the environment for such a long period of time. But as emissions are cut back so will the amount of mercury sent out. And eventually birds will be able to feed on their favorite insects without lessening the chances of successfully raising their young, thanks to your emails and phone calls.



Cont. from Page 1— HCAS programs to focus on conservation.



Walter Clark is the Executive Director of Blue Ridge Conservancy, which is the organization that protects land in Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey counties. They conserve land with significant agricultural, ecological, cultural, recreational, or scenic value.

Walter has a long history of environmental education, policy and management. Before beginning his tenure in land conservation, he directed the legal program for North Carolina Sea Grant at North Carolina State University. While there, he co-founded the University of North Carolina's Coastal Resources Law, Planning and Policy Center.

Walter has a Masters in Regional Planning from UNC, Chapel Hill and a JD from Wake Forest University. Immediately after finishing his education, Walter served as the legal advisor to the Coastal Resources Commission. More recently, he was a member of the Legislative Commission on Global Climate Change.

In his spare time, Walter and his partner operate a blueberry farm in beautiful Ashe County, North Carolina. He was born and raised in Mount Airy, NC.

Last year BRC added 6 new properties making the total number of acres they are stewards of 16,400! They are required to inspect each parcel of land once a year to ensure that standard are being observed. BRC's logo says "Saving the Places You Love" and I think that is very accurate.

Cont. from Page 2—Why are Invasive Plant Species Bad?

If we begin to get involved in our own backyards then our communities we can make a positive impact on our section of the world. The earth needs us work with the ecosystems already in place and the birds need the plants and trees they depend on for food and shelter to survive.

Our third annual Garlic Mustard Pull at Valle Crucis Park will be after Curtis Smalling's regular Wednesday bird walk. The first year the harvest was 24 large trash bags then last year we were down to about 4 trash bags. We pull up the entire plant before it goes to seed and place it in black trash bags to be put into the dumpster. The first year the harvest was 24 large garbage bags then last year we were down to about 4 bags. Bring your gloves on May 2nd to VCP and be a part of our conservation efforts!

For more information with pictures of all invasive plants in NC go to www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/unitedstates/nc.shtm or just google National Invasive Species Information Center.

Use what talents you possess: the woods would be very silent if no birds sang there except those that sang best. Henry Van Dyke

May and June Field Trips

May 8th will find some of us at Daniel Boone Native Gardens to bird Strawberry Hill and the gardens with Janet Palmer. This is the second of our monthly bird walks which we will continue to do on the second Tuesday morning of each month through October. All walks begin at 8:30am.

On Thursday, May 10th, Jesse Pope will be leading our field trip to the Blue Ridge Escarpment along Wilson Creek. We will start on the flank of Grandfather Mountain on the Blue Ridge Parkway and go south down the escarpment. Jesse says, "It's really neat to pick up migrants as they are moving upslope. You pick up a new species with every few hundred feet of the elevation drop it seems at this time of year." We could get warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, thrushes, cuckoos, flycatchers, sparrows and more. We will meet at Lowe's Food at Grandfather Center at 7am to enjoy a long half-day of birding.

Then on Tuesday, May 29th we will meet and enjoy a morning of birding around Martha Cutler and Doug Blackford's home in Todd. The exact time will be posted at a later date. Recently we enjoyed another invitation to bird around members Janet and Richard Paulette's home at Powder Horn Mountain, where we saw over 30 different species. We appreciate the generous hospitality of our members and get to bird new areas. What a great combination!

Notes of Interest:

- The Cape Fear Audubon Society is hosting ANC's Annual Meeting just as we did here last year. Their birding hotspots will be Bald Head Island, Fort Fisher, Green Swamp and Boiling Springs Lakes. The meeting will be headquartered at the Hampton Inn/Medical Park in Wilmington. Registration deadline is May 4, but you may register with a late fee until May 18th. The registration form and all information about the meeting will be on the ANC website.
- We have a new way to update the Calendar on our website that is easier, so be sure to check frequently for updates for field trips and impromptu bird walks, especially if you are not on the Yahoo group email. And if you are on the group email, you may post a notice if you would like to have company on any bird walk. However common the walk is to you, it more than likely wouldn't be common to someone else!
- The American Bird Conservancy has self adhesive window tape for reducing bird strikes into windows. It is sold in ¾" or 3" widths in uncut rolls or precut. It has a frosted appearance and is reasonably priced. For more info or to order go to abcbirdtape.org.
- Bill and Kathy Ehmig may not be able to come to the mountains this year since they are staying close to Kathy's mom, whom many of us have met. We will miss their presence as they are active members of HCAS and regulars at the Valle Crucis Park Wednesday walks.
- Remember we are on Facebook! If you have a Facebook account go to High Country Audubon's page and like us and see the most recent posts. You may put photos there also from our field trips or any bird shots you may want to share.



Palm Warbler and
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
photo's by
Donald Mullaney



MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Annual membership dues: \$10 for an individual

Field trips: \$5 for an individual for each trip

OR

\$25 for an individual covers annual dues and all field trips for the year

Annual corporate membership dues: \$50

Dues of renewing members are payable by July 31st of each year.

Or consider making a contribution to HCAS to help protect birds and their habitats

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

High Country Audubon Society

Attention: Membership

PO Box 3746

Boone, NC 28607

The High Country Audubon Society is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization

Donations to the High Country Audubon Society are tax-deductible as allowed by applicable law.