HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS High Country Audubon Society



Serving Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties

Volume 11 – Issue 1

February - March – April 2019

President's Message

Dear Fellow Birders,

Happy New Year to all! I hope everyone had a great 2018 and is looking forward to 2019! Here at HCAS, we're definitely excited about the prospects for the upcoming season. Winter is, of course, our slower time for birding, but even so, HCAS members participated in 6 Community Christmas Bird Counts. These included Mt. Jefferson, New River, Grandfather, Grayson Highlands, Wilkes County and Stone Mountain. The birding community thanks Guy McGrane, Eric Harrold, Jesse Pope, and Lisa Benish for also compiling the results, because this continuous, yearly data is important in tracking the health of our bird populations and helps to inform the direction of bird research.

With the arrival of spring (just around the corner, I hope!), we'll resume our bird walks, fieldtrips and monthly meetings. Keep checking the website calendar and group email for the dates of these activities. In the meantime, the board is working on finishing up some projects that were begun last year. The website continues to be a work in progress, but we're eternally hopeful that this will be finished soon. We're also hoping to finish up the new birding hotspots map on the website. This should help all of us, but especially newcomers and visitors, understand where and when to bird in the High Country.

Other projects begun in 2018 include the bird blinds at Brookshire Park and boardwalks at Foscoe Wetlands. Both of these projects should enter the construction phase sometime in 2019. The implementation of the bird plan for Green Valley Park should be completed in 2019. We'll be applying for additional grant funding this winter to match the donations generously received in support of these projects.

Additionally, our Audubon in Action Grant, which we received in conjunction with the Elisha Mitchell chapter in Asheville, is nearing completion. The funding from this grant stimulated the establishment of the new ASU chapter, a new UNC Asheville chapter, and paid for members of all four organizations to complete training for advocacy of dean energy, which is critical in protecting our birds. The final portion of the grant involves advocating for birds at Lobby Day on March 5th in Raleigh.

Finally, we're excited to announce that HCAS will be scheduling additional Saturday walks this year to accommodate more working folks. Stay tuned for locations, dates and times! That's about it for the winter update. Stay warm, and remember, our Brookshire Park walks continue throughout the year, on the first Saturday of every month. Hope to see you there.

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<u>March 16, 2019 – Saturday</u>. Wilkes County – W. Kerr Scott Reservoir and Dam area. Meet at the W. Kerr Scott Visitor Center, 499 Reservoir Rd, Wilkesboro, NC 28697 (<u>map</u>) at 8AM, rain or shine. Brenda and Monty Combs will lead us around the area near the dam and Visitor Center. If time permits we will then go to the Yadkin River Greenway. Check the group email for carpooling details. If you're planning to attend, contact bcombs@wilkes.net. Phone 336-262-8125.

<u>April 5, 2019 – Friday</u>. Birds and Beverages 2019 Tour. Meet Brenda and Monty Combs at Lowe's Foods on U.S. 421 in Wilkesboro at 8:30 am. We will go to Shiloh General Store in Hamptonville to bird the area and pick up made to order sandwiches. From there we will tour and bird at Laurel Gray Winery and picnic on the new patio. Our last stop will be back in Wilkesboro at the Call Family Distillery where we will learn the history of Moonshine and sample their "shine." We will bird along the Yadkin River Greenway afterward. If you are planning to attend please let Brenda know by March 29, 2019 so she can notify the winery and distillery of the numbers to expect. Email bcombs@wilkes.net . Phone 336-262-8125.

April 16, 2019 – Tuesday. Powder Hom Mountain, Deep Gap, NC 28618, USA (map). 8 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Meet at the parking lot near the dub house at Powder Hom Mountain (map), then on to Janet and Richard Paulette's for coffee and snacks prior to walking a 2 1/2 mile loop (not flat!) through the neighborhood. Check the group email for carpooling arrangements. Rain date is Thursday, April 18 and you have a second chance on Saturday, April 20. Email janetpaulette@gmail.com. Phone 828-781-5708.

April 28, 2018 - Sunday. Marley Ford Canoe Launch, S Marley Ford Rd, Ferguson, NC 28624, , 8am – 11am. Meet at Marley's Ford WMA at the upper end of the W. Kerr Scott Reservoir in Wilkes County (map). To get there take 268 west from W. Kerr Scott dam for 5.7 miles, turn right on Marley Ford Road, just after the brown federal sign for Marley's Ford, and go about half a mile to the parking lot. There is easy walking around an impoundment and along a river trail, which can be a little muddy at times. Expect a nice mix of water birds, migrants, breeding birds, raptors and something unexpected. We usually stop at Mountain View Overlook and Blood Creek Overlook on the way out to scan for eagles, hawks and water birds. Check the listserv for carpooling and postponements in case of high water.

<u>May 5, 2019 – Sunday.</u> We will bird Merrill Lynch's Echo Valley Farm off of N.C. Highway 88 just east of Trade, Tennessee. Because of severely limited parking at the farm, we will meet at the Trade, Tennessee Post Office (map) to shuttle people to the farm, which is very close. There is a limit of 10 people so contact Martha Cutler to sign up early. Check the HCAS group email for updates as the date approaches. . Email cutford@skybest.com. Phone 336-877-4031.

May 7, 2019 – Tuesday. Martha Cutler and Doug Blackford residence and the Todd, Ashe County - 7932 3 Top Rd., Todd, NC 28684, 8am – 11am. Meet at the Cutler/Blackford house (map). We'll walk around the property and perhaps go into Todd afterward to see what is along the river. *There will be no weekday rain date, but there is a second chance on Sat. 5/12 for folks who are busy during the week. Check the group email for carpooling arrangements. Email cutford@skybest.com. Phone 336-877-4031.

<u>May 19, 2019 – Sunday.</u> Hampton Creek Cove Natural Area, Carter County, Tennessee (map). Meet at Judi Sawyer's house at 7:30 a.m. and then carpool over to Hampton Creek Cove. Judi will have refreshments at her house. Judi will lead participants around the Tennessee Natural Area near Roan Mountain where we hope to see Golden-winged Warblers among other species. Check the HCAS group email for carpooling arrangements. Email jsawyer105@gmail.com. Phone 423-481-1184. You can read about Hampton Creek Cove at https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/environment/program-areas/na-natural-areas/natural-areas-east-region/east-region/na-na-hampton-creek-cove.html.



Article by Amy Renfranz, Director of Education and Natural Resources, Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation

Grandfather Mountain to Host Programming for Adults

At Grandfather Mountain, education is literally a top priority. After all, when your classroom is a mile high, the sky is the limit. Even for grown-ups. The adult field courses allow students to examine specific aspects of the park ecosystem through fun field excursions. The course leaders are experts in their fields and include professors, naturalists, scientists and acclaimed photographers, writers, historians and artists.

Most courses will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Courses cost \$60 per person (or \$20 for members of Grandfather Mountain's Bridge Club program), with registration required in advance. The schedule of field courses continues to grow as the winter wears on, so keep an eye on <u>https://grandfather.com/</u> for updates. The first program of the year will be Steve Dowlan's "The Joys of Birding" on May 4th.

May is an exciting month for birding in the High Country. Songbirds are arriving every day from as far away as South America, flying at night so that can use daylight hours to feed and rest. Some stay to set up territories and raise young through the late spring and summer months, and some just stop on the mountain long enough to find high-protein food and store energy so they can move on to the boreal forests of Canada and Alaska.

Join Steve to fully apply the field guide, digital and online resources you have at your disposal to identify birds on your own. You will start your day by spending time in the classroom, and spend the rest of the afternoon finding and identifying birds. Improve your naturalist skills with this course and the many others to be offered at Grandfather Mountain in 2019!



Third Tuesdays



Strategies for Helping Birds Thrive – March 19 2019

Andrew Hutson, executive director of Audubon North Carolina and vice president of the National

Audubon Society will present an update on some of the new directions National Audubon and Audubon NC are taking to ensure a healthy future for birds. As head of Audubon North Carolina, Dr. Hutson oversees conservation strategies spanning across North Carolina's mountains, coast, working lands and bird-friendly communities, meets with partners, donors, funders and chapter members to strengthen community connections, and lays the groundwork for Audubon North Carolina to address new conservation challenges including climate change and sea level rise.



Light Pollution and Bird Migration – April 16 2019



Human-caused light pollution is now widespread over the planet, with the exception of the oceans and certain remote continental regions. Many birds migrate at night, and use the stars as a directional reference. What this means is that nearly all migrating birds encounter light pollution during their annual migrations. In some cases the presence of artificial lights can cause birds to become disoriented, which can lead to exhaustion and even death. HCAS's own Dr. Richard Gray will discuss how birds navigate during migration, how serious a

problem light pollution is, and what we as individuals and as a group can do about it. Dr. Gray is currently a professor in the department of Physics and Astronomy at Appalachian State University. His research is in the field of stellar spectroscopy, and his interests include the discovery and classification of chemically peculiar stars. He is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, a member of the International Astronomical Union of the American Astronomical Society.

Oregon's Great Basins and Ranges – May 21 2019

Most people think of Oregon as a very green place with tall trees and abundant rainfall. Although this is

true for the western one-third of the state, most of Oregon consists of wide open spaces and panoramic views of very dry habitats. Retired Natural Resource Specialist Steve Dowlan birded the eastern part of Oregon for over 25 years, and lived and worked for three years in Harney County, the driest and highest of eastern Oregon's counties. Steve will provide glimpses of the history, landscape, plants and wildlife of a land of extremes at the northern edge of North America's Great Basin. It is a landscape that never fails to impress.





Feisty Merlin's Fractured Wing Healing Well at MWRC

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



The May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center regularly admits raptors of all sizes, with the most common being Red-tailed Hawks and Eastern Screech owls. Of the nearly 1,500 patients admitted to the center in 2018, 124 were injured or orphaned raptors, representing 15 different species. On December 2, staff was surprised to admit an infrequent raptor patient – a Merlin.

The diminutive but fierce falcon was found on the ground in Burnsville, unable to fly. The finder bravely scooped her up, placed her in a box, and delivered the injured bird to the rehabilitation facility in Banner Elk. On the bird's left wing were fractures of the major and minor metacarpal bones. Located between the wrist and the digits, birds have 2 fused metacarpal bones as opposed to the five present in human hands.

The treatment plan for this patient included a stabilizing wing wrap, pain medications, and LASER therapy. The MWRC utilizes Low Level Laser Therapy (LLLT) to facilitate wound healing,

manage discomfort, and in this case, to help fractures heal more quickly. Treatments may be as short as 1-2 minutes with such small patients.

The Merlin proved to be a great eater and was as amenable to bandage changes as one would expect a tenacious 200 gram falcon to be – not very. Wrap changes, physical therapy, or laser treatments occurred on day 2, 7, and 12; by day 16, the wraps were left off for good. On day 25, healing had progressed sufficiently for the bird to move to an outdoor flight enclosure. With winter encroaching, a heat lamp offered a warm spot in addition to flight practice opportunities.

After two weeks of flight time, her maneuverability, strength, and stamina are all on point. Staff is hopeful to release the still feisty as ever Merlin in the next 1-2 weeks.





Donations

Martha Cutler Steve & Dona Dowlan Lauren Sinclair

The Board of Directors of HCAS recognizes with gratitude these donors to our Wetlands Appeal and sincerely thanks them. Please let these friends of HCAS know how much you appreciate their donations for our exciting wetlands projects.

HCAS Wetlands Appeal

Arthur Cone Barbara Hurlbrink Karin & Gerhard Kalmus Pegge & Chris Laine in honor of Martha Cutler Sue McBean Sheryl McNair in honor of Martha Cutler

Dear HCAS,

A couple weekends ago, we had the incredible opportunity to travel to Nags Head for a Carolina Bird Club meeting. Despite being passionate about bird watching and networking with others who share that interest, none of us would have been able to attend this meeting without the generous scholarship provided by the HCAS.

The weekend was certainly one to remember. Upon arriving at the hotel, we immediately ran into several others who were there for the meeting: the lobby, elevator, and hallways were all filled with conversations about birds, field trips, and the possibility of finding rarities over the course of the next couple days. We spent daylight hours outside traveling from site to site bird watching and learning about the species we found from our incredible trip leaders, and came together at night to hear from other birders and photographers about their adventures. Having never been to an event like this, it was an incredible experience and a young birder's dream come true!

We would like to offer our utmost thanks to the High Country Audubon Society for making this trip possible. We had an absolutely incredible time, saw more birds than we'd even imagined possible, and met some truly remarkable people. Thank you for your generous support of young birders and for allowing us to travel for this opportunity. We are beyond grateful and will remember this experience for years!

Mary Whiteacre, Alex Marine, and Lucas Price

The Science of Birds



You Are What You Eat

Article by Bob Cherry

For quite a while now Audubon, as well as many other conservation organizations has been encouraging people to use native plants when landscaping around their houses. The argument for their use usually focused on the insects that feed on the native plants and in turn on the birds that fed on these insects.

A recent study reviewed at the web site sciencedaily.com took this another step and looked at how non-native landscaping affects the reproductive success of a common insectivore, the Carolina Chickadee. Doug Tallamy and Desirée Narango of the University of Delaware and Peter Marra of the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center surveyed yards of more than 200 homes in and around Washington DC. For their study they looked at what plants were in the yards, what insects were on the plants, and how well Chickadees used and reproduced there.

The researchers chose Chickadees to represent insectivores, those birds that survive by eating insects (caterpillars, spiders, etc.) rather than seeds or other food sources. In the U.S. more than one-third of all birds are insectivores, and so the results of this study can generally be applied to many other species as well.

Many nurseries and homeowners appreciate non-native plants for their variety, profit margins, and that they tend to be used by fewer pests, requiring less maintenance than native plants often do. Unfortunately non-native plants are not used as often by insects because the plants often have tastes or defensive mechanisms that native insects have not adapted to and cannot consume. As an example, there are no caterpillar species that feed on the non-native Gingko tree, while a native white oak will support up to 557 species of caterpillars.



Carolina Chickadee. Photo by S. Dowlan

As found with other studies, the yards with a higher percentage of non-native plants had fewer insects, which forces insectivores to consume less-desired, and less-nutritious, foods. In this study, the Chickadees were less likely to use those yards and were less likely to breed there. The ones that did attempt to breed in yards with fewer native plants were less successful and produced fewer young. Marra noted that not only would this affect chickadees, but would have the same effects for other insectivores, such as warblers, vireos, and thrushes.

Overall the threshold for Chickadee success was a yard having at least 70% of the plant biomass as native species. Once the percentage dipped below 70%, the chances of these birds successfully using the area dropped to zero. If your yard is one of those that contains more non-native than native plants it is never too late to make matters right. An example the researchers use is if you replace a *Zelkova* tree (a European elm), which supports no caterpillar species, with a black cherry you would add food for 456 species of caterpillars, which in turn provide food for our native birds. For help with finding native plants that would work in your yard there is a lot of help at https://www.audubon.org/native-plants.



Beware the Anomalies! What to do when the bird doesn't match the picture Article and photos by Steve Dowlan

In the beginning, we look at birds in the field and hope that they are all dead ringers for the paintings or photos in our field guide of choice. When I say beginning, I mean when we begin our pursuit of the pastime known as "birding." The vast majority of the birds we see in the field or at our feeders neatly match the pictures, and we are happy to apply a label with confidence.

As experience accumulates, difficult identification pairs, trios, or even genera present themselves. With time and practice, we learn to separate the most common confusing pairs that we see in our back yards: House Finch and Purple Finch, Cooper's Hawk and Sharpshinned Hawk, Downy Woodpecker and Hairy Woodpecker, and if you live in the Northeast, Chipping Sparrow and American Tree Sparrow when their paths cross in migration.

If we live near an ocean or other large body of water, we move on to other problematic pairs and genera such as Greater and Lesser Scaup, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Arctic, Common and Foresters Tern, and winter-plumage loons. Many developing birders who live near or visit areas where multiple species of gulls congregate try their best to ignore them... the task seems simply overwhelming unless the bird is an adult gull in breeding plumage. Small sandpipers often appear to be equally overwhelming.

Still, the struggles we undertake do not represent insurmountable obstacles, for the most part. With practice and exposure we gain an understanding of age-related and seasonal plumage differences that are the result of molt, seasonal occurrence patterns, behavior, and habitat associations, all of which contribute to affirmative identification of those tricky species. But what happens when we have applied all of the wisdom we have accumulated to a clear and lengthy look at a bird in good light with adequate optical assistance... and it still does not quite add up?

Sometimes, the bird is the right size, is in the right habitat, appears in the right season, and displays all the right filed marks... except one. I have some very nice photos from central Oregon of a finch with very broad white wing bars. Because of the wing bars, this bird looked very much like an adult female Lark Bunting, which I had seen for the first and only time just a week before on the Oregon Coast. This is a very rare bird in Oregon. It was drinking from a man-made dripper in front of a very well-known photography blind in a ponderosa pine forest, where Cassin's Finches were swarming by the dozens.



This aberrant female or hatch-year male Cassin's Finch displays a very broad white wing bar not unlike the wing bar on a female Lark Bunting. The bird lacks the black malar stripe and clean white throat stripe typical for a female Lark Bunting. 15 September 1998, Cabin Lake Ranger Station, Lake County, Oregon

The facial markings were not bold enough for Lark Bunting, and Cassin's Finch normally has no wing bars. This was my dilemma... I tried very hard to make my finch into a Lark Bunting, but in the final analysis an aberrant Cassin's Finch among dozens of others in suitable habitat is much more likely than an aberrant Lark Bunting in unsuitable habitat - perhaps one in all of Oregon - in the middle of a Cassin's Finch flock! I talked myself off the ledge and labeled my photo "Cassins Finch." When I look at the photos now, I see an "aberrant" or abnormally plumaged Cassin's Finch. Quite simply, it happens, and we all need to be aware of the phenomenon.

When a bird in your binoculars is the right size and shape for a common species that you are familiar with, or a species you are seeing for the first time displays a color or pattern that is not right, an absence or over-abundance of one or more pigments is probably the cause. When a bird does not produce melanin at a normal level or in a normal pattern, the it may be referred to as albino (all-white), leucistic (patches of pure white), or with dilute plumage. If a bird produces too much melanin, it is referred to as melanistic. These unusual color patterns can be the result of injury, poor nutrition, or a genetic mutation. Sometimes aberrant plumage is simply the result of sun bleached or extremely worn feathers, high air pollution, in the case of unusually dark plumage, or even the result of berries that stain plumage red or purple.

Aberrant plumage can confound experienced observers. I once had a friend who asked me for help in identifying an odd bird in his yard. The man was familiar with all of the common birds on his property, and he was a careful observer. He described the bird as looking like a white American Robin... it was the same size and general shape as a robin. I suggested to him that his mystery bird was in fact most likely an albino or leucistic American Robin, but he dismissed this suggestion by saying "I know what a robin looks like and this is not a robin. Several weeks passed, and when I saw him again, he said "Well, you were right. It was a white robin." He had studied the bird and convinced himself.



This "normal" female or hatch-year male Cassin's Finch was photographed at the same location as the aberrant bird.

Albinism is a recessive genetic characteristic that is generally quite rare animal populations. It has been estimated that only 0.5% to 1.0% of all birds display any sign of albinism, partial or complete. Both parents have to carry the uncommon recessive genes that produce rare pure white offspring. A true albino bird typically has pink or red feet, legs, and bill, and its eyes are pale. Pied or piebald leucistic feathers are rarely in a symmetrical pattern. Some birds with leucism have white feathers where darkpigmented feathers would normally be while still maintaining the bright colors of their red, orange, or yellow feathers. Because many birds use plumage color as a way to find and recognize potential mates, individuals with discoloration may struggle during courtship.

To further confound our mission to identify every bird we see with confidence, even the hard parts of a bird may not neatly match the picture in our field guides. Bill deformities, also known as Avian Keratin Disorder may alter the appearance of a familiar species and cause an observer to wander off the beaten path in search of an alternate identification. From 2000 through 2006 Project FeederWatch collected 215 reports of bill deformities, representing 38 species from 38 states and provinces. We all strive to identify every bird we see with a reasonable degree of certainty. Unfortunately for us as birders, the birds don't cooperate to achieve our mission. Field guides cannot display all of the possible aberrations, deformities and worn and broken parts that modify the appearance of a bird. Recognition of aberrant field marks is an important tool in the field identification toolbox. Sometimes a robin, however odd it appears to be, is still just a robin!

RESOURCES

https://feederwatch.org/learn/unusual-birds/ https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/plumagevariations/



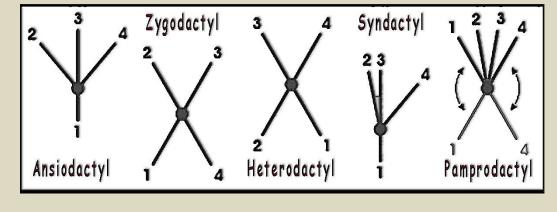
Did You Know?

Most birds are classified as *digitigrade* animals, which means that they walk on their toes rather than the entire foot. The long skinny part of the bird that most people refer to as the bird's "legs" are actually fused bones that correspond to some of the human foot bones and the tarsus. This bone is called the *tarsometatarsus* in birds and it gives the leg extra lever length. A bird's ankle points backward, and connects to a *tibiotarsus* that is a fused version of a human upper foot and tibia . The *fibula* is much reduced in birds and is attached to the *tibia*. The knee joint between the *femur* and *tibiotarsus* points forwards, but is hidden within the feathers along the lower contour of the body. Loons and grebes are exceptions to the digitigrade arrangement Because they use the entire foot (toes and tarsometatarsus) with the heel on the ground, they are referred to as *plantigrade*.

Birds have evolved to employ five typical toe arrangements:

- 1. *Anisodactyl* feet have three toes in front (2, 3, 4) and one in back. This is the normal arrangement for nearly all songbirds and most other perching birds. This is the most common toe arrangement.
- Zygodactyl feet have two toes in front (2, 3) and two in back (1, 4). The outermost front toe

 (4) is reversed. The zygodactyl arrangement is a case of convergent evolution because it
 evolved in birds in different ways nine times. Climbing woodpeckers can rotate the outer
 rear digit (4) to the side in an ectropodactyl arrangement. In Black-backed woodpeckers,
 Eurasian three-toed woodpeckers and American three-toed woodpeckers the inner rear toe
 (1) is missing and the outer rear toe (4) always points backward and never rotates. Owls,
 ospreys and turacos can rotate the outer toe (4) back and forth.
- 3. *Heterodactyl* feet have two toes in front (3, 4) and two in back (2, 1). The inner front toe (2) is reversed. This arrangement only exists in trogons.
- 4. Syndactyl feet have three toes in front (2, 3, 4), one in back (1). The outer and middle toes (2, 3) are joined for much of their length. This toe arrangement is common in kingfishers and hornbills.
- 5. *Pamprodactyl* feet have two inner toes in front (2, 3) and the two outer toes (1, 4) can rotate freely forward and backward. This arrangement occurs in mousebirds and some swifts, although some swifts move all four digits forward to use them as hooks to hang on to vertical surfaces.



See <u>https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bird_feet_and_legs</u> for more diagrams and descriptions.



Fall Migration



Adult White-crowned Sparrow, 27 Oct 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray





Bobolink, 6 Oct 2018, Brookshire Park--Loop and Greenway, Watauga County.. Photos by G. McGrane



Immature White-crowned Sparrow, 13 November 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Yellow-billed Cuckoo, 17 Sep 2018, Boone Greenway Trail, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane



Swainson's Thrush, 28 Oct 2018, Boone Greenway Trail, Watauga. Photo by R. Gray.



Swainson's Thrush, 7 Oct 2018, Tanawha Trail at Holloway Mountain Road, Watauga. Photo by R. Gray.

Fall Migration



Marsh Wren, 29 Sep 2018, Julian Price Memorial Park--Price Lake, Watauga. Photo by B. Dunson



Winter Wren, 13 November 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Cedar Waxwing, 21 November 2018, Julian Price Memorial Park, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray



Immature Cedar Waxwing, 14 November 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan.



Purple Finch, 27 October 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray



Lincoln's Sparrow, 4 Nov 2018, Westbrook, Boone, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray



Golden-crowned Kinglet, 23 November 2018, Boone Greenway Trail, Watauga. Photo by R. Gray.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

February – March – April - May 2019

Please check our HCAS Yahoo group email regularly for changes and additions to the calendar http://highcountryaudubon.org/calendar-2/

February

2	8:00 a.m 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane. Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
8-10	Check Web Site	Birds of a Feather Fest, Palm Coast, Florida. For details check
		https://www.palmcoastgov.com/events/birding-fest
9	9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Forsyth Audubon Second Saturday Bird Walk - Location varies. For details check
5		http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar
15-18	Check Web Site	Great Backyard Bird Count. For details check https://www.audubon.org/conservation/about-great-
13-10		backyard-bird-count
21-24	Check Web Site	23rd Annual Whooping Crane Festival, Port Aransas, Texas. For details check
21-24		http://www.whoopingcranefestival.org/
23		Burrowing Owl Festival, Cape Coral, Florida. For details check http://ccfriendsofwildlife.org/

March

1-3		International Festival of Owls, Houston, Minnesota. For details check https://www.festivalofowls.com/
2	8:00 a.m 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane. Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
9	9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Forsyth Audubon Second Saturday Bird Walk - Location varies. For details check
	9.00 a.m. – 11.50 a.m.	http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar
16	8:00 a.m 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Wilkes County, W. Scott Kerr Reservoir area. Contact Monty and Brenda
	0.00 d.iii 11.00 d.iii.	Combs, bcombs@wilkes.net, 336-262-8125
19	6:30 - p.m 8:30 p.m.	Third Tuesday HCAS monthly meeting, Holiday Inn Express, Boone. Presenter is Andrew Hutson

April

3	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
5	8:30 a.m TBD	Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Wilkes County, Birds and Beverages 2019 Tour. Contact Monty and Brenda Combs, bcombs@wilkes.net, 336-262-8125
6	8:00 a.m 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane. Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
10	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
14	TBD	HCAS Bird Identification Class at Valle Crucis Community Park. Contact Steve Dowlan – owlhooter@aol.com for details.
13	9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Forsyth Audubon Second Saturday Bird Walk - Location varies. For details check http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar
16	8:00 a.m 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Watauga County, Powder Horn Mountain Private Residential Area. Contact Janet and Richard Paulette, Janetpaulette@gmail.com, 828-781-5708
16	6:30 p.m 8:30 p.m.	Third Tuesday HCAS monthly meeting, Holiday Inn Express, Boone. Presenter is Richard Gray
17	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
18	8:00 a.m 11:00 a.m.	RAIN DATE: Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Watauga County, Powder Horn Mountain Private Residential Area. Contact Janet and Richard Paulette, Janetpaulette@gmail.com
27	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leader: Steve Dowlan
24	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk – No trip leader / no host
26-28	9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Hatchie BirdFest, Brownsville, Tennessee. For details check http://www.hatchiebirdfest.com/
28	Check Web Site	Golden-Winged Warbler Field Day at Shady Grove Gardens and Nursery, 2278 West Peak Road, Creston, NC. Call for information and directions. 828-297-4098. <u>http://shady-grove-gardens.blogspot.com/2011/04/golden-winged-warbler-field-day-photo.html</u>

28	8:00 a.m 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Wilkes County, Marley Ford Canoe Launch, W. Kerr Scott Reservoir area.
		Contact Guy McGrane, badgerboy@wilkes.net, 336-981-5480
29- May 4	Check Web Site	New River Birding & Nature Festival, Fayetteville, West Virginia. For details check
		https://www.birding-wv.com/
29- May 4	Check Web Site	2019 Little St. Simons Island Spring Birding Days, St. Simons Island, Georgia. For details check
		https://www.littlestsimonsisland.com/promotions#spring-birding-days

May

1	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
4	8:00 a.m 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane. Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
5	TBD	Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Watauga County, Echo Valley Farm near Zionville. <i>Check the HCAS list serve for details as the date approaches.</i>
7	8:00 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Watauga County, Martha Cutler and Doug Blackford Residence in Todd.
		Contact Martha Cutler, cutford@skybest.com, 336-877-4031.
8	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
11	l	Watauga County Spring Bird Count. Contact Guy McGrane – badgerboy@wilkes.net
15	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
19	9 7:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Carter County, Tennessee. Hampton Creek Cove Natural Area. Contact Judi Sawyer, jsawyer105@gmail.com, 423-481-1184
21	6:30 p.m 8:30 p.m.	Third Tuesday HCAS monthly meeting, Holiday Inn Express, Boone. Presenter is Steve Dowlan
22	2 8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - No trip leader / no host
25	5 8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leader: Steve Dowlan
29	e 8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members

For a full schedule of birding festivals and events throughout the U.S. please visit https://www.allaboutbirds.org/birding-festivals/

Calendar Reminder: A monthly THIRD SATURDAY bird walk at Valle Crucis Community Park has been added to the field trip schedule.

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will occur from <u>*February 15 to 18*</u>. This is a free, fun, and easy event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of bird populations. Participants are asked to count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the four-day event and report their sightings online at birdcount.org. Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from beginning bird watchers to experts, and you can participate from your backyard, or anywhere in the world.

Each checklist submitted during the GBBC helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how birds are doing, and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, more than 160,000 participants submitted their bird observations online, creating the largest instantaneous snapshot of global bird populations ever recorded. For more information check their website: http://gbbc.birdcount.org/.

And if anyone is interested but doesn't know how to get started, Please contact Guy McGrane – badgerboy@wilkes.net.

Remember to Report Your Bird Sightings on eBird

Launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at Cornell University and the National Audubon Society, eBird gathers basic data on bird abundance and distribution around the world. The goal of eBird is to maximize the utility and accessibility of the vast numbers of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional

eBird

bird watchers. If you choose to participate in the eBird effort, your observations, including photos and sound recordings you upload yourself join those of others in an international network. All of this collected information is freely available through internet queries in a variety of formats. As of July 7, 2018, over 412,000 eBirders have entered almost 30 million checklists from around the globe.



Observations entered into eBird range from a single species that was observed while mowing the lawn to extensive lists with photo and sound recordings made while birding all day. eBird encourages a broad range of observation types, and makes data entry easy. Some beginning birders are reluctant to enter their observations because they lack confidence, or are afraid to make an inaccurate entry. Fear not! Experienced birders monitor everyone's observations and are ready and willing to provide constructive feedback.

Also a great tool for planning your own birding outings, eBird can produce checklists of expected species for a local hotspot or an entire country. You can even create an illustrated checklist that includes photos from those who have birded the area before you. Here is what you will



see if you explore Watauga County's records on eBird: <u>https://ebird.org/region/US-NC-189?yr=all</u>. To better understand how eBird works and create an eBird account, visit eBird's help page at <u>https://help.ebird.org/?t</u>=. Join your friends, join the fun, and be a citizen scientist!

Bird Observations



Example of a bar chart for Valle Crucis Community Park generated from eBird.

What Did You See and Hear? Enhance your eBird Experience

Article by Steve Dowlan

If you are a regular contributor to eBird, you might have noticed a few optional check-boxes on the right hand side of the "What did you see or hear?" page. If you check the box for "Show Rarities," species will be displayed that are not expected for your reporting area on the reporting date. Regional eBird reviewers will expect to see some details if you report any of these species, even if they are easy to identify.

This is not intended to doubt anyone's credibility... reports of common species reported in "the wrong season" or far away from the normal range should be carefully documented in order to ensure the accuracy of the data. Clear photos or sound recordings are always the best form of documentation, but even these solid pieces of evidence can be enhanced by a brief narrative that includes habitat, behavior, associated species, duration of observation, and optics used. Don't attempt to fill-in what you did not observe or hear... just stick to what you did see and hear. It is good to remember that your contribution to eBird is "citizen science" at its best!

If you check the "Show Subspecies" box, you see more than one possible entry for the same species. These "Identifiable Subspecific Forms" (ISSFs) allow eBirders to make note of identifiable differences to study the distribution and abundance of different subspecific forms where they both occur. These groups also may be helpful later if the species are split. These groups are composed of formally described subspecies, subspecies pairs, and groups of subspecies defined by eBird. For a more detailed explanation, visit <u>https://ebird.org/science/the-ebird-taxonomy</u>.

This can be a bit confusing, and for novice birders it is usually best to leave the "Show Subspecies" box unchecked. When the novice birder is ready to nudge up to the next level, here is some basic guidance for using ISSFs when reporting observations of common to not-so-common species in the High Country:

For these species, the subspecies or group listed is simply the one expected for the High Country, for the United States, or for North America as a whole:

Green-winged Teal (American) American Coot (Red-shielded) Great Blue Heron (Blue Form) Osprey (*carolinensis*) Sharp-shinned Hawk (Northern) Red-shouldered Hawk (*lineatus* group) Red-tailed Hawk (*borealis*) Great Horned Owl (Great Horned) Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted) Merlin (Taiga) Peregrine Falcon (North American) Warbling Vireo (Eastern) Barn Swallow (American) Cliff Swallow (*pyrrhonta* Group) White-breasted Nuthatch (Eastern) House wren (Northern) Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*caerulea* Group) Eastern Bluebird (Eastern) Swainson's Thrush (Olive-backed) American Robin (*migratorius* Group) House Finch (Common) Purple Finch (Eastern) Red Crossbill (Appalachian or type 1) Fox Sparrow (Red) Dark-eyed Junco (Slate-colored) White-crowned Sparrow (*leucophrys*) Savannah Sparrow (Savannah) Eastern Towhee (Red-eyed) Yellow Warbler (Northern) Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle) A few other species require a slightly different approach:

- Canada Geese found in the High Country are mostly if not entirely residents. Their subspecific origin is usually uncertain. The use of Canada Goose (*canadensis* Group) should be reserved for birds that are certain to be of migratory origin, which is difficult to ascertain here. Birds found in the summer, and especially paired birds with young are not suitable for this identification.
- Both Bronze and Common Grackles may be present in the High Country, so unless the observer is looking at individual birds up close or carefully sorting through flocks, it is probably best to simply apply "Common Grackle" in most reports.
- Both Western (Brown) Palm Warbler and Eastern (Yellow) Palm Warblers pass through the High Country in migration. The two subspecies are not difficult to distinguish under good field conditions, but it is certainly fine to simply enter a number for "Palm Warbler."
- Two subspecies of Yellow-throated Warblers also pass through our area. Distinguishing these two subspecies requires a good clear look at the lores above and in front of the eyes, so many sightings will have to avoid the distinction.

The last check box is "Group by Most Likely." This feature is especially useful if you are submitting a checklist for a location that has a fair number of checklists already, like your yard. It simply looks at past eBird data for that location at that time of year and groups the species into three groups:

- 1. Frequent (10% or more of the checklists have the species on it),
- 2. Infrequent (less than 10%), and;
- 3. Not reported (0%).

This works great for my yard because there are lots of species that I'll never see there that aren't really rare elsewhere in the area. Also, the ten or so common species for my yard always appear near the top of the list.

As you explore eBird and become a more frequent contributor, it saves time and adds to the fun if you learn to use more of its powerful tools. It can also add to the quality of the data, which benefits everyone else too.





HCAS member Guy McGrane summarizes sightings of unusual and rare birds, as well as observed trends for our more common and expected species in the High Country for each Hoots issue. Guy usually gleans these sightings from eBird, but please do forward your thoughts and comments, such as "I saw very few Belted Kingfishers in the High Country this winter as compared to last winter." Sometimes what we are not seeing is as significant as what we are seeing! The reporting period for sightings and observations in the current issue is <u>September, October, and November 2018</u>. Frequently cited locations are abbreviated, with a key to abbreviations at the end of field notes.

The most notable thing about this fall was the lateness of the migration. Many new latest fall dates were set for migrating species. New late warbler reports included Black-throated Green, Tennessee, Canada, and Magnolia. Swainson's Thrush also set a late date. This fall's very warm conditions over much of eastern North America likely had an impact on these birds.



Green-winged Teal, 4 November 2018, Price Lake, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane

Ring-necked Duck, flock of 96 at PRICE on 4 Nov, highest count ever for area. Green-winged Teal, 4 at PRICE on 4 Nov American Wigeon, 4 at PRICE on 7 Nov Goldeneye, KERRSCOT on 15 Nov Ruffed Grouse, TROUT on 31 Aug Black-billed Cuckoo, one or two birds at CHESKNOB, Watauga from 1-6 Aug; Todd community on 7 Aug; TROUT on 17 & 18 Aug; LINCREEK on 28 Aug; ELKKNOB on 27 Aug; ECHO on 6 Sep with unusual recording, again at ECHO on 5 Oct Eastern Whip-poor-will, Todd community on 15 Aug; Laurel Springs, Allegany on 8 Sept were both very late reports Common Nighthawk, 481 at CHESKNOB, on 26 Aug was a very large number Ruby-throated Hummingbird, CHESKNOB on 6 Oct was very late Sandhill Crane, a large flock flew over the Glade Valley community on 9 Nov Solitary Sandpiper, TROUT on 30 Aug Spotted Sandpiper, PRICE on 6 Sep *Least Sandpiper,* 4 at Lowe's Park at Riversedge on the Yadkin River Greenway, Wilkes on 17 Sep Semipalmated Sandpiper, GREENWAY on 17 Sep was our 5th report overall and first since 2011 for Watauga Co. Greater Yellowlegs, Lowe's Park at Riversedge, Wilkes County on 17 Sep Black Tern, KERRSCOT on 15 Sep Laughing Gull, Hardin Park School in Boone and GREENWAY on 17 Sep were likely the same bird Common Tern, 12 birds KERRSCOT on 15 Sep and a few lingered for 2 days Forster's Tern, 23 birds KERRSCOT on 15 Sep and a few lingered till next day



Laughing Gull, 17 September 2018, Boone Greenway Optimist Club Baseball Field, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson

Common Loon, an apparent first year bird continued from the summer at PRICE and was last reported 4 Oct

Double-crested Cormorant, PRICE on 15 Aug & 8 Sep; at the Rominger Road bridge over the Watauga River in Watauga on 17 Sep; a good count of 169 birds in three groups during a hawkwatch at MAHOG on18 Oct; very high count of 167 birds at the Linville Land Harbor development in Avery on 9 Nov





Semipalmated Sandpiper, 17 September 2018, Boone Greenway - ASU Athletic Fields, Watauga County. Photos by G. Mcgrane

Great Egret, BROOKSHIRE on 5 Nov-- count of 5 was unusually high and very late; also one at HICKKNOLL on 6 Nov. Both were part of a wave

of sightings in the mountains seemingly resulting from a strong storm *Swallow-tailed Kite,* 1 at Avery County High School on 12 Aug was the first ever report for Avery Co. and only the 5th for the 5 county region

Mississippi Kite, MAHOG on 22 Sep and 8 Oct *Northern Harrier*, 1 at Osborn Mountain Overlook on the BRP in Watauga on 29 Sep, and 1 at VCCP on 22 Nov. Hawkwatch season totals: GRANDFATHER-4, MAHOG-3



Great Egret, 6 November 2018, Hickory Knoll Neighborhood Watauga County. Photo by G. Mcgrane

Bald Eagle Growing much more common across the region, birds that were likely either on territory or exploring new territories were seen several times at or near each of the following locations: KERRSCOT, around Todd, the Crumpler area of Ashe and Allegany, and at Valle Crucis. Likely migrants were seen at MAHOG, ECHO, HICKKNOLL, and GRANDFATHER. **Golden Eagle, 1 at** GRANDFATHER on 29 Sep; 1 at MAHOG on 4 Oct and 2 birds on 21 Oct **Osprey,** early were birds at VCCP on 4 Aug and 22 Aug, HICKKNOLL on 12 Aug; TROUT on 16 Aug;

Hawkwatch season totals: GRANDFATHER-20; MAHOG-22

Cooper's Hawk, Hawkwatch totals: GRANDFATHER-17, MAHOG-43 *Sharp-shinned Hawk,* Hawkwatch season totals: GRANDFATHER-33, MAHOG-34 *Red-shouldered Hawk,* Hawkwatch season

totals: GRANDFATHER-5, MAHOG-4 **Broad-winged Hawk,** Hawkwatch season totals: GRANDFATHER-6368 (high count of 4559 on 29 Sep); MAHOG-7700 (high count of 5133 birds on 20 Sep)

Red-tailed Hawk, Hawkwatch season totals: GRANDFATHER-49, MAHOG-16

Great Horned Owl, Todd area on 19 and 20 Aug; CHESKNOB on 4 Sep and 7 Oct; LINCREEK on 21 and 25 Oct

Red-headed Woodpecker, Osborn Mountain Overlook on the BRP on 29 Sep;

NNEWRIVER.221 on 1 Oct; MTJEFF on 7 Oct *American Kestrel,* Osborn Mountain Overlook on the BRP on 29 Aug, VCCP on 24 Oct, ASU Fig Farm in Watauga on 4 Nov, Phillips Gap area of Wilkes on 18 Nov. Hawkwatch season totals: GRANDFATHER-7; MAHOG-11

Merlin, Jumpinoff Rocks on the BRP , Ashe on 4 Sep; TROUT on 7 Sep; ECHO on 23 Sep, Elk Mountain Overlook on the BRP on 26 Sep, LINCREEK on 28 Nov. Hawkwatch season totals: GRANDFATHER-3; MAHOG-14

Peregrine Falcon, 1 bird at VCCP on 23 Sep; 2 birds at Osborn Mountain Overlook, BRP on 29 Sep, Hawkwatch season totals: GRANDFATHER-2; MAHOG-7

Willow Flycatcher, CHESKNOB on 7 Sep; GREENWAY 10 Sep were both very late *Yellow-bellied Flycatcher,* One seen at the Kennedy Trails at the ASU Athletic Fields on 21 Sep was only our 4th county report *Least Flycatcher,* VCCP on 8 Oct was very late

Philadelphia Vireo, CHESKNOB on 27 Sep *Sedge Wren,* VCCP on 1 Aug was the earliest fall report for the area.

Gray Catbird, HICKKNOLL on 29 Nov was very late

Swainson's Thrush, PRICE on 8 Aug was very early; ECHO on 1 Nov was latest county report *Gray-cheeked Thrush*, MAHOG on 23 Sep, ECHO on 19 Oct

American Pipit, 1 at VCCP on 14 Nov, heard only flyover

Red Crossbill, a flock of 5 at Elk Mountain Overlook on the BRP on 26 Sep stayed in the Deep Gap area thru 10/31



Vesper Sparrow, 4 November 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray

Savannah Sparrow, TROUT on 27 Aug and 21 Oct

Lincoln's Sparrow, Large influx throughout area from 1 Oct through 4 Nov

Vesper Sparrow, Todd area in late Oct; VCCP on 4 Nov

Rusty Blackbird, GREENWAY on 8 Nov; 6 at VCCP on 14 Nov

Northern Waterthrush, PRICE on 13 Sep *Golden-winged Warbler*, BENMILLER on 6 Sept *Blue-winged Warbler*, TROUT on 6-9 September

Tennessee Warbler, ECHO on 2 Nov was latest county report

Nashville Warbler, GRAND on 30 Sep; LINCREEK on 10 Oct; VCCP from 24-31 Oct

Orange-crowned Warbler, TROUT on 1 Oct Mourning Warbler, ECHO on 13 Sep Magnolia Warbler, ECHO on 1 Nov was latest

county report

Blackburnian Warbler, TROUT on 20-21 Aug **Blackpoll Warbler,** ECHO on 25 Oct and GREEN on 28 Oct are very late

Palm Warbler, VCCP on 13 Nov was quite late **Prairie Warbler,** CHESKNOB on 26 Aug, and 3 at US221 on 1 Oct

Black-throated Green Warbler, BENMILLER on 22 Oct was latest county report

Canada Warbler, ECHO on 25 Oct was latest county report



Nashville Warbler, 30 September 2018, Half Moon Overlook, Grandfather Mountain, Avery County. Photo by J. Sawyer



Blackpoll Warbler, 28 October 2018, Boone Greenway Trail, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray



These three individual Palm Warblers were seen together at Valle Crucis Community Park on 13 November 2018 at Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photos by S. Dowlan

AREA KEY:

BASS-Bass Lake, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga. BRPBEACON-Beacon Heights Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway, Avery. BENMILLER-Ben Miller Road, Watauga. BRP-Blue Ridge Parkway.
BROOKSHIRE-Brookshire Park, Watauga. CHESKNOB-Chestnut Knob, Watauga. ECHO-Echo Valley Farm (private), Watauga. ELKKNOB-Elk Knob State Park, Watauga. GRANDFATHER-Grandfather Mountain area, Avery, Caldwell & Watauga. GREENWAY-Town of Boone Greenway Trail, Watauga. HICKKNOLL-Hickory Knoll development (private), Watauga. KERRSCOTT- W. Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes.
LINNCREEK-Linville Creek Crossing & Overlook development (private), Watauga. MAHOG-Mahogany Rock area on the Blue Ridge Parkway, Alleghany. MEATCAMP-Meat Camp Environmental Studies Area, Watauga. MOUNTJEFF- Mount Jefferson State Natural Area, Ashe. NNEWRIVER.221-US221 access at New River State Park, Ashe.
PONDMOUNTAIN-Pond Mountain Game Lands, Ashe. POWDER-Powderhorn Mountain development (private), Watauga. PRICE-Price Lake, Julian Price Memorial Park, Watauga. TROUT-Trout Lake, Moses Cone Memorial Park, Watauga. VCCP-Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga



Recent and noteworthy sightings of birds throughout the Carolinas can be viewed at the Carolina Bird Club's web site at <u>https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/sightings/</u>

Christmas Birds Counts in the High Country: 2018–2019

Article and photos by Guy McGrane

Highlights of the season included a gorgeous GOLDEN EAGLE perched along the New River near Sparta, a LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE which popped up among a bunch of WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS near Zionville, a MERLIN which buzzed overhead at sunset at Kerr Scott Lake, and a SHARP-SHINNED HAWK which perched low and close allowing great looks at Stone Mountain State Park.

The one thing that all our counts had in common this year was low numbers! Overall, the number of birds found was about ¾ of what we usually find. We will keep an eye on this and hope it's a blip, not a trend. Everyone can help by keeping brush piles and thickets of vegetation, mowing less, and setting aside space for nature.



Adult Bald Eagle at the New River CBC on 4 January 2019.



Adult Cooper's Hawk at the Shady Valley/ Mountain City CBC on 1 January 2019.



Adult Golden Eagle at the New River CBC on 4 January 2019.

December 14- Mt. Jefferson: Rainy day birding with 4 parties in Ashe County produced no unusual finds, but one of the highest counts of Red-breasted Nuthatches in the area this year, 8, all along the New River.

December 15- Mt. Rogers/Whitetop: continuing rain and mist combined with melting slush from the snowstorm made birding slippery and wet. A group of 6 WILSON'S SNIPE and a LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE were nice finds.

December 16th- Roan Mountain: More rain and high winds kept the birds down in the Roan Mountain area which includes parts of Avery County. A flock of 7 AMERICAN BLACK DUCKS was a good find, and the species count of 47 was just above the norm.



Turkey Vulture at the Stone Mountain CBC on 30 December 2018.





Black Vulture at the Stone Mountain CBC on 30 December 2018.

December 21st- Grandfather Mountain: After several nice sunny days the rain returned in buckets, turning to snow later at high elevations. The BALD EAGLES at Hounds Ears appear to be returning to nest another year.

CBC on 30 December 2018.

December 30th- Stone Mountain: Warm and sunny conditions made the birding very pleasant but numbers were still well off long-term averages. A large group of soaring VULTURES, both BLACKS and TURKEYS, entertained a group of HCAS birders near sunset on top of Stone Mountain. On the way out of the park afterwards, we were treated to very close looks at an adult SHARP-SHINNED HAWK, then nice looks at several Red Bats which were taking advantage of the warm conditions to hunt flying insects just before sunset.



American Kestrel at the Shady Valley/ Mountain City CBC on 1 January 2019.



HCAS group at the Stone Mountain

Pat Geiger, Jimmy Shetterly, and Debbie Shetterly, 30 December2018.

CBC, including (L to R) Guy McGrane,



Belted Kingfisher at the Shady Valley/ Mountain City CBC on 1 January 2019.

January 1st- Shady Valley/Mountain City: Mild, partly sunny conditions allowed comfortable birding, but again bird numbers were low, and the species count of 58 was a little low. A BALD EAGLE was found, first time ever for the count, consistent with the growing population of the species for the area as a whole. In the Neva community of Johnson Co., Tennessee, close to the NC border in Watauga Co., a LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE surprised us by jumping up on a low Christmas tree in great lighting among a bunch of mature WHITE-CROWNED SPARROWS.

January 3rd- Upper Yadkin Valley: The rain ended early, and mild drier conditions marked the late morning and afternoon, which brought out some birds but less than we usually find at this lowestelevation area count, around Kerr Scott Reservoir. Compiler Eric Harrold led a large group on a wild woodcock hunt at YMCA Camp Harrison with his two captive Harris' Hawks. Thankfully, no woodcock were found. Then, during a beautiful warm windless evening at Bandit's Roost on the lake, we were treated to a very close flyover by a MERLIN, and the traditional turnout of HOODED MERGANSERS across the lake which performed their usual "dance", bobbing up and down and stretching their necks. A couple RUSTY BLACKBIRDS were an interesting find during count week, but couldn't be relocated on count day.

January 4th- New River: After being postponed on December 21 due to heavy rain, the rescheduled count got more of the same. A congregation of 4 eagles, including a gorgeous GOLDEN EAGLE, made us forget about the rain, and livened up the birding on the New River just north of Sparta. The Golden perched out in the open in good lighting, allowing good scope views, and seemed to be calling to the pair of adult BALD EAGLES which were perched about 100 yards away. It was a great way to wrap up the CBC season.

High Country Hoots Submission Guidelines

For the next issue (May – June - July), please have all material to the editor by April 19, 2019. Send all material to OWLHOOTER@aol.com

I will accept written material and photos in any format. Material in the body of an email is fine too. It will make my task easier if I receive material contained in a MS Word document in *Calibri 11 point, single space, with spaces between paragraphs rather than indents.* Use this issue as an example.

Suitable and desirable topics for articles include (but are not limited to): HCAS field trip accounts and summaries; an especially satisfying or successful day in the field, especially at a local (High Country) area; site guides for a High Country area not previously birded or described (only if free public access is available); short notes (one page or less) that describe unusual bird sightings, infrequently-seen behavior, and nest locations and descriptions for less common bird species.

Photos of birds submitted by HCAS members may be placed in the "*Through Our Lens*" regular feature, in the **Field Notes** section, or elsewhere in the newsletter. *Through Our Lens* will feature photos taken during the previous three-month Hoots publication period, and will include three subheadings: *High Country, Farther Afield in the Carolinas*, and *Somewhere in the Wider World*. Priority will be given to photos submitted for the High Country subheading. Especially desirable are photos of nests, photo sequences of nests through the breeding cycle, nestling and fledgling birds (Canada Geese, Mallards, House Sparrows, and Robins... not so much!), birds carrying nesting material, birds carrying food for nestlings or fledglings, birds feeding nestlings or fledglings, birds in flight, and unusual behavior.

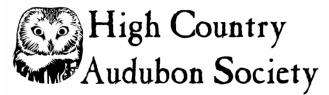
Photos are best received as jpegs... A minimum of 72 dpi helps a lot, and more is better. I can crop and edit photos from any size.

Photos of birds or any other nature subject should *include a species name, location (including county), and date taken*. Photos of field trips or HCAS events should include the date, location, and names of people in the picture, if known. A useful (but not required) format for photo labels is to use the species alpha code, followed by a date, followed by a location. So, a photo of a Black-throated Blue Warbler taken on June 18 on the Profile Trail might look like: BTBW20180618Profile. Bird species alpha codes for the Carolinas can be found at: https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/bandcodes.html. Knowing, or at least knowing where to access these alpha codes can come in very handy for all kinds of reasons!

Events announcements intended for the HCAS calendar should first be submitted to the Programs and Field Trips Chair.

Please contact me with questions! <u>Owlhooter@aol.com</u> Your feedback is welcome too!

Steve Dowlan, Editor, High Country Hoots



High Country Hoots is published four times each year by the High Country Audubon Society, a chapter of the National Audubon Society.

Newsletter Editor: Steve Dowlan Newsletter submissions: Owlhooter@aol.com 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.

http://www.highcountryaudubon.org

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HCAS appreciates any additional contributions you make to support our local efforts related to protection of birds, their habitats, and our environment.

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You can now make donations to HCAS on our website, www.HighCountryAudubon.org, through PayPal. You do not need a PayPal account to take advantage of this convenient way to donate. 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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