

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

High Country Audubon Society



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

Volume 13 – Issue 2

April to June 2021

President's Message



Hello fellow birders,

It's been a good season so far. We've had our spring bird counts, whip-poor-will counts, breeding bird surveys, bird-a-thon, and of course, all of our walks. It's been nice to get back out and see all of our birding friends, for sure.

Coming up, we'll continue to have a walk each Wednesday and Saturday throughout the season. Please check our website calendar for times and locations. We're excited that we'll be offering walks in Ashe and Allegheny Counties in the next couple of months.

Our Boone Greenway walks as a substitute for our indoor meetings have gone well, too. One walk was highlighted by both the Green Heron nest and a Sora sighting - exciting stuff! This coming month, our monthly meeting will be our annual meeting, and I hope lots of you can arrange to attend. It will once again be a potluck, followed by the election of a new vice president and treasurer. Please join us at Valle Crucis Community Park at 5:30 P.M. on July 20th.

As far as projects go, our placement of benches at Brookshire Park and Green Valley Park is finally complete, with the addition of our small plaques attached to each of the benches. Thanks to Mary Olson for completing that project. The project with the Town of Boone on their property across from Brookshire Park is finally underway, so eventually we'll be contributing trees, signs and a walking trail to the effort.

Our chapter has so many wonderful birders who volunteer their time and energy to help others. We owe many thanks to Paul Laurent for stepping up to lead all of our Wednesday VCCP walks. Paul and his wife, Amanda, own Epic Nature Tours, and professionally guide birding tours to multiple locations. HCAS is fortunate to have his expertise at our Wednesday walks! Also, thanks to Bill Dunson for continuing to host his Birds, Bugs and Blooms walks each month. Thanks, too, to Steve Dowlan for helping out Beech Mountain Recreation Department on their first Naturalist Rally, and to Sheryl McNair for hosting Tuesday evening walks in June at Trout Lake.

Finally, ongoing thanks to Guy McGrane for leading our Brookshire walks throughout the year, and for helping all of us with the birding atlas. Speaking of the NC birding atlas, I hope lots of you are participating in the atlas. It will make the end result much more complete in the High Country. Talk to Guy if you have questions about how to participate.

All of you should have by now received notification of our conversion to a new listserv. Thanks to Cindy Darling to for completing this project. So far, the process has been quite a bit easier than our forum, and I'm hoping many more of you will be able to renew your communications with the rest of our chapter.

I hope all of you have a great summer, and we'll look forward to fall migration, with warblers, nighthawks and hawks!



Strategies for a Successful North Carolina Bird Atlas Effort

By Steve Dowlan

As a veteran of a bird atlas project from another state, I confess that I get a bit obsessed with the effort. I was thrilled when the North Carolina Bird Atlas Project was launched this year, and it immediately changed the way I bird wherever I go within the state. I'm thinking about locating Priority Blocks when I travel, and I'm searching for birds with bugs and bits of grass and twigs in their bills rather than just hoping to hear or see a new county or state species. Completing an Atlas Project Priority Block that is seldom birded requires some planning and forethought that may not be necessary in blocks that include eBird hotspots or in those that already receive a lot of attention. I have some suggestions for a birding strategy in these less-birded areas.

One of my atlas priority blocks is within sight of my house, but has seldom been birded by locals or visiting birders. It includes mostly rural neighborhoods along lightly-traveled roads and large blocks of private property. Although I plan to ask for access to some of these areas, I'm assuming that most if not all of my birding will have to happen from public roads and a few kinds of places where I will not likely be chased away. Fortunately, most priority blocks include several of these public and semi-public facilities.

Schools and Public Parks

The obvious go-to areas for bird atlas efforts are in public ownership of one kind or another. My close-by priority block includes a historic high school that now houses a day care center, Chinese medicine school, a playground, and a track used by locals for walking and running. This facility is also along a stream, and includes riparian vegetation communities. It is the only substantial tract of land that offers free public access in the entire block. Birds are well-accustomed to the presence of people here, and this is a great advantage when looking for behavior that confirms breeding activity. Always be mindful of how your presence may arouse concern, especially around operating schools and day care centers.



Churches and Cemeteries

Churches and cemeteries are great places to pursue atlas birding where access is limited. During the few times I've encountered someone associated with these places, no one has looked at me with suspicion or malice. Church and cemetery staffs are more likely to be curious about what you are doing, and may

even offer useful advice and guidance for access elsewhere. The key to harmony in these situations is to stay in plain sight, avoid trespass on to adjacent private property, and be friendly to anyone who approaches to ask what you are up to. Be aware though that some family cemeteries are on private land not associated with churches. Usually, this is obvious.

Birding by Bicycle

Local residents are rightfully suspicious of anyone parking in odd places or blocking traffic and peering at feeders next to homes. Sometimes wide spots and potential parking areas are nowhere near the best or most interesting habitat, which means you may have to walk along roadsides from the few available parking spots. I have had great success birding these areas by bicycle, especially where traffic is light. While rolling along slowly, I can hear bird songs and call notes, especially begging calls, and I can stop almost anywhere I want to. I'm also more likely to see birds carrying nesting material or food. Even a fairly narrow road is adequate for leaning a bicycle against a bank to follow up on potential breeding confirmation. Bikes also are useful on rails-to-trails and any other public pathways that are open to them.

Birding by Kayak and Canoe

Riparian habitat associated with lakeshores, rivers, and large streams can be difficult to access from land. A waterway may be open to public access, but the shore is often off-limits and clearly posted. Kayaks and canoes provide quiet, efficient, and slow transportation, allowing detection of birds by sound well away from the shore in upland areas. Use of watercraft may open up many miles of tidal areas, reservoir shorelines, river banks, and forested swamps that are otherwise difficult to access. It may take a bit of practice to keep the boat from rolling as you twist and turn to follow a bird (I keep my binoculars and camera in a dry bag while actually paddling), and one must be mindful of tides in order to avoid grounding well away from the launch point. Some birds may be less wary of a birder approaching by boat rather than on foot.

Getting to "Confirmed"

Confirming the breeding status of a species involves both luck and persistence. It is luck when you see an Eastern Towhee perched on a guardrail post with a beak full of nesting material as you drive by (**CN** – Carrying Nesting Material). With a little persistence and patience in the follow-up, the **CN** code can be upgraded to **NB** – Nest Building. It is also persistence when you spend extra time watching a Northern Cardinal for as long as it takes to see it gather and carry food for its young (**CF** – Carrying Food) through dense brush to see the bird feed its young (**FY** – Feeding Young) . Often confirmation is achieved by just a few-second glance as a bird flies away with nest material or food.

Observations of occupied nests may involve several-to-many minutes of following a bird that is acting "nesty", which becomes obvious the more you look for it. It helps tremendously to learn key characteristics of recently fledged young and their behavior when begging for food. Although begging calls of young birds vary tremendously, all begging birds have a repertoire of sounds that is different from the adults of the same species. Following these oddball sounds often leads to confirmation by **FL** – Recently Fledged & Precocial Young, **FY** – Feeding Young, or **NY** – Nest with Young.

Balance Effort with Results

Completing one of the 937 priority blocks requires consideration of what you have or someone else has already achieved each time you head to the field. From the project perspective, there isn't much benefit to pursuing confirmation for a species in a Priority Block in which the species has already been confirmed. Instead, think about the species – especially the common species – that still need to be confirmed and look for them where you have seen them before. If you saw a Baltimore Oriole pair several times in the same place, go there and follow the birds until you see them carrying food or visiting a nest. Once you have acquired confirmation, move on to another species. Be methodical in your approach.

To Bird Where No One Has Birded Before

In my opinion, the real benefit to atlas birding is that it takes you to new places that have been seldom or never birded by anyone else. Since March of the current year, I have rarely visited the local eBird hotspots. Instead, I have worked atlas Priority Blocks, and this has taken me to places I would not have considered before. I have increased my knowledge of local roads, found species in new locations, and found a new reason to exercise my legs and arms with the bicycle and boat. It may require a little determination to refocus your birding efforts... I study maps of Priority Blocks specifically to look for roads I have never traversed and places I have never visited. Sometimes, a new location yields nothing new or exciting and no follow-up visit is necessary. Some places turn out to be real jackpots of bird occurrence and activity; I

have added these new hotspots to my menu of potential birding locations.

Levels of the Game

As an activity and a pastime, birding has many levels which reflect effort, commitment, enjoyment, and effective results. A bird atlas project represents to me a high-quality contribution to both the pastime and science of the study of birds. It is egalitarian because any degree of effort and any level of commitment satisfies the goals and objective of the project. It is enjoyable because it changes focus of activity and makes common species worthy of extra effort to observe and document. It is effective because it turns what we do as birders every day into a result that is greater than the sum of its parts. For me, it doesn't get any better than that.

For detailed information on how to participate in the North Carolina Bird Atlas Project visit <https://ebird.org/atlasnc/home>

Below is a list of Priority Blocks for the North Carolina Bird Atlas Project in Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties as of 6 July 2021. You do not have to adopt a Priority block to report observations in that block or any non-priority block. While Atlas Project will accept observations from anywhere in North Carolina, data from priority blocks is preferred. These blocks are spread throughout the state to get a better sampling of all kinds of habitat in the state.

Alleghany County

Glade Valley SE - Available
Mouth of Wilson SE - Available
Sparta East SE - Adopted
Sparta West SE - Adopted

Ashe County

Baldwin Gap SE - Adopted
Grassy Creek SE - Adopted
Grayson SE - Available
Jefferson SE - Available
Laurel Springs SE - Adopted
Park SE - Adopted
Todd SE - Adopted
Warrensville SE - Adopted

Avery County

Carvers Gap SE - Available
Elk Park SE - Adopted
Grandfather Mountain SE - Adopted
Newland SE - Available

Wilkes

Boomer SE - Available
Glendale Springs SE - Available
Horse Gap SE - Available
Maple Springs SE - Available
Mcgrady SE - Available
Purlear SE - Available
Roaring River SE - Available
Ronda SE - Available
Thurmond SE - Available
Traphill SE - Available
Whitehead SE - Available
Wilkesboro SE - Available

Watauga County

Boone SE - Adopted
Deep Gap SE - Available
Sherwood SE - Adopted
Valle Crucis SE - Adopted

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 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.

eBird

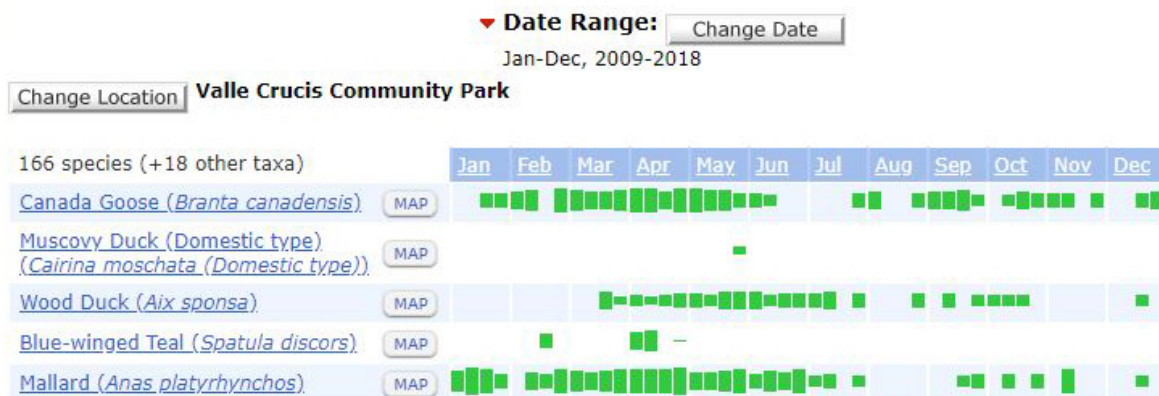


Observations entered into eBird range from a single species that was observed while mowing the lawn to extensive lists with photo and sound recordings made while birding all day. eBird encourages a broad range of observation types, and makes data entry easy. Some beginning birders are reluctant to enter 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: <https://ebird.org/region/US-NC-189?yr=all>. To better understand how eBird works and create an eBird account, visit eBird's help page at <https://help.ebird.org/?t=>. 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.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Please check our HCAS web site regularly for the full HCAS activity calendar

<http://highcountryaudubon.org/calendar-2/>

For a full schedule of birding festivals and events throughout the U.S. please visit

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/birding-festivals/>

The Appalachian State University Biology Greenhouse will conduct its first sale in quite a while. This fall, A record number of succulents, some houseplants, perennials and natives will be available to choose from. All are grown by Biology greenhouse staff and volunteers.

When: August 13th and 14th, Friday, 6:30am-4:30pm, Saturday 7am-2pm

Where: Biology Greenhouse –211 Dale Street(next to State Farm parking lot)

Who to contact: email meyerja@appstate.edu with any questions.

1st Annual Valle Crucis Park Bio Blitz

Valle Crucis Community Park is holding the 1st Annual Valle Crucis Park Bio Blitz on Sunday, August 1. The goal of this family friendly event is to catalog as many species of plants and animals as possible while educating the public about the amazing natural history of this area and encouraging an interest in nature, science, and conservation. The HCAS has generously offered to help count bird species in the park and also lead Bio Blitz participants on short walks of the park as well as ID plants and animals. If anyone is interested in volunteering to help please email Paul Laurent at programs@vallecrucispark.org

The event will go on from dawn till dusk, but anyone is welcome to join for as long or short a time as they wish. There is no registration required, so feel free to bring friends, family, strangers you meet at the grocery store, etc...

Crossing Paths with Crossbills with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Visit <https://www.ncwildlife.org/News/Blog/crossing-paths-with-crossbills> for an update on the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission's work with Red Crossbills in the Fall of 2020.



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! Frequently cited locations are abbreviated, with a key to abbreviations at the end of field notes.

((NOTES: 1. Use of the phrase “the region” refers to High Country Audubon's 5 county region of Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties. 2. Underlined bird species are especially rare. 3. To join the Watauga area Rare Bird Alert Text message system, contact Guy McGrane.))

Notable sightings for HCAS 5-county region for March, April and May, 2021

A very slow migration season, likely due to weather conditions causing the birds to bypass our area was nevertheless marked by several regional or High Country early marks set for migrating birds, including Spotted Sandpiper, Solitary Sandpiper, Willow Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Barn Swallow, Bobolink, Black-and-white Warbler, Northern Parula, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Palm Warbler, and Yellow-throated Warbler. Does this mean the birds are adapting to global climate change?

Waterfowl

Blue-winged Teal, Our largest group this spring was 22 at PRICE on 28 MAR. Another fairly large count for the immediate area was 8 at LANDHARBOR on 11 APR. And 2 at NRSP-ALLEGHANYACCESS were slightly unusual for that county.

Northern Shoveler, Always a nice find in the high country, 5 at PRICELAKE stayed for a few hours on 13 APR.

Gadwall, a flock of 4 flying over BASSLAKE on 17 MAR were the only report this spring from the



Northern Shoveler, 13 April, Price Lake, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane

High Country and one was seen at KERRSCOTT on 19 MAR.

American Wigeon, we had two records of these locally elusive birds this spring, both at TROUTLAKE, both seen and photographed

about a month apart: a single male on 4 MAR, and 2 females on 2 APR.

Green-winged Teal, one at TROUTLAKE on 4 MAR likely was a continuing bird from winter in the area.



Green-winged Teal, 4 March, Trout Lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Redhead, a single female bird was seen at BASSLAKE throughout the period, although there was a gap in sightings for the entire month of April, so it's not clear whether all the reports were of the same bird. This bird was about a month and a half later than any of the species in our region before.



Redhead, 24 May, Bass Lake, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson

Ring-necked Duck, although not unusual in the High Country, for some reason Ashe County had never had one reported before, so one on a small pond at Ashelawn Memorial Gardens right on Highway 221 was a great find, a stunning male with great photos, providing a county first record on 3 MAR. 41 at BASSLAKE on 13 MAR was this year's biggest flock in the area, while a

male at the Edwards Crossroads community in Alleghany Co. on 27 APR provided that county's latest spring record.

Greater Scaup, always a fun bird to find in our area, a lone male was at BASSLAKE on 16-17 MAR, while a large flock of 9 at LANDHARBOR on 31 MAR appears to be a high count for the High Country.



American Wigeon, 4 March, Trout Lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



American Wigeon, 2 April, Trout Lake, Watauga County. Photo by T. McNeil

Common Merganser, several reports along the New River and Little River in Alleghany in April and May, and one report in early May at KERRSCOTT suggest a likely breeding presence in those areas, which has yet to be confirmed.

Red-breasted Merganser, a large flock of 60, carefully counted at KERRSCOTT on 19 MAR, appears to be a high count for county and region, the previous high being 50 at the same location. Several other groups stopped in at area lakes, including 6 at PRICELAKE on 28 MAR, 4 at BOONEFORKLAKE from 29 MAR to 3 APR, 2

at Temple Lake, Alleghany Co, on 13 APR, and a single at LANDHARBOR on 20 APR.

Ruddy Duck, always a good find in the High Country, 4 were reported on 3 MAR at BASSLAKE.

Fowl, Grebe, Doves

Northern Bobwhite, of the 3 reports in the area this spring, one at VALLECRUCIS on 11 MAR was almost certainly a tame released bird, while one singing at Bart Hurley Road in Ashe on 27 MAY, and another at HOLLOWAYMTNRD on 31 MAY, had less certain origin, but also seem likely to be released birds.

Ruffed Grouse, about 14 reports this spring was a good, encouraging number of which the vast majority were from heavily wooded areas surrounding the Blue Ridge Parkway, including Grandfather Mountain, Jeffress Park, and Doughton Park.

Cuckoos, Nightjars, Hummers

Black-billed Cuckoo, a small flurry of reports from 15-17 MAY at GREENWAY, BROOKSHIRE, AND TROUTLAKE, and one at Stack Rock Overlook on the BRP in Avery on 19 May, all appear to have been passing through our area briefly.

Common Nighthawk, not easy to find in spring in our area, 3 birds on 16 MAY were along the Little River in Alleghany Co, one was at Hays in Wilkes Co, on 19 MAY, and 5 were seen at MEATCAMP on 20 MAY.

Chuck-will's-widow, a good count of 6 was made during the Wilkes Co. spring count on 2 May, mostly around KERRSCOTT.

Eastern Whip-poor-will, the first report this year was quite late, on 20 APR on Chelsea Lane in Alleghany Co.

Waders, Shorebirds, Gulls

Virginia Rail, a single bird was noted this spring by multiple observers at GREENWAY on 19 and 20 APR.

Sora, 4 were noted in the region this spring: one at VALLECRUCIS from 22 APR thru 16 MAY, another at GREENWAY from 17 APR thru 18 MAY, a single sighting at BROOKSHIRE on 25



*Sora, 9 May, Mill Pond at Banner Elk, Avery County.
Photo by T. McNeil*



Sora, 9 May, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey

APR, and one at a new location for the species, MILLPOND, on 9 MAY.

Least Sandpiper, they largely bypassed our region this spring, with only one location getting reports, BROOKSHIRE, from 6 to 15 MAY, with a high count of 28 on 10 May, which was our second highest count ever.

American Woodcock, fewer reports than normal came in this spring, all from early to mid March, at NRSP-WAGONER, HOLLOWAYMTNRD, McCrae Meadows in Avery Co, Newland in Avery Co., and PRICELAKE



Least Sandpiper, 21 May, Brookshire Park, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane

Wilson's Snipe, in addition to very regular birds at GREENWAY, VALLECRUCIS, and MILLPOND, a couple migrating birds in weird habitat stood out as unusual: an apparently injured bird at Stoney Fork Overlook on the BRP in Watauga on 18 APR, and a very late sighting, possibly the latest in the region, on 27 MAY on the BRP near Glade Valley in Alleghany Co.



Virginia Rail, 20 April, Clawson-Burnley Park Created Wetland, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane

Spotted Sandpiper, one at NRSP-ALLEGHANYACCESS on 9 APR likely set an early date for the county.

Solitary Sandpiper, one which turned up at BROOKSHIRE on 26 MAR, was our earliest by about a week for county, High Country, and HCAS region. It apparently stuck around for at least 2 weeks.

Greater Yellowlegs, five different occurrences this spring, was a high number for this heretofore rarely reported species. There was a pair at VALLECRUCIS on 20 APR, a group of 4 at a temporary retention pond associated with



Greater Yellowlegs, 25 April, Brookshire Park, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey

new construction at the Watauga Hospital on 21 APR, a single at BROOKSHIRE on 25 and 26 APR, another single on 2 MAY at RIVERSEDGE, and a group of 4 on a sandbar in the river at BROOKSHIRE on 5 MAY.

Willet, only the fourth occurrence of these in the region, and a record high count, was a large group of 18 photographed on a low water bridge near FLEETWOOD, Ashe Co., on 1 May. They were a first record for that county.

Ring-billed Gull, 2 were photographed at FLEETWOOD on 14 MAR, for only the second or third report in Ashe Co., and a group of 5 was seen circling above the Walmart parking lot in Boone on 28 MAR.



Ring-billed Gull, 6 March, W. Kerr-Scott Reservoir, Wilkes County. Photo by R. Gray

Common Loon, it seemed like fewer than usual came thru this spring, with only singles occurring in the High Country, and only two reports of 1 and 2 birds at KERRSCOTT, which can often get sizeable flocks in spring.

Double-crested Cormorant, in addition to scattered reports in the High Country this spring, a nice sized group of 34, quite large for how late in spring, was at CAMPHARRISON on 2 MAY.

Great Blue Heron, a nest colony with a few nests was noted at KERRSCOTT from early to mid spring.

Great Egret, singles were reported at PRICELAKE on 28 MAR, POWDERHORN on 18 APR, KERRSCOTT on 2 MAY, and VALLECAY on 19 MAY.



Great Egret, 19 May, Valle Cay neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey

Raptors & Owls

Turkey Vulture, a very high count, especially for spring, was 79 migrating at GREENWAY on 3 MAR.

Osprey, they seemed very common this spring, appearing early and staying later than normal, and seemed to concentrate in streams with stocked fish.

Northern Harrier, five sightings of migrating birds this spring included three at various times in the Glade Valley area of Alleghany, one at VALLECRUCIS on 21 APR, and another at CAMPHARRISON on 2 MAY.



Bald Eagle, 21 March, Railroad Grade Road, Ashe County. Photo by M. Cutler

Bald Eagle, the eagle nest at RIVERPOINTE was apparently abandoned, but consistent reports from the area suggest a nest relocation. One report of 2 adults “sparring” near Fleetwood in Ashe Co., on 19 MAR could indicate the presence of a nest in that area.

Northern Saw-whet Owl, a tooting bird was reported this spring in late March and again in early May at Sims Creek Overlook on the BRP, Watauga Co., and another report came from near Banner Elk on the Watauga Co. side in early March.

Falcons

American Kestrel, a report of a bird at FIGFARM, which caught a tree swallow and flew off with it on 18 MAY, was quite late and suggests a possible local breeder.

Merlin, although nesting has never been confirmed in North Carolina, a pair of birds were courting and apparently attempting to nest at LEESMCRAE, in the first and second weeks of April. The pair apparently decided to move the nest to a less crowded location, which has not been found. Very late birds were also seen at BROOKSHIRE on 5 MAY, and even later at ASU on 26 MAY, this last date was a pair calling back and forth as if on territory.

Peregrine Falcon, a new nesting site for the species has apparently been established at Brinegar Cabin on the BRP in Wilkes Co, among some fairly extensive cliffs there. The birds were seen several times this year and also last year at

the same site. There also appears to be a nest at their traditional site on Grandfather Mountain above the profile trail near the Avery/Watauga border.

Flycatchers

Alder Flycatcher, one reported at MEATCAMP from 13 to 19 MAY might have been a migrant or two different migrants, as it didn't appear to stay, while a few reports of them near the Appalachian Trail near Yellow Mountain during the same time frame appeared to be breeding birds.

Willow Flycatcher, one at VALLECRUCIS on 21 APR set an early spring mark for the region.

Songbirds

Yellow-throated Vireo, 2 birds at NRSP-WAGONER on 4 APR set an early mark for the region by about a week.

Warbling Vireo, migrating birds were seen at BROOKSHIRE, two birds together on 10 MAY, and a single at TROUTLAKE on 10 MAY, while a late bird likely attempted to set up a nesting territory at VALLECRUCIS from 23 MAY thru the end of the period.

Fish Crow, up to 4 birds were carousing around downtown Boone from 11 MAR thru the end of the period. Secretive nesters, they evaded the notice of birders looking for nesting evidence.



Fish Crow, 13 March, Shops at Shadowline area, Boone, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Common Raven, a nest under the BRP bridge at Goshen Creek, Watauga Co., fledged on 7 APR,

apparently an early fledging mark for the High Country.

Black-capped Chickadee, very puzzling was a bird that showed many field marks of the black-capped and also sang the 2 noted song, at Banner Elk, Avery Co., on 16 MAR. Experts consulted for identification gave conflicting opinions, but the only pictures obtained were quite blurry.

Purple Martin, a group of 6 were together at a Martin house in Alleghany Co., at about 2600 ft elevation, near upper limit for breeding in High Country, on 8 APR. Several reports in late May at VALLECRUCIS indicate likely nesting activity somewhere near there at elevation 2800 ft. Nesting in Watauga Co., has yet to be confirmed.

Barn Swallow, several reports in late March set early marks for Wilkes and Watauga Counties.

Brown Creeper, two found building a nest at GREENWAY on 10 May, at around 3100 feet elevation was fairly low.

Sedge Wren, one was a great find at GREENWAY on 3 MAY.

Marsh Wren, several birds were reported at MEATCAMP, GREENWAY, and VALLECRUCIS from 20 APR thru 21 MAY.



Marsh Wren, 25 April, Clawson-Burnley Park Created Wetland, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Northern Mockingbird, difficult to find during nesting season in Watauga Co., a new probable

nest site was found at the Bojangles on 421 E in Boone on 17 May.

Thrushes and Waxwing

Swainson's Thrush, a secretive, mostly silent spring migrant, single birds found in Ashe, Alleghany, and Avery Counties were good finds for those areas. One in Watauga on 20 May at TROUTLAKE was fairly late.

Finches and Sparrows

American Pipit, appeared to mostly bypass our region this spring, with but a single sighting of a solitary bird at VALLECRUCIS on 26 MAR.



American Pipit, 26 March, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray

Evening Grosbeak, continuing from winter, the large flock of up to 30 birds at Wildcat Road, Watauga Co., stayed until at least 8 MAY.

Purple Finch, 4 at a feeder near Banner Elk, Avery Co., on 20 APR apparently set a late mark for the region, excepting some very late birds in TODD about 20 years ago. A good count of 27 appeared at a feeder in Todd on 11 APR.

Red Crossbill, away from their high altitude stronghold at Grandfather Mountain, a flock of 7 was seen at STONEMOUNTAIN on 3 APR, while a single, heard-only bird was recorded at VALLECAY on 15 APR.

Pine Siskin, a flock of 120 at MULBERRYFIELDS on 11 MAY was a very high count for a migratory flock away from feeders.

Grasshopper Sparrow, a migrant at GREENVALLEY on 23 APR was a good find, while

a pair of birds apparently on territory at LINVILLECREEK on 27 and 28 MAY was very unusual and might represent the only known present nesting territory in Watauga Co.

Fox Sparrow, one found at Wildcat Road, Watauga Co., on 24 APR set a late spring mark for the High Country by over a week.

Blackbirds and Chat

Yellow-breasted Chat, a couple birds that appeared to be on territory late this spring, were at LINVILLECREEK from 6 MAY thru the end of the period, and one was singing along WATAUGARIVERROAD on 28 MAY.

Bobolink, an early mark for the region was set by a bird at BROOKSHIRE on 21 APR, by a few days.

Baltimore Oriole, good finds for Wilkes Co. were two at KERRSCOTT on 2 MAY, and one at Moravian Falls on 6 May.

Rusty Blackbird, were only found in 4 locations in the region this spring: LEESMCRAE, FIGFARM, VALLECRUCIS, AND GREENWAY from 13 MAR thru 7 APR.

Common Grackle, a good high count of 42 birds was at VALLECRUCIS on 17 MAR.

Warblers

Black-and-white Warbler, one seen in the woods near Rutherwood in Watauga Co., on 8 MAR set an early mark for the region by about 3 weeks.

Swainson's Warbler, one at NRSP-ELKSHOALS on 4 MAY was a first report for Ashe Co., and a nice find during migration.

Tennessee Warbler, one reliable report came in this spring of a single bird at WESTWOODHILLS on 9 MAY.

Orange-crowned Warbler, one bird photographed at MEATCAMP on 16 APR provided the only regional record for the season.



Orange-crowned Warbler, 16 April, Meat Camp Environmental Study Area, Boone, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray

Hooded Warbler, a single seen at Chelsea Lane in Alleghany Co. on 13 APR set an early mark for that county by a day.

Northern Parula, several birds came slightly earlier than ever before throughout the region this spring, including one at LEESMCCRAE on 6 APR, which appears to have set a mark for the early regional bird, two widely separate birds on 9 APR at NRSP-WAGONER (Ashe Co.) and Brush Creek in Alleghany Co., and one at NRSP-KINGSCREEK the next day, 10 APR.

Location Key: FIGFARM=Appalachian State University FIG Farm, Watauga; BASSLAKE =Bass Lake, Watauga; BROOKSHIRE =Brookshire Park, Watauga; BRP=Blue Ridge Parkway, all counties; CAMPHARRISON =YMCA Camp Harrison, Wilkes; ELKKNOB=Elk Knob State Park and Elk Knob Gamelands, Watauga; ELKMTNOVERLOOK=Elk Mountain Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway near Deep Gap, border Watauga/Ashe; FLEETWOOD=Fleetwood community, Ashe; GRANDFATHER=Grandfather Mountain Area, Avery/Watauga GREENWAY=Boone Greenway, Watauga; GREENVALLEY=Green Valley Park, Watauga; HOLLOWAYMTNRD =Holloway Mountain Rd by the BRP, Watauga; JEFFRESSPARK=WB Jeffress Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway near Deep Gap, border Ashe/Wilkes/Watauga; KERRSCOTT =Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes; LANDHARBOR=Linville Land Harbor community, Avery; LEESMCRAE=Lees McRae College, Avery; LINVILLECREEK=Linville Creek Overlook near Vilas, Watauga; MEATCAMP= Meatcamp Environmental Study Area off Castleford Rd, Watauga; MULBERRYFIELDS=Yadkin River Greenway at Mulberry Fields, Wilkes; NRSP-ALLEGHANYACCESS=New River State Park-Alleghany Access area, Alleghany; NRSP-ELKSHOALS=New River State Park-Elk Shoals Access, Ashe; NRSP-WAGONER=New River State Park-Wagoner Access, Ashe; POWDERHORN= Powderhorn Community, Watauga; PRICELAKE=Price Lake in Julian Price Park, Watauga; RIVERPOINTE = Riverpointe Community, Watauga; RIVERSEDGE=Lowe's Park at Riversedge, Wilkes; STONE MOUNTAIN=Stone Mountain State Park, Wilkes and Alleghany; TODD=Todd community, Watauga/Ashe border; TROUTLAKE =Trout Lake in Moses Cone Park, Watauga; VALLECAY=Valle Cay community, Watauga; VALLECRUCIS=Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga; WATAUGARIVERROAD=Watauga River Road, Watauga; WESTWOODHILLS=Westwood Hills neighborhood and ponds, Wilkesboro, Wilkes

Black-throated Blue Warbler, one set the early mark for region at KERRSCOTT on 11 APR.

Palm Warbler, seen at PRICELAKE on 13 MAR, it was apparently an early spring mark and a first record for month of March in High Country.

Yellow-throated Warbler, the bird that spent the winter at Moravian Falls stayed until 29 MAR, just earlier than many birds started appearing in their Wilkes County nesting grounds. One at NRSP-WAGONER set an early mark for Ashe Co. on 30 MAR, and one at VALLECRUCIS on 4 APR set an early mark for Watauga Co. by a few days.

Tanager, Grosbeak, Cardinal

Blue Grosbeak, consistent with a suspected expansion of their range into Ashe Co., a couple interesting reports came in, one with a good audio recording on 22 MAY on Liberty Grove Ch. Road, and another on Nettle Knob Rd on 29 May, but this latter unfortunately without any documentation.

High Country Hoots Submission Guidelines

For the next issue (June to September), please have all material to the editor by October 15, 2021. 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 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. PLEASE do not embed your photos in an MSWord document!

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 JUN 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! Owlhooter@aol.com

Your feedback is welcome too!

Steve Dowlan, Editor, High Country Hoots



High Country Audubon Society

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

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Visit our website for more information about HCAS and birding in the High Country. Group email members receive the newsletter via electronic mail. A link on the homepage has instructions for joining our group email and for archived newsletters.

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