

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

High Country Audubon Society

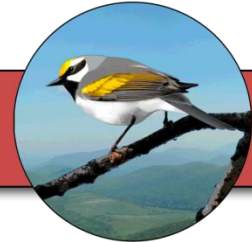


Serving Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties

Volume 12 – Issue 2

August 2020 to October 2020

President's Message



Dear Fellow Birders,

Hello everyone, I hope that you've all been able to bird individually during these difficult times. We've had some wonderful birds show up in our High Country area, so at least we've had some source of cheer! AudubonNC continues to have guidelines limiting the number of birders that can congregate outdoors to 25, and we are abiding by those guidelines.

I'd like to welcome three new people to the HCAS board. Tonya Lee has assumed the membership committee chair duties, and Katie Griffith and Gina Diggs are new at-large members. We're very excited to have all three because of their enthusiasm and motivation in regards to both conservation and birding. Katie and Christina are working on a proposal to help HCAS become more racially and age diversified, and Gina would like to help Curtis with the IBA adoption activities.

HCAS continues to work on various projects, such as the benches at Brookshire Park, and signage at Foscoe Wetlands. Our Burke grant work focused on the town property opposite Brookshire Park is on hold, pending progress by the Town of Boone. We have additionally asked Watauga County to limit mowing along the Greenway at Brookshire to two feet on either side to hopefully preserve more pollinator plants and ground-level bird nests. At Green Valley Park, we're working on installing an additional bench along the field birding loop.

Finally, the board constantly strives to match our activities with what our members would like to see. In this endeavor, we have realized that our monthly meetings are very poorly attended, and have heard from numerous members that they would prefer evening bird walks on the third Tuesday of each month as opposed to indoor presentations. The board has thus voted to conduct third Tuesday evening bird walks the remainder of the season at the Boone Greenway. Of course, these will be limited to 25 people with social distancing. We can always have a special meeting presentation should the need arise. The board also voted to have three special events each year: a kick-off event each spring, the annual meeting, and the Sue Wells recipient's presentation of research. During the winter, the board believes it would be great fun and would help keep us all engaged to host zoom meetings featuring birding trip photos. I hope that all of you will agree that this new format will be more rewarding and fun. That's all the news for now. Stay safe and enjoy our birds!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'All State'.

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

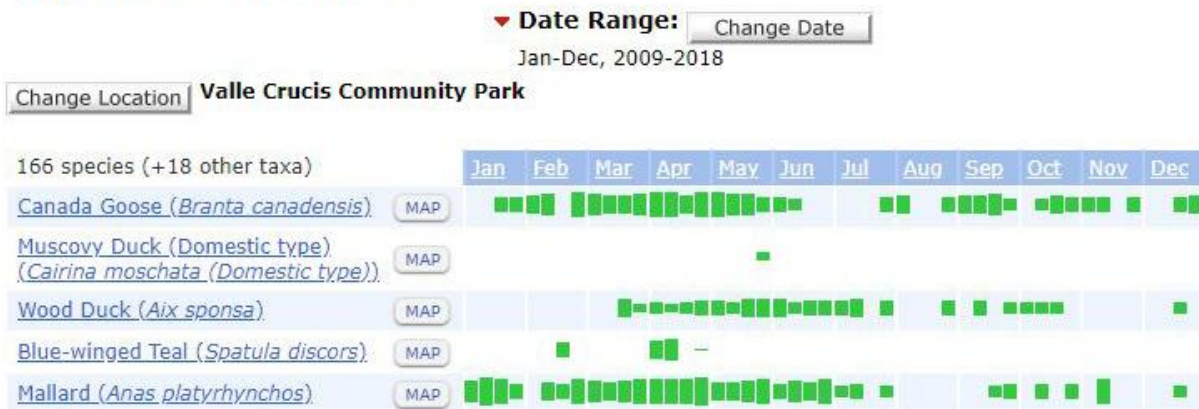


Observations entered into eBird range from a single species that was observed while mowing the lawn to extensive lists with photo and sound recordings made while birding all day. eBird encourages a broad range of observation types, and makes data entry easy. Some beginning birders are reluctant to enter 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!

The Cornell Lab
of Ornithology

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/>



New Members

Katie Griffith - Todd, NC

Paul Laurent family - Banner Elk

Michelle Leonard family - Bethania, NC

Adrianna Nelson - Bristol, TN

Donations

General Fund:

Gina Diggs

Laura England

Michelle Leonard

Conservation/Education:

Robin Diaz

Adrianna Nelson

Tonya Lee

Gina Diggs

Sue Wells Research Grant:

Bob Cherry

Young Birders Scholarship :

Gina Diggs

Tonya Lee

Gordon Warburton



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.

This spring was a thrilling one for birders as many unusual species stopped in and were seen. A regional push of migrating shorebirds was apparently stalled in the area by a fairly strong late-season cold front, which luckily coincided with our spring count. The newly restored floodplain at Brookshire Park created quite a bit of good habitat for shorebirds with very shallow water and lots of muddy flats, which persisted through much of the spring. And the precautions associated with the pandemic likely cause many birders to spend more time birding alone, which seemed to increase coverage of the area in total. Also, a slew of our returning warblers set early date records, for both the individual counties and the 5-county region as a whole. One of the most exciting finds ever for our area was the ultra-rare Kirtland's Warbler, which spent a day at Meat Camp in Watauga County, was well documented with pictures and recordings, and appears to be the first ever singing bird found in the entire state of NC. ((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.))



Yellow-billed Cuckoo, 23 May 2020, Old Hampton Rd., Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray



Yellow-billed Cuckoo, 21 May 2020, Stony Fork area, Deep Gap, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson

Notable sightings in five-county area for March, April and May, 2020

Look for additional photos of noteworthy species in sections entitled Brookshire Park, Rivers, Lakes and Ponds, Clawson-Burnley Park Wetlands, and Warblers!

Blue-winged Teal - There was a consistent push of these ducks through the area this spring, from 21 MAR to 16 MAY, with highest counts of 21 at PRICELAKE on 27 MAR and 13 at WATAUGARIVERROAD on 9 APR

Gadwall - A single bird was at BASSLAKE 15 and 16 MAR

Northern Shoveler - A pair were seen and photographed at Mill Pond in Banner Elk on 30 MAR, one of a very few reports for Avery Co. Two more pairs were also found this spring, one at VALLECAY on 1 APR and another at ROARINGRIVER on 28 APR, which was only 2 days shy of the record late date for the region.



Northern Shoveler, 1 April 2020, Valle Cay neighborhood - Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey

American Wigeon - Always a good find in the high country, one was at PRICELAKE on 27 MAR.



American Wigeon, 27 March 2020, Price Lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Lesser Scaup - Dribbling through the area in mostly small flocks from 9 MAR to 13 APR this year, notable was a massive flock of 130 at PRICELAKE on 15 MAR. This was likely a high count ever for the region. A resident bird at Church Hollow Pond, Watauga Co., continued its years-long stay thru the period.

Ring-necked Duck - A very large flock of 75 was at BASSLAKE on 9 MAR, otherwise there were several small to medium size flocks from 9 MAR to 15 APR.

Ruddy Duck - Singles were noted at PRICELAKE on 27 MAR and BASSLAKE on 13 APR, while a notable flock of 26 were at KERRSCOTT on 15 APR.

Red-breasted Merganser - Several mostly mid-sized flocks came through from 15 MAR to 4 MAY, the largest being a mob of 47 at PRICELAKE on 25 MAR. This set a record high-count for the county and was just a few short of the regional high.



Red-breasted Merganser, 25 March 2020, Price Lake, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane

Common Merganser - Up until a few years ago these birds were very difficult to find in the high country, but surrounding areas have experienced an increase in populations as the ducks have expanded their breeding range. Up to 5 birds were seen at WATAUGARIVERROAD from 15 MAR to 5 APR, but more evidence of

nesting is needed. On the Little River near Ennice in Alleghany Co, a flock of 10 was seen in early spring and a pair on 19 MAY, suggesting possible breeding. And the best evidence yet for nesting in our area was a report from NRSP-ALLEGHANYACCESS of a female flying to a cavity in a sycamore tree and entering it on 17 MAY.

Hooded Merganser - One at PRICELAKE on 11 May was slightly late.

Northern Bobwhite - Calling birds were heard several times in MAY at Chestnut Knob in Watauga Co. It seems likely that these birds are domestic or introduced but evidence of wild populations should be gathered when possible.

Ruffed Grouse - 20 years ago it was a common experience to hear the males “drumming” or “booming” in the spring as they advertised their territory, but it is quite rare to hear one in 2020. A pleasant surprise, therefore, was one drumming in response to clapping at swarms of midges at Mt. Jefferson OVERLOOK on the BRP, Ashe Co., on 29 MAR. 3 more reports, all from Ashe Co. were made this spring—singles at Phillips Gap Road on 9 APR and Bald Fork Road on 14 APR, and 2 birds at PONDMTN on 28 MAY.

Pied-billed Grebe - One was seen at an unusual location at WATAUGARIVERROAD on 19 MAR, while one at PRICELAKE on 11 MAY was slightly late.

Horned Grebe - Good finds were singles at VALLECAY on 23 MAR and WATAUGARIVERROAD on 1 APR. More expected was a group of five at KERRSCOTT on 27 MAR.

Eurasian Collared-Dove - While there is an established population in Wilkes Co., only the second ever report for the High Country was made at MEATCAMP - a single bird on 22 MAY.

Black-billed Cuckoo - Known to prefer very dense scrubby habitat, two occurring at HICKNOLL in fairly open woods were a real surprise on 25 MAY. Other reports were at RIVERSEDGE on 26 APR, first in Wilkes Co. for over 40 years, a heard-only bird at BROOKSHIRE on 11 MAY, one with blurry but diagnostic

pictures at GREENWAY on 16 MAY, and one at PONDMTN on 28 MAY.

Eastern Whip-poor-will - A singing bird on 28 MAR at DOCPRUITTHOMEPLACE set an early mark for Wilkes Co. by a single day, but was 2 weeks later than the incredibly early report from 15 MAR 2016 at Holloway Mtn. Road in Watauga Co.

Chuck-will's-widow - On the Wilkes Co. spring count on 28 APR 2 different pairs of 2 singing birds were heard at DOCPRUITTHOMEPLACE and KERRSCOTT. One of the birds from DOCPRUITTHOMEPLACE remained throughout the period, but surveying efforts for night birds are probably too meager to establish their true density in the upper foothills area.

Sora - One or two birds were seen at GREENWAY from 1 thru 3 MAY.

Virginia Rail - One of these normally shy birds was seen extremely well at close range in the open by many very happy observers at GREENWAY from 30 APR thru 11 MAY. Although there is only one previous eBird report for this species in our region, there are several records and reports as listed in my county databases, mostly from the early 2000s at MEATCAMP.

Common Gallinule - One seen at YMCACAMPHARRISON on 28 APR was the first report in our region in over 40 years.

Semipalmated Plover - Another very noteworthy event was likely 7 different occurrences for the species:- 5 different waves of birds at BROOKSHIRE between 22 APR and 26 MAY with a peak count of 11 on 11 MAY; also up to 3 at BASSLAKE on 11-12 MAY and 1 at trout on 19 MAY. Before this spring there were less than 10 occurrences overall for the region.

American Woodcock - There were just a few reports of displaying birds in early spring this year spread across the region, and one much later report of a bird flushed from the trail near ELKMTNOVERLOOK on 28 MAY. Also, a bird near TODD was reported to have kept displaying through the second week of May, very late for the species in this area.

Solitary Sandpiper and Spotted Sandpiper -

These two species were almost ridiculously easy to find this spring anywhere there was water but especially at wetlands and shallows. There were literally several dozen reports of each and they were especially common at BROOKSHIRE. High counts were 16 solitaires at BROOKSHIRE on 28 APR, and 14 Spotties at KERRSCOTT on 15 APR.

Lesser Yellowlegs - Up until 2015 there were a total of 6 separate reports for the species in Watauga Co. This spring there were several - likely 4 distinct waves - of birds stopping in at BROOKSHIRE between 23 APR and 6 MAY, with a high count of 5 birds on 26 APR. There was a similar event in 1978 during a drawdown of Price Lake for maintenance, with multiple waves of birds and a high count of 8. Also, 2 were at RIVERSEDGE on 13 APR, and 1 at KERRSCOTT on 26-28 APR.

Greater Yellowlegs - Drawn to the flats and shallows at BROOKSHIRE this spring were 5 separate occurrences of this species from 21 APR to 20 MAY, with a high count of 11 on 26 APR, which sets a record for the entire region. Again, prior to this year there were only a handful of separate occurrences.

Least Sandpiper - Also at BROOKSHIRE were about 10 different waves of these cute peeps from 24 APR to 23 MAY, with high counts of 41(!) on 3 MAY - 11 on 26 APR - and 9 on 13 MAY. Also reported were 5 at VALLECAY on 3 MAY, 3 at BASSLAKE on 11 and 12 MAY, and 1 at MEATCAMP on 13 MAY. The count of 41 appears to be a record for the region, though 40+ were noted during the drawdown at PRICELAKE in 1978.

Pectoral Sandpiper - A single bird noted at BROOKSHIRE on 24 and 25 APR was a great find.

Semipalmated Sandpiper - Another rather extraordinary find at BROOKSHIRE was a group of up to 8 (record high for the region) on 21-23 MAY. There are less than 10 records overall for the entire region.

Short-billed Dowitcher - One at BASSLAKE on 11 MAY was only the second county report - the first in over 40 years, and third report for the region.

Willet - Part of a larger wave of birds stopping in the western NC mountains on 26 APR were 5 seen at WATAUGARIVERROAD and 2 at KERRSCOTT. These represented a first record for Watauga Co., a second record for Wilkes Co., and only the second and third records for the region.

Bonaparte's Gull - 3 rather large flocks stopped in at KERRSCOTT on 25 and 27 MAR, and 15 APR. The 55 birds on 15 APR were a high count for the region.

Caspian Tern - Among only a handful of reports for our region were our early and high count records at KERRSCOTT. One on 27 MAR was very early, while 3 on 26 APR was a high count.



Caspian Tern, 26 April 2020, Bandit's Roost Campground, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane

Forster's Tern - Only found every few years in the region, one was exciting at KERRSCOTT on 15 APR.

Common Loon - There were about 13 reports on area lakes from 25 MAR to 28 APR, and a very late bird showed up at LANDHARBOR on 28 MAY, staying through the period and into summer.

Double-crested Cormorant - There were several reports on area lakes, including PRICELAKE, KERRSCOTT, LANDHARBOR, and TROUT from 27 MAR thru 11 MAY, and a slightly unusual report

on the Watauga River at WATAUGARIVERROAD on 28 MAR. Flyovers were 1 at ELKMTNOVERLOOK on 15 MAY and 6 at BROOKSHIRE on 2 MAY.



Double-crested Cormorant, 26 April 2020, Bandit's Roost Campground, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane

Great Egret - Only one was noted in the region this spring, at Traphill in Wilkes Co on 28 APR.

Cattle Egret - Only the second record ever for our region, both from Wilkes Co. was this exciting sighting at ROARINGRIVER on 3 MAY.

Green Heron - One at GREENWAY on 7 APR set an early date for the county and high country by about a week, and the region by a day.

Bald Eagle - The nest at Riverpoint development in Watauga Co. was occupied again this year and the pair produced at least 2 fledglings.

Broad-winged Hawk - One at POWDERHORN on 29 MAR was very early, and was just the first of several early returning birds.

Northern Harrier - a single bird coursing above MULBERRYFIELDS on 26 APR was fairly late.

Great Horned Owl - A pair was heard several times at VALLECAY beginning in early APR and lasting through the end of the period, while a single was heard twice in late spring near Todd.

Northern Saw-whet Owl - A single singing bird noted near Simms Creek Overlook on the BRP, Watauga Co., on 28 APR, as well as 17 and 30 MAY likely was on territory in that area.

Red-headed Woodpecker - A single bird was photographed at VALLECAY on 1 May.



Red-headed Woodpecker, 1 May, Valle Cay neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey

American Kestrel - Singles at WATAUGARIVERROAD on 1 MAR, and at TODD on 9 MAR were likely wintering birds still lingering. On the other hand, birds were likely nesting near TODD on 11 MAY, at Piney Creek in Alleghany Co. on 23 MAY and at Fender Rd. in Alleghany Co. on 25 MAY.

Merlin - Singles of this spine-tingling bird were reported, both on 15 APR, at GREENWAY and KERRSCOTT.

Peregrine Falcon - In addition to breeding birds expected at the rocky outcrops near Grandfather and Linville Gorge was an intriguing find at NRSP-ALLEGHANYACCESS of a single bird frequenting a ledge in a tall cliff near a raven nest. The bird was noted at the ledge on several occasions from 17 MAY through the end of the period, but no further evidence of nesting was found.

Great Crested Flycatcher - The breeding status of this species is a real mystery in our area; we get several reports most years in the late spring in the high country, but they don't seem to persist in any one location through the breeding season. This year there were 6 reports scattered through the high country from 26 APR thru 30 MAY, mostly in river bottom areas, but again the birds appeared to vacate and not breed.



Great-crested Flycatcher, 30 May 2020 - Dunson yard on Chestnut Knob Rd., Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson

Olive-sided Flycatcher - Always unexpected in our area, one was a nice surprise at Linville River Picnic Area along the BRP, Avery Co. on 24 MAY.

Alder Flycatcher - This species, which in recent years has likely bred at MEATCAMP and BROOKSHIRE was fairly inconspicuous this spring - with just a few scattered and unsustained reports of heard-only birds at BROOKSHIRE, GREENWAY and NRSP-ALLEGHANYACCESS

Tree Swallow - Our earliest return this year was found at Watauga High School on 5 MAR, a week or 2 later than previous early dates.

Marsh Wren - A bird at GREENWAY from 29 APR thru 11 MAY, and one at GREENVALLEY on 11 MAY livened up our wetlands.

Sedge Wren - A single in upland habitat at LINVILLECREEK on 11 MAY was a nice surprise.

Chickadee sp. - A single bird was reported several times this spring from GRANDFATHER as a Black-capped on eBird. Due to the possible intergrades, large variability within species, and cross-learning of the other species' song by each, any sighting of purported Black-capped's in our area should be exhaustively documented with recordings and pictures.



Brown-headed Nuthatch, New River Heights Rd neighborhood, Boone, Watauga County. Photo by P. Geiger



Brown-headed Nuthatch, New River Heights Rd neighborhood, Boone, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Brown-headed Nuthatch - Our first well-documented record for the high country was obtained in a neighborhood near GREENWAY on 26 and 27 MAY, as a single bird was seen and photographed, a real surprise for birders in the area.

Brown Thrasher - One near TODD on 13 MAR was slightly early.

Northern Mockingbird—Difficult to find in late spring and summer in our area, they were reported at several mostly river bottom locations in May, including Deep Gap, Boone Golf Course, Todd, Stratford Road in Alleghany Co., and NRSP-ALLEGHANYACCESS.

Fish Crow - The first well-documented instance of this species in the High Country was reported on 4 APR at VALLECAY, with a very good recording of what are almost certainly fish crows. Their almost identical resemblance to American Crows, and the fact that the American Crow females and young make sounds almost indistinguishable from the Fish Crows, make ID

very difficult - which calls for great caution in reporting anywhere in the High Country.

Common Raven - Known to breed fairly commonly in the High Country, the species is extending its breeding range to the lower elevations in the piedmont all over the southeast and our local evidence of that trend included a family group of up to 5 with 3 recently fledged young at KERRSCOTT in late April near a large nest where they likely raised the brood.

Wood Thrush - Slightly early was a singing bird at DOCPRUITTHOMEPLACE on 29 and 29 MAR.

Swainson's Thrush - One at DOCPRUITTHOMEPLACE on 4MAY set an early spring date for Wilkes Co. Surprisingly rare in Ashe Co. in spring with only a few reports, one was heard at Fleetwood on 9 MAY.

Gray-cheeked Thrush - Never easy to find in our region, singles were at PRICELAKE on 4 MAY and WESTWOODHILLS on 8 MAY.

Hermit Thrush - Suspected of breeding at ELKKNOB a few years ago but then becoming more difficult to find, they were again found more commonly this spring and thru the end of the period there.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet - One at DOCPRUITTHOMEPLACE on 8 MAY set a late date for Wilkes Co., but only by a single day.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher - One at DOCPRUITTHOMEPLACE on 31 MAR set an early arrival date for Wilkes by a single day.

American Pipit - Never an easy bird to find in our area, several birders were treated to very close looks at BROOKSHIRE on 2 MAY.

Pine Siskin - A bird that can be annoyingly numerous during irruption years, they were only conspicuous by their absence this spring, with the only two reports other than of birds in known breeding territories along Meat Camp Road in Watauga Co. on 26 APR and 15 MAY.

Fox Sparrow - Unusually hard to find this spring, a pair was at BROOKSHIRE on 7 MAR, and singles were seen at POWDERHORN on 16 MAR and GREENWAY on 3 APR.

White-crowned Sparrow - in some springs these can be fairly easy to find. Not so this year even in their traditional stronghold in the ag lands of Wilkes Co., where only 2 reports were submitted. Other than that only two birds were found, one at BROOKSHIRE on 21 APR and again on 9 MAY, and another from 18 to 24 APR at LINVILLECREEK.



Fox Sparrow, 3 April 2020, Clawson-Burnley Park, Boone, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



White-crowned Sparrow, 18 April 2020, Linville Creek Crossing neighborhood, Vilas, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



White-crowned Sparrow, 9 May 2020, Brookshire Park, Boone, Watauga County. Photo by P. Geiger

Savannah Sparrow - Of the few reports in our region this spring the most notable was a large mob counted at 45 individuals at RIVERSEDGE on 26 APR, which easily set a mark for high numbers in the region. Breeding was again highly suspected as 4 individuals were observed at OSEEROAD on 25 MAY.

Vesper Sparrow - In addition to reports of birds at their well-known breeding territories at PONDMTN and ELKKNOB, a new possible breeding area was found with a pair of birds on 10 MAY at CHAPPELL. A good early find was a single migrating bird at MULBERRYFIELDS on 11 MAR.



Vesper Sparrow, 11 March 2020, Mulberry Fields, Wilkesboro, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane



Vesper Sparrow, 10 May 2020, Chappell Farm Rd., Banner Elk, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

White-throated Sparrow - A very late bird was at GRANDFATHER on 21 MAY. This is probably the late spring record for the region, discounting a single summer report many years ago.

Grasshopper Sparrow - Aside from several reports in their well-known breeding ranges in the agricultural grasslands of Wilkes and Alleghany counties, a couple reports of obvious

migrants stood out at BROOKSHIRE on 25 APR and RIVERSEDGE on 26 APR.



Grasshopper Sparrow, 30 May 2020, Osee Rd. Sparta, Allegany County. Photo by R. Gray

Lincoln's Sparrow, Quite unexpected was a well-documented, with pictures and full description, single at WATAUGARIVERROAD on 9 MAY. Although the species is much more common passing through in the fall, there are only a total of 3 spring reports in our entire region, the other 2 without any documentation.



Lincoln's Sparrow, 9 May 2020, Watauga River Rd. at Long Ridge Rd., Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey

Yellow-breasted Chat - A difficult bird to find in the high country, one was enjoyed by many observers at ELKMTNOVERLOOK from 3-17 MAY, and in Ashe Co. one was noted near Todd on 11 MAY and another at Bald Fork Rd. on 16 MAY. As usual, several were found in their stronghold of regenerating logging cuts in Wilkes Co.



Yellow-breasted Chat, 10 May 2020, Elk Mountain Overlook, Blue Ridge Parkway, Watauga County. Photo by P. Geiger

Red-winged Blackbird - A count of 90 on 2 MAR at LINVILLECREEK was quite high.



Bobolink, 23 May, Boone's Trace Overlook, BRP, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray

Bobolink - In migration often noted for separate-sex flocks, a large mixed flock of 30 or more birds was quite interesting at Memorial Park in Wilkes Co. on 6-7 MAY. A pair of singing birds was also noted in far eastern Wilkes at Union Baptist Church on 10 MAY, all the more notable because there are only a handful of reports all time for the county. The birds returned to their traditional nesting grounds at MTVERNON, with a high of 20 reported on 20 MAY and a few birds reported at CHAPPELL. Also noted were several small flocks during MAY within close proximity to the MTVERNON flock. Up to 8 birds were reported at OSEEROAD in late MAY.

Worm-eating Warbler - One at JEFFRESSPARK set an early date for the region on 8 APR.

Louisiana Waterthrush - One at Stone Mtn State Park ON 22 MAR set an early date for the Wilkes Co.

Northern Waterthrush - 2 birds found in Wilkes on 28 APR were highly notable for that county as there are very few previous reports there. One was at YMCACAMP and another at RIVERSEDGE. In the high country, where they are found more frequently, one was at MEATCAMP from 29 APR thru 15 MAY, one was at BROOKSHIRE on 9 MAY and one at GREENWAY on 20 MAY.

Golden-winged Warbler - A likely migrant stopped in at ECHOVALLEY on 13 MAY, while a good count of 5 in their traditional breeding site at ELKKNOB was made on 24 MAY.

Black-and-white Warbler - Birds seen and heard in Deep Gap, Watauga Co. near the BRP on 28 and 29 MAR beat the previous early date for the region of 3/30. One at LEWISFORKOVERLOOK on 9 APR set an early date for Ashe Co.

Swainson's Warbler - Continuing the trend of increased breeding area, several were found this year probably on territory near Blowing Rock and Linville.

Tennessee Warbler - Very difficult to find in spring in our area, there were 3 separate reports—at MTVERNON on 9 MAY, at WESTWOODHILLS on 9-10 MAY, and LEWISFORKOVERLOOK on 17 MAY.

Hooded Warbler - An early date was set for Wilkes Co. by one reported at JEFFRESSPARK on 13 APR.

Kirtland's Warbler - The first ever report for our region, and also the first ever report of a singing bird in NC was this well-documented bird at MEATCAMP on 13 MAY, with pictures and sound recordings obtained. Thrilling to have one of the rarest species of warbler in the US spend some time in our area!

Cape May Warbler - Four separate occurrences of this bird, somewhat hard to find in spring were documented from 1 to 13 MAY in Watauga and Wilkes counties.

Cerulean Warbler - Our local breeding site at LEWISFORKOVERLOOK seems to have gone

silent, as many attempts to find these birds failed this spring. Only a single report was made from that area on 19 APR at JEFFRESSPARK by an unknown birder.

Northern Parula - A bird at POWDERHORN on 5 APR set an early date for the region and Watauga Co., while two in Wilkes on APR 8 at JEFFRESSPARK and KERRSCOTT set an early date for that county.

Magnolia Warbler - Only a few migrants were found this spring: on 3 MAY at Linn Cove Viaduct in Avery Co.; on 8-9 MAY at WESTWOODHILLS; 2 on 9 MAY along the BRP in Alleghany Co.; on 10 MAY near Todd;- and on 12 MAY at PRICELAKE. Later in MAY, likely breeding birds were found at the Daniel Boone Scout Trail (2) on 22 MAY and Beacon Heights Overlook on the BRP, Avery Co. on 24 MAY.

Bay-breasted Warbler - Very difficult to find in the region during spring with just a couple previous reports, they were nevertheless well represented this year, starting with one at VALLECAY on 5 MAY, two at WESTWOODHILLS on 8-9 MAY, one at Chelsea Rd. in Alleghany Co. on 8 MAY, and one at the Mill Pond in Banner Elk, Avery Co. on 10 MAY.

Blackburnian Warbler - Aside from their known breeding sites near ELKMTNOVERLOOK and the Blowing Rock area, they were found at three spots in the region this spring at Chelsea Lane near the BRP in Alleghany Co., on 26 APR and again on 10 MAY, at ROARINGRIVER on 22 APR, and near TODD in Ashe Co. on 9 MAY

Black-throated Blue Warbler - One at LEWISFORKOVERLOOK on 9 APR set an early date for Ashe Co.

Yellow-throated Warbler - One reported near Crumpler in Ashe Co. on 11 APR could easily have been a breeding bird as the habitat is right at lower elevations in the floodplain of the New River. It also set an early date for that county.

Black-throated Green Warbler - Early dates were set for the region and for Watauga, Wilkes, and Alleghany counties as the birds returned earlier than ever this spring, a possible sign of

climate change. 2 birds at POWDERHORN on 25 March were our all-time earliest for the region and Watauga Co., while one at DOCPRUITTHOMEPLACE on 3/28 set the Wilkes Co. early record, and one along the BRP near Ennice in Alleghany Co. on 27 MAR set the early date there.

Summer Tanager - An adult male on 22 MAY at NRSP-ALLEGHANYACCESS - well documented with pictures and recordings of its song and calls - was a real surprise and raised lots of questions, as eBird's frequency animations show that almost all Summer Tanager seasonal movement is finished weeks before that date. The species is not known to breed in the High Country but could there be an exception along the lowest elevations of the New River floodplain? Several birding trips which followed failed to relocate the bird.



Summer Tanager, 22 May 2020, New River State Park – Alleghany Access, Alleghany County. Photo by G. McGrane

Grosbeak sp. (Pheucticus) - An intriguing find was a Pheucticus Grosbeak at Kellwood, Watauga Co. in early May, of which the observer described "There were definitely NO STREAKS on the breast of the bird I saw, just the pale orange wash on the breast." If true then a Black-headed Grosbeak would be a possibility. There is already one photograph record for Watauga Co., so this would not be unprecedented. Unfortunately, repeated attempts to photograph and further document the bird failed. Any such grosbeak should be reported to the listserv eBird or our rare bird alert text system ASAP.



Blue Grosbeak, 26 April, W. Kerr Scott Res. Dam area, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane

Blue Grosbeak - Unusual for Watauga Co., but occurring at its lowest elevations near Stony Fork, and so not unexpected was a pair apparently on territory on 9 MAY during the spring count and relocated later on 18 MAY. The habitat is very open with lots of fields and grazing, which is quite suitable for the species, and the elevation is about 2300 ft, even lower than some of the places where the species has apparently bred along the New River in Alleghany. This spring there were three reports of the species from such sites in Alleghany Co - between 2600 and 2800 feet in elevation.

Dickcissel - One seen and heard at Union Baptist Church in far eastern Wilkes Co. on 10 MAY was the first ever report for that county and one of only a handful of reports for our region. Later attempts to re-find the bird and establish whether it was breeding failed, so it

appears to have been a migrant. Another intriguing report was a heard-only bird at OSEEROAD on 24 MAY which responded to playback but never came out. That would be a first for Alleghany Co. and would appear to be well within breeding season - but later attempts to re-find the bird failed.



Blue Grosbeak (pair), 18 May 2020, Stony Fork Church, Deep Gap, Watauga County. Photos by S. Dowlan

Location Key for this reporting period:

ASUFARM=Appalachian State University Farm - Watauga; BASSLAKE =Bass Lake - Watauga;
BROOKSHIRE =Brookshire Park - Watauga; BRP=Blue Ridge Parkway - all counties;
CHAPPELL=Chappell Farms Road area near Banner Elk - Watauga; CHETOLA=Chetola development -
Watauga; DOCPRUITTHOMEPLACE=Doc Pruitt Homeplace on Browntown Road - Wilkes;
ECHOVALLEY=Echo Valley Farm - Watauga; ELKKNOB=Elk Knob State Park and Elk Knob Game Lands -
Watauga; ELKMTNOVERLOOK=Elk Mountain Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway near Deep Gap -
border Watauga/Ashe; GRANDFATHER=Grandfather Mountain Area - Avery/Watauga
GREENWAY=Boone Greenway - Watauga; HICKNOLL=Hickory Knoll Rd in Deep Gap - Watauga;
JEFFRESSPARK=WB Jeffress Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway near Deep Gap - border
Ashe/Wilkes/Watauga; KERRSCOTT =Kerr Scott Reservoir - Wilkes; LEESMCRAE=Lees McRae College -
Avery; LEWISFORKOVERLOOK= Lewis Fork Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway - border Ashe/Wilkes;
LINVILLECREEK=Linville Creek Overlook near Vilas - Watauga; MEATCAMP=Meatcamp Environmental
Study Area off Castleford Rd - Watauga; MTVERNON=Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in Bamboo area -
Watauga; MULBERRYFIELDS=Yadkin River Greenway at Mulberry Fields - Wilkes; NRSP-
ALLEGHANYACCESS=New River State Park-Alleghany Access area - Alleghany; OSEEROAD=Osee Road
area - Alleghany; PONDMTN=Pond Mountain Gamelands - Ashe; POWDERHORN=Powderhorn
Community - Watauga; PRICELAKE=Price Lake in Julian Price Park - Watauga; RIVERSEDGE=Lowe's
Park at Riversedge - Wilkes; ROARINGRIVER=Roaring River community - Wilkes; TODD=Todd
community - Watauga/Ashe border; TROUTLAKE =Trout Lake in Mose Cone Park - Watauga;
VALLECAY=Valle Cay community - Watauga; VALLECRUCIS=Valle Crucis Community Park - Watauga;
WESTWOODHILLS=Westwood Hills neighborhood and ponds - Wilkesboro - Wilkes



Killdeer (juvenile), 25 April, Laurel Springs Baptist Church, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Ruby-throated Hummingbird, 9 May 2020, Dunson yard at Chestnut Knob Rd., Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson



Killdeer, 26 April Watauga River Rd., Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Brown Creeper, 1 March, Valle Cay neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey

BROOKSHIRE PARK



Newly created wetland habitat at Brookshire Park on 21 May 2020. Photo by B. Dunson.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS



Photo by R. Gray, 26 April



Photo by S. Dowlan, 23 April



Photo by B. Dunson, 23 April

GREATER YELLOWLEGS



Photo by S. Dowlan, 24 April



Photo by B. Dunson, 24 April

LEAST SANDPIPER



Photo by S. Dowlan, 26 April



Photo by M. Ramey, 3 May



Photo by R. Gray, 28 April

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER



Photo by S. McNair, 21 May



Photo by R. Gray, 23 May



Photo by S. Dowlan, 23 May

PECTORAL SANDPIPER



Photo by G. Rhyne, 25 April



Photo by S. Dowlan, 25 April

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER



Photo by S. Dowlan, 11 May



Photo by B. Dunson, 26 May



Photo by R. Gray, 26 April

SOLITARY SANDPIPER



Photo by P. Geiger, 9 May

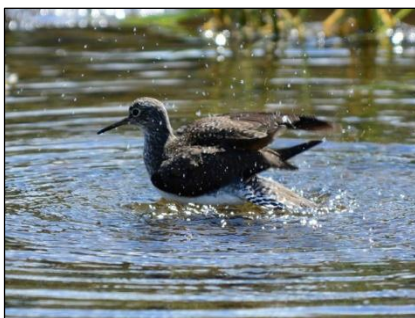


Photo by S. Dowlan, 11 May



Photo by B. Dunson, 23 April

SOLITARY SANDPIPER



Photo by R. Gray, 2 May



Photo by S. Powell, 4 May

SPOTTED SANDPIPER AND KILLDEER



Spotted Sandpiper, 23 April. Photo by B. Dunson



Killdeer, 9 May. Photo by P. Geiger

AMERICAN PIPIT



Photo by R. Gray, 2 May



Photo by b. Dunson, 2 May

RIVERS, LAKES AND PONDS



Five Willets were found along the Watauga River just upstream from the Rominger Road bridge on 26 April 2020. These "Western" Willets are a subspecies that breeds in the western U.S. and winters mainly on the Pacific Coast. Some winter on the Atlantic coast southwards from the southern United States. These Willets, present for just a day represent a first Watauga County record. Photo by M. Ramey



Western Willet. Photo by S. Dowlan



Western Willet. Photo by M. Ramey



Western Willet. Photo by B. Dunson



This Short-billed Dowitcher was found on the shore of the island at Bass Lake on 11 May 2020. It was present for just one day, and represents just the second Watauga County record for the species. Photos by G. McGrane

RIVERS, LAKES and PONDS



Least Sandpiper, 11 May, Bass Lake, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane



Horned Grebe, 23 March, Valle Cay neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey



Semipalmated Plover, 11 May, Bass Lake, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane



Horned Grebe, 23 March, Valle Cay neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Common Loon, 3 April, Price Lake, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray



Common Merganser, 22 March, Watauga River below Valle Crucis, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey



Common Merganser, 22 March, Watauga River near Tom Ward Rd, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Common Merganser, 28 March, Watauga River near the Rominger Rd. bridge, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Pied-billed Grebe, 25 March, Watauga River Mill Pond, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Common Loon, 27 March, Bass Lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Common Loon, 25 March, Price Lake, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane

RIVERS, LAKES and PONDS



Willet, 26 April, Bandit's Roost Campground, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane



Lesser Yellowlegs, 15 April, W. Kerr Scott Res. Dam, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane



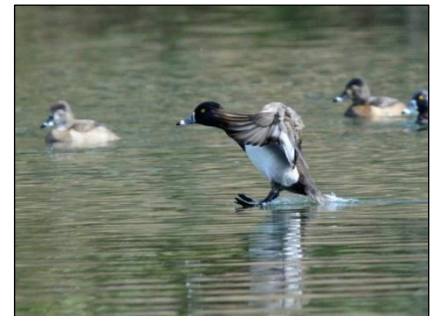
Greater Yellowlegs, 28 April, Marley's Ford, Yadkin River, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane



Lesser Scaup with Ring-necked Ducks, Valle Cay neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey



Bufflehead, 9 March 2020, Newland area, Avery County. Photo by J. Sawyer



Ring-necked Duck, 9 March 2020, Bass Lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

CLAWSON-BURNLEY PARK WETLANDS



Marsh Wren, 30 April. Photo by S. Dowlan



Spotted Sandpiper, 30 April. Photo by S. Dowlan



Virginia Rail, 4 May. Photo by R. Gray



Virginia Rail, 30 April. Photo by S. Dowlan



Green Heron, 30 April. Photo by S. Dowlan



Green Heron, 10 May. Photo by P. Geiger



Green Heron, 30 May. Photo by B. Dunson



Green Heron, 30 April. Photo by G. McGrane

WARBLERS!



This singing male Kirtland's Warbler was found on in the early afternoon of 13 May at Meat Camp Environmental Studies Area in Watauga County. It remained through the early morning hours of the next day. It was observed and reported on eBird by eleven ecstatic birders. It was also videotaped by the finder. Photo by R. Gray



Kirtland's Warbler, 13 May, Meat Camp Environmental Studies Area. Photo by B. Dunson



Prothonotary Warbler, 15 April, W. Kerr Scott Res. Dam, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane



Kirtland's Warbler, 13 May, Meat Camp Environmental Studies Area. Photo by S. Dowlan



Cape May Warbler, 4 May. Valle Cay neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey



Golden-winged Warbler, 3 May. Elk Knob Game Lands, Watauga County. Photo by G. Rhyne



Blackpoll Warbler, 13 May. Long Ridge Road, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

WARBLERS!



Prairie Warbler, 13 May. Tanawha Trail at Holloway Mtn. Road, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray



Swainson's Warbler, 13 May. Julian Price Mem. Park Campground, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Canada Warbler, 7 May. Trout Lake, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray



Swainson's Warbler, 13 May. Julian Price Mem. Park Campground, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey



Kentucky Warbler, 24 April. Ben Miller Area, BRP, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Black-throated Blue Warbler, 27 April, Trout Lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Northern Parula, 28 March, Mountain Top Lane, Watauga County. Photo by S. Powell



Chestnut-sided Warbler, 29 April, Trout Lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Palm Warbler, 15 April, W. Kerr Scot Res. Dam, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane



Black-throated Green Warbler, 29 April, Valle Cay neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by M Ramey

High Country Hoots Submission Guidelines

For the next issue (August-September-October), please have all material to the editor by October, 2020. 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.

www.highcountryaudubon.org

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