

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

High Country Audubon Society

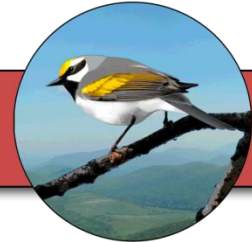


Serving Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties

Volume 12 – Issue 3

November 2020 to January 2021

President's Message



Dear Fellow Birders,

Hello all my often thought of, rarely seen, fellow birders! It's been a long season, and I admit, we've struggled to move forward with all of the exciting events and walks that the board had planned last spring. Despite this, we did experience a fabulous fall migration, with additional rarities showing up in our area. The board remains committed to helping birds and birders, as always!!

I hope many of you will be able to visit Brookshire Park in these waning moments of fall. The new bench and sign look fantastic. We've received numerous compliments about how they will improve experiences for people along the Greenway. However, the project with New River Conservancy for the property across from Brookshire Park is still pending. Hopefully sometime next year, we'll have wetland restoration there. The additional greenway planned in that area may not happen in that same timeframe, so our plan for additional birding access is on hold.

In Valle Crucis, we're working with Blue Ridge Conservancy in order to enhance bird habitat in BRC's newly-acquired portion of the park. The projected plan is to begin a staggered mowing rotation across the area, so that during a 3-year span, only a third of the area will be mowed each year. This will result in three stages of bird habitat, especially good for our winter sparrows. BRC will also be allowing the riparian zone along the river to re-establish, creating additional new habitat there.

Although we weren't able to conduct our monthly meetings this season, the board recently voted to try some zoom winter meetings. With the continued inability to meet in person, we thought it would be great to connect with everyone, including those that leave the area in the winter. Stay tuned for notices about that.

Speaking of notices, Tonya Lee, our membership chair, is working diligently to find the best solution to replace our yahoo groups group email. Yahoo will suspend all yahoo groups accounts December 15th, so we have to find a new way to communicate. We'll let you know when and how to migrate to the new system.

As far as winter birding activities are concerned, the Christmas bird counts will proceed, albeit with altered procedures. We will all have a chance to participate in 4 different counts: Stone Mountain, Upper Yadkin Valley, Mt. Jefferson and Grandfather Mountain. Guy will be compiling the first three, and Jesse Pope will compile for Grandfather. If you're interested in any or all, get in the touch with the

compilers. Additionally, although our Brookshire walks are still not official events, Guy will continue to do bird counts the first Saturday of each month throughout the winter and into next spring.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank our HCAS board, which has continued to work industriously toward our goals during these difficult times. Thanks, also, to all of you, for your continued great support of HCAS. Here's to a better 2021!



2020 Bird-a-thon

A good time was had by all, despite the heavy rain and cool temperatures that three of the teams encountered. Four teams participated in HCAS' first Bird-a-thon. We each had our choice of any 24-hour period within 3 days, but only one of those days, Friday, September 10th, had pleasant weather. Our winning team, Team Siskin, also our youngest team, had 5 members, Silas Powell, Charlie Ayers, Adrianna Nelson, Maxwell Ramey and Evan Wunder. They were a "wonder", reporting 79 species seen or heard by their team, and most of their birding was on the very rainy and cold Saturday of the event. They were enthusiastic and "hope we do this again soon". They were awarded HCAS T-shirts, designed and created by Steve Dowlan. They, like the 2nd place finishers, covered several of the 5 HCAS counties.

Our 2nd place finishers were Team Nighthawk (and all 4 teams saw Common Nighthawks), with Bob Cherry, Charlie Brady, Gina Diggs, Lauren Lampley and Amy Renfranz. They reported 54 species, and also overlapped Friday's pleasant weather with Saturday's miserable weather. Miserable, because our binoculars fogged up and the birds, although present, were hard to see and identify.



Team Siskin

Teams McNair and Paulette rounded out our contestants to

4. These were also our smallest teams, proving that despite the rule that at least 2 team members needed to see/hear the species, more eyes and ears racked up more species.

The next Bird-a-thon is intended to be a fundraising effort, and will be scheduled for May, 2021. We will hope for great weather, but, even more, for the presence of many migrating birds.

Sheryl McNair

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

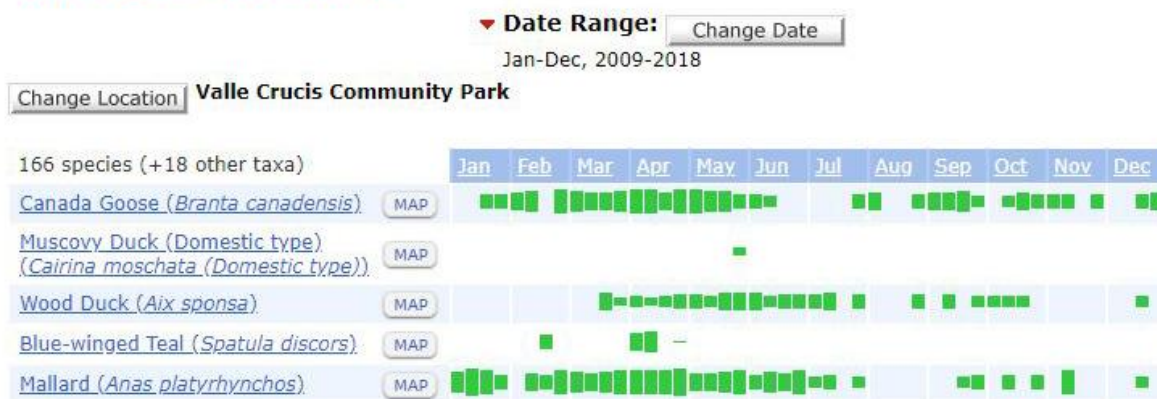


Observations entered into eBird range from a single species that was observed while mowing the lawn to extensive lists with photo and sound recordings made while birding all day. eBird encourages a broad range of observation types, and makes data entry easy. Some beginning birders are reluctant to enter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



New Members

Charlie Ayers, Carnesville, GA
Cynthia Barnes, Cary, NC
Ken & Margie Cassan, Boone, NC
Cheryl Day, Tryon, NC
Mary Gale, Mountain City, TN
Joseph Johnson, Todd, NC
Lyndsay Parkhurst, Boone, NC
Silas Powell, Sugar Grove, NC
Maureen Pratt, Tryon, NC
Frances Sample, Trade, TN
Janie Wey, Jacksonville, FL

Donations

General Fund:

Martha Cutler
Richard Gray
Richard & Janet Paulette
Janie Wey

Sue Wells Research Grant:

Christina Collins
Richard Gray
Richard & Janet Paulette

Young Birders Scholarship :

Cynthia Barnes
Richard Gray

Possible First Record of Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) Nesting in North Carolina

Adrianna Nelson and Guy McGrane

Introduction

Several lines of evidence suggest that Merlins (*Falco columbarius*) successfully nested at Linville Land Harbor, in Avery County, NC, in summer 2020. If true, this would be the first known breeding record for the state of North Carolina (LeGrand et al. 2020), and would appear to be, by approximately 150-200 miles, the furthest south breeding record for the species (eBird 2017). Evidence for breeding includes observation by experienced birders of three Merlins together exhibiting begging/feeding behavior on 1 AUG, photo documentation of Merlins practicing their ritualized bonding flight on 3 AUG, along with verbal descriptions of that flight in full, and verbal descriptions of the loud and raucous calling behavior that often characterizes Merlin families at the nesting grounds during the time in question.

Background

The historical breeding range of the Merlin in eastern North America includes Canada and only the very northernmost fringe of the US (Peterson 1980; Sibley 2000). Data from the United States Geological Survey estimate that populations have increased by a factor of five since the 1960's and have doubled since the late 1990's (n.d.). By 2020, eBird breeding range maps included the mountains of NY, PA, and WV, with a small presence in VA (eBird, 2017).

Peak spring migration occurs roughly from mid-March to mid-April, but can occur from mid-February until early May. Peak fall migration is from late August to late September, but can occur from late June through early November. Breeding can occur from March through early September, with young present from April through early September. (Warkentin, I. G., N. S. Sodhi, R. H. M. Espie, A. F. Poole, L. W. Oliphant, et al. 2020). See Fig. 1.

The sightings mentioned in this report were in early June and through the entire month of August. The single early June report is well within the breeding window, since migration is not expected to take place at that time. The August reports, while within the earliest time frame for fall migration, more closely line up with the breeding season.

Sightings

On 28 APR, John Frazier photographed a Merlin in flight above Land Harbor Lake in Linville, NC. This Merlin appeared fairly pale in color and may or may not be related to subsequent sightings. Frazier again observed, without photographing, a Merlin on 8 JUN perched on a small snag by the waterline on the northern shore of the lake by the clubhouse. It was being mobbed by smaller landbirds for several minutes. There were no more sightings until almost two months later.

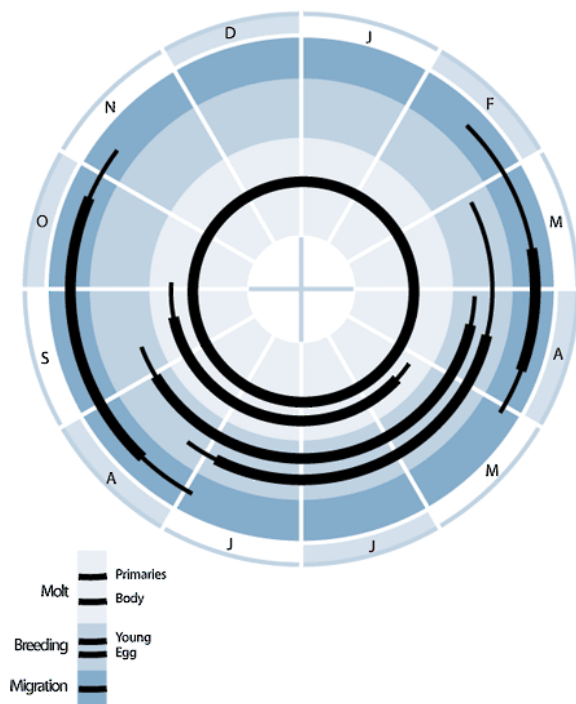


Figure 1: North American Merlin molt, breeding, and migration phenology (Cornell 2020)

On 1 AUG, Barbara and Dean Stewman observed three Merlins for over an hour, two of which seemed to be harassing an adult and exhibiting “feeding or begging behavior.” One of the birds remained perched on a dead snag (Figure 2) for much of the time. The Stewmans also noted that all three birds gave a “kee-kee-kee” call very “loudly” and “raucously” (B. & D. Stewman, personal communication, Oct. 14, 2020). Merlins, although typically silent, most commonly give the “ki-ki-kee”

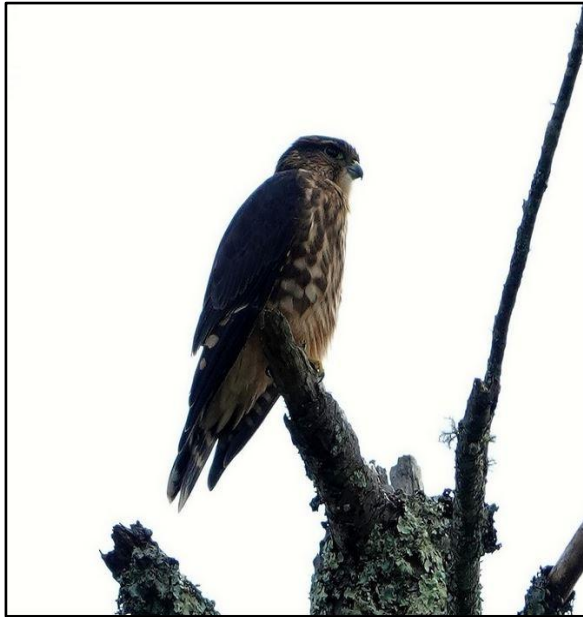


Figure 2: Image of Merlin perched at typical snag. Photo courtesy of Dean Stewman.

call, which can be used in a variety of situations, including courtship, territory, or other agonistic interactions (Feldsine and Oliphant 1985). An observer in Maine notes hearing similar loud calls from nestlings begging for food, especially when they were almost old enough to fledge (Wells, Jeff and Allison 2013).

On 3 AUG, the Stewmans observed two Merlins in flight for several minutes. According to the report, the birds were “almost flying in tandem” and were “quite acrobatic” (B. & D. Stewman, personal communication, Oct. 14, 2020). Feldsine and Oliphant describe many different flight patterns such as “high circling/soaring,” “powerflying,” and “rocking glide,” which are characteristic of territorial, mating, or pair bonding reasons. These differ from the powered, early-morning flights and soaring of migratory Merlins (1985). The Stewmans obtained several pictures that clearly demonstrate what appears to be the synchronized flight indicative of breeding behavior (Figure 3).

A single Merlin was also observed on August 2nd, 5th, 9th, 11th, 18th, and 30th. Each time, the bird was perched on the same snag. Feldsine and Oliphant (1985) found that Merlins typically use tall trees as perches for guarding their nest sites. The perching seen by these Merlins is consistent with this protective behavior.

There were several other sightings of Merlins in the same time frame by a birder, Alex Trifunovic, at Lees McRae College, which is about 8 miles north of Land Harbor Lake. He observed 2 on 14 AUG, 1 calling on 15 AUG, and a group of 5 birds flying over on 1 SEP. Although the September sighting was within peak fall migration, it is possible that these individuals were associated with the same birds at Land Harbor Lake.

Discussion

One reason that there is a lengthy time period of no observations between 8 JUN and 1 AUG may be due in part to the nature of Merlin nesting behavior. They are very secretive, often nesting in dense conifers or deciduous trees in order to avoid predation (Fox 1964, Hodson 1976, Smith 1978, Sieg and Becker 1990). It is well known that most bird species



Figure 3: Image of the Merlins performing the synchronized flight observed by the Stewmans. Photo courtesy of Dean Stewman.

become secretive when eggs and vulnerable young are on the nest, which would also explain why the “raucous calling” was not observed until later in the summer (“Why do birds sing?” 2003). Incubation

averages 30 days, and fledging occurs around day 29, summing to approximately two months before the young leave the nest (Cramp and Simmons 1980, Ruttledge 1985, Palmer 1988; Becker and Sieg 1985, Oliphant and Tessaro 1985). This could account for the lack of observations of the Merlins in the two-month period between 8 JUN and 1 AUG. It is also possible that the lack of observations throughout the summer is because residents were vacationing and not consistently at their homes.

The nest, assuming breeding did occur, could have been located far enough away from Land Harbor Lake to render any obvious behaviors unnoticed during the summer. Males usually give the “ki-ki-kee” call when bringing food to an incubating female, yet no observations of calls were reported before August. The activity of the adults and young over these two months could have easily been overlooked if the birds were nesting in a secluded location in the

surrounding area. There is little information regarding nestling and fledgling vocalizations during the post-fledging period. In fact, according to Birds of the World, there is no quantitative data about fledglings after they leave the nest. There is much more to be learned about fledgling behavior, family group behavior, and movements and dispersal, which may bring additional clarity to the sightings this summer (Warkentin, I. G., N. S. Sodhi, R. H. M. Espie, A. F. Poole, L. W. Oliphant, et al. 2020).

Merlins are usually solitary outside of the breeding season and would not usually exhibit begging or courtship behaviors (Sodhi et.al. 1993). Although, they have also been known to loosely migrate together and winter in pairs (Cade 1982; Cramp and Simmons 1980). Perhaps these birds were an early migrating group, but the interesting behavioral displays reported by the Stewmans suggest otherwise.

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Barred Owl, 26 June 2020, Blue Ridge Parkway, Wilson Creek Overlook, Avery County. Photo by M. Ramey



White-eyed Vireo, 8 July 2020, Boone Greenway Trail, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray



Chestnut-sided Warbler, 16 July 2020, Moses Cone Memorial Park, Trout Lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. McNair



Blackburnian Warbler, 21 June 2020, Blue Ridge Parkway, Beacon Heights Area, Avery County. Photo by R. Gray



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 summer brought an extended stay in the area of a White Phase Great Blue Heron, formerly known as the Great White Heron, which was likely the longest stay in NC away from the coast yet known. Also, a fairly remarkable record for apparently nesting Merlins in Avery county, could be the first such occurrence for North Carolina. ((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 in five-county area for June and July, 2020



Lesser Scaup, 7 July 2020, Church Hollow Road ponds, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

American Black Duck (UNCONFIRMED), One was reported with scant detail at BASSLAKE on 22 JUL. Because some off-season- plumaged Mallards can be very dark, any summer report for Black Duck should include documentation of the wing stripe color, preferably with pictures. There are no previous summer reports for the county and only one sketchy summer report for the region.

Lesser Scaup, the long term resident, apparently of wild origin, continued thru the summer at CHURCHHOLLOW.

Northern Bobwhite, one was seen in the Meat Camp area of Watauga Co., on 23 JUL, in an area of Christmas trees and cow fields. This species is probably extirpated in the wild from our area, although hunting clubs periodically introduce tame birds for pleasure hunts. This was probably such a bird, but evidence to the contrary should be searched for.

Ruffed Grouse, there were only four reports of this apparently declining species this summer, three along the blue ridge and one near Beech Mountain, all in heavily forested areas.

Eurasian Collared-Dove, a heard-only bird was found during a Breeding Bird Survey at ROARINGRIVER on 7 JUN, where a small nesting population appears to have been established for the past several years.

Black-billed Cuckoo, though this species can sometimes breed in our area, only two reports came in this summer of possibly wandering birds; at LEWISFORKOVERLOOK on 4 JUN, and at BIGYELLOWMOUNTAIN, 18 JUN.

Chimney Swift, a rather early large roost, of an estimated 100 birds, was found at Parkway elementary School, Watauga Co., on 14 JUL.

Spotted Sandpiper, though there is no evidence for breeding in our region, birds linger into summer and show up quite early in late summer. This year the late “spring” report was on 9 JUN at TROUTLAKE, while the early “fall” report came from LANDHARBOR on 18 JUL. NOTE: references indicate that our area could possibly support breeding birds, and that they are very quiet and difficult to find while nesting, so late and early birds should be observed for signs of nesting.

Greater Yellowlegs, the first known summer occurrence in our region came from BROOKSHIRE on 17 JUN, where a single bird was well documented with photographs. This appears to be the first report for the month of June for all of North Carolina away from the coast.

Common Loon, an apparently injured bird continued from spring through most of the month of June at LANDHARBOR.

Double-crested Cormorant, apparently wandering birds, not on breeding territory, were found throughout the area on the larger water bodies, starting on 25 JUN and continuing thru the period.

Great Blue Heron (White form), this subspecies rarely occurs north of southern Florida, so it was quite surprising when one showed up near VALLECRUCIS on 8 JUN and stayed thru the summer. The extent of its stay may be a new record for duration in the entire state away from the coast, though it may be part of a regional pattern—there was another bird to our north in West Virginia that stayed there for a similar period this year.



Great Blue Heron (white form), 19 June 2020, Watauga River Bridge at Valle Crucis, Watauga County. Photo by M. Ramey



Great Blue Heron (white form), 3 July 2020, Herbert Thomas Road bridge, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Great Blue Heron (white form), 29 July 2020, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson

Great Egret, only 3 appearances were made this summer by this bird that tends to wander widely beginning in late summer after breeding is finished. They were widely spaced but all between 24-26 JUL, one at BROOKSHIRE, one at VALLECRUCIS, and one in Wilkes Co., at a small pond off Vannoy Road.

Osprey, known to be expanding their breeding range in our area, but with no evidence yet for the high country, there were again this year



Great Egret 24 July 2020, Brookshire Park, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane



Great Egret 24 July 2020, Shepherd Way pond, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane

several intriguing reports during midsummer. Any evidence of nesting, such as carrying sticks, or birds engaged in ritualized play or fighting, should be thoroughly investigated.

Bald Eagle, nesting season for Bald Eagles is mostly over by June, but several reports in the region during summer suggest a continuing presence of family groups in the area.

Great Horned Owl, the species appears to be a regular breeder in our area, but its nocturnal habits make reporting very sparse. This summer there were single reports from LANDHARBOR, TROUTLAKE, AND VALLECRUCIS, but a well documented all-summer occurrence at TODD was very likely a continuing nesting site.

Northern Saw-whet Owl, the continuing presence into summer of a calling owl at Simms

Creek Overlook on the BRP, Watauga, likely involved a nesting attempt.

Merlin, a very intriguing report of apparently summering birds, from LANDHARBOR, could be the first nesting of the species in the state. They were seen in late spring and again in summer, then again on 1 AUG and continuing for some weeks. Some of the reports involved begging/feeding behavior and this is not thought to occur far from the nesting site.

Peregrine Falcon, aside from its usual cliffside summering sites near Grandfather Mtn and Linville Gorge, a bird continued to be seen at New River State Park—Alleghany Access in Alleghany Co., in the first part of June. A single bird likely wandering away from the nest site was at VALLECRUCIS on 21 JUL.

Alder Flycatcher, one at NRSP- ALLEGHANYACCESS ON 1 JUN was likely a late migrant. One at BEEHCREEKBOG on 9 JUN was likely a breeder. One was seen and heard several times in June and July at BROOKSHIRE, a likely breeder.

Great Crested Flycatcher, the breeding status of this species in our region, especially the high country, is still pretty uncertain. Sightings in summer in the High Country appear to be wandering birds because sustained presence is rarely noted. We had the same pattern this summer with about 10 isolated reports throughout our region, the single exception being 2 reports from CHESTNUTKNOB on 2 and 17 JUN.

Fish Crow, a species that is apparently expanding in our area, heard-only birds were at VALLECRUCIS on 22 JUN and Boone on 22 JUL. Though American Crows' begging calls from females and juveniles, can sometimes be confused with the typical call of the Fish Crow, these reports were pretty late in the year, and several more reports came in early fall from the urban 321 corridor, one with a poor recording that nonetheless apparently does document the species. Because Fish Crows rarely associate with American Crows, any birds seen with a bird reported as giving the Fish Crow Call should also be reported as Fish Crows.



Great Crested Flycatcher, 2 June 2020, Chestnut Knob area., Dunson residence, Watauga County.
Photo by B. Dunson

Black-capped Chickadee (UNCONFIRMED), a few reports were made this summer from the Grandfather Mountain area, and the reports were not confirmed by the ebird reviewer. There are questions of hybridization and also of cross-species song learning, which make it very difficult to say with certainty that birds in this area are indeed Black-capped. Because there is a known black-capped population not too far away at the Grayson Highlands just across the Virginia border, any suspected birds should be exhaustively documented with photographs and sound recordings if possible.

Purple Martin, this summer saw a number of reports from the VALLECRUCIS area on 7 JUN, and 8, 18, and 21 JUL, suggesting a possible nest site in that area, which is fairly low elevation for the High Country, and would be the place we might expect our first breeders to occur in Watauga Co. Elsewhere in the high country, they are known to breed at similar elevations in the lower New River Valley area in Alleghany Co.

Golden-crowned Kinglet, away from their known nesting range in the spruce-fir forest at our highest elevations, these Kinglets are apparently expanding their nesting range to dense stands of White Pine in some areas such as VALLECAY and along the BRP. A pair was repeatedly observed throughout the summer at VALLECAY, one was reported on 12 JUL at Jeffress Park on the Wilkes/Ashe border, and there was an undocumented report of singing birds in the Doughton Park area along the BRP on the Wilkes/Alleghany border.

Brown Creeper, very similar to the Golden-crowned Kinglets, these have been documented expanding their nesting range to dense stands of White Pine along the BRP. This summer there was a fairly well documented likely breeding pair in dense White Pines at VALLECAY, which is well away from the BRP and other formerly known locations.

Hermit Thrush, In addition to their known summer range at the highest elevations of GRANDFATHER and BIGYELLOWMOUNTAIN, a breeding season presence seems well established now at ELKKNOB with several reports through June and July. One was recorded at lower elevation at ECHOVALLEY on 25 JUN, suggesting further range expansion.

Purple Finch (UNCONFIRMED), an intriguing report of 7 birds came from BEACONHEIGHTS on 2 JUL. This followed a similar report from last summer, so more work should be done to find out what's going on there. The species is NOT known to breed in our region, but does breed near Mt. Rogers just across the VA border.

Red Crossbill, aside from their traditional nesting area near GRANDFATHER, an apparent wanderer stayed at VALLECAY from 25 JUN thru 8 JUL.

Pine Siskin, away from its traditional high-elevation breeding grounds, an adult male near TROUTLAKE on 2 and 3 JUL was likely wandering post-breeding.

Grasshopper Sparrow, seen a few times from beginning of June to the end of July, in northeastern Alleghany Co., they continue their nesting presence in that area.

Vesper Sparrow, documented again this summer at several places in the High Country, including BIGYELLOWMOUNTAIN, RICHMOUNTAINGAMELANDS, AND POND MOUNTAIN, more work should be done to confirm presence in other area such as



Pine Siskin, 2 July 2020, Flannery Fork Rd., McNair residence, Watauga County. Photo by S. McNair
BEECHMOUNTAIN, SUGARMOUNTAIN, and CHAPPELL.

Yellow-breasted Chat, fairly common breeders in the piedmont, they are much rarer in the mountains. This summer brought reports at NRSP-ALLEGHANY on 2&3 JUN, NRSP-221 on 13 and 27 JUN, PRICELAKE on 19 JUN, ECHOVALLEY on 24 JUN, and ELKMTNOVERLOOK on 11 JUL.

Bobolink, continued this summer at their traditional breeding sites at MERVERNONCHURCH and vicinity, CHAPPELLFARMS, and in northeastern Alleghany Co.

Eastern Meadowlark, Common breeders in the Wilkes Co. piedmont pastureland, they are much more limited in nesting sites in the mountains. In addition to their known breeding sites at MERVERNONCHURCH and northeastern Alleghany Co., a new possible site was reported this summer just north of Castleford Rd. in

extensive pastures along NC 194, Watauga Co., on 13 JUN. Reports in late July at BROOKSHIRE and VALLECRUCIS probably were post-breeding.

Swainson's Warbler, Most reports this summer were from the area surrounding PRICELAKE, but there were also a couple reports from Avery County, one along the Tennessee border and another well down off the Blue Ridge.

Magnolia Warbler, Highly suspected of breeding at BEACONHEIGHTS for the past several years, excellent evidence was acquired this year with extensive documentation, including pictures, of a pair of birds feeding a fledgling, on 11 JUL. This is probably the best breeding evidence yet in our region.

Yellow-rumped Warbler, highly suspected, but not proven, to breed at the highest elevations of GRANDFATHER, one was reported on 15 JUN there this year.

Yellow-throated Warbler, although there was much less birding than normal this year at VALLECRUCIS due to the pandemic, this species again apparently set up territory at the park with several sightings through June and July.

Prairie Warbler, one found on 2 and 10 JUN and again on 8 JUL, on Clint Norris Road near Boone, Watauga, was likely at least attempting to nest in the area, a fairly unusual find for the high country. There was also a single report on 15 JUL from Miller Road in Alleghany.

Location Key for this reporting period:

BASSLAKE =Bass Lake, Watauga; BEACONHEIGHTS =Beacon Heights overlook on the BRP, Avery; BIGYELLOWMOUNTAIN =Big Yellow Mountain TNC preserve, Avery; BROOKSHIRE =Brookshire Park, Watauga; BRP=Blue Ridge Parkway, all counties; CHAPPELL=Chappell Farms Road area near Banner Elk, Watauga; CHESTNUTKNOB =Chestnut Knob, Watauga; ECHOVALLEY=Echo Valley Farm, Watauga; 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; GRANDFATHER=Grandfather Mountain Area, Avery/Watauga GREENWAY=Boone Greenway, 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; MERVERNONCHURCH=Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in Bamboo area, Watauga; NRSP-ALLEGHANYACCESS=New River State Park-Alleghany Access area, Alleghany; NRSP-221= New River State Park-221 Access, Ashe; OSEEROAD=Osee Road area, Alleghany; PONDMTN=Pond Mountain Gamelands, Ashe; PRICELAKE=Price Lake in Julian Price Park, Watauga; 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.

High Country Hoots Submission Guidelines

For the next issue (November-December-January), please have all material to the editor by January 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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