

# HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

High Country Audubon Society



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

Volume 10 – Issue 3

August-September-October 2018

## President's Message



2018 is flying by!!! It doesn't seem possible that it's almost time for fall migration! HCAS has been busy this season with our weekly walks at Valle Crucis, our monthly walks at Brookshire Park, and our new monthly "Birds, Bugs and Blooms" walks. All have been extremely popular, and many new birders have been joining us! It's great to see. We've also participated in numerous bird counts and breeding bird surveys. These contribute to research that tracks the health of bird populations in our area and across the region.

HCAS has also been working hard on our new native gardens at Hardin Park School and Green Valley Park. Both are the result of National Audubon grants and are part of Audubon's initiative, "Plants for Birds." Research has shown that the single greatest threat to our bird populations is loss of native habitat. By planting native shrubs in our nearby parks, we can help restore small oases of habitat. Individual yards, however, make up the vast majority of the overall landscape. Landowners can make a huge impact on restoring native habitat by making sure their yards are primarily native landscaping. HCAS now has a "Plants for Birds" Garden Tours program, which is a way to help landowners understand how best to convert their yards, but also gives the rest of us ideas on what could be done in our own yards. If you would like participate in the program, please contact Bill Dunson at [wdunson@comcast.net](mailto:wdunson@comcast.net). Bill will explain how the garden tours work.

With fall fast approaching, we're starting to gear up for our fall migration outings, our swift nights out, and our hawk watches. Check our calendar frequently to make sure you know when all the activities are occurring. Additionally, sometime in the near future, our new website will launch, so be sure to keep tuned for that exciting event. Thank you to Beverly Saltonstall for all her hard work on this project. Thank you also to Doris Ratchford for continuing to keep our current website up-to-date while Beverly works on the new site.

Finally, after a long successful run of publishing Hoots, Janet Paulette and Beverly Saltonstall are turning over the reins to Steve Dowlan. Steve loves to produce newsletters, has a lot of experience in doing so, and is publishing this issue of Hoots. Thanks to Janet and Beverly for their dedication to Hoots over the years, and thank you to Steve for taking on the project. We appreciate all the hard work!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Steve Dowlan".

# Kudos Corner

## Farewell to Janet Palmer



*Left to Right: Martha Cutler & granddaughter Miriam, Janet Palmer, Richard Paulette, Chris Laine, Pegge Laine, Janet Paulette, Doris Ratchford, Beverly Saltonstall, and Doug Blackford.*

Founding HCAS member and long-time Board member **Janet Palmer** recently moved to Charlotte to be near her daughter and grandchildren. She couldn't be at the annual meeting, so we hurriedly arranged a "mini-meeting brunch" with present & past Board members at Vidalia Restaurant & Wine Bar, a sponsor of HCAS. The food was wonderful, and we got to meet Doris & Jim Ratchford's son and daughter-in-law, owners of Vidalia. After reminiscing about Janet's significant contributions to HCAS over the years, we presented her with an Appreciation of Service Award and a gift certificate for her to use for one of her passions - books! Please visit Vidalia at <http://vidaliaofboonenc.com/> and support their enthusiasm for HCAS!

Thirty-two HCAS members and family attended the 2018 annual meeting and potluck at Green Valley Community Park near Todd. Despite the threat of rain, attendees toured the park with the assistance of park board president Chris Laine without getting wet. After everyone enjoyed some very nice potluck food, a brief business meeting was conducted. Debbie Shetterly was elected to serve two more years as HCAS president, and Mary Olson was elected to serve a two year term as Secretary to the Board of Directors.

HCAS President Debbie Shetterly had the honor of presenting the Volunteer of the Year Award to co-recipients **Doris Ratchford (right)** and **Beverly Saltonstall (left)**.

**Doris Ratchford** was an early member of HCAS and has been active for many years. She worked on the early organization of our chapter; served as an HCAS Board member and as treasurer; worked with Daniel Boone Native Gardens to set up regular bird walks there;





developed and maintained the HCAS website for years and is again maintaining it while a new website is developed; represented HCAS at festivals; contributed her beautiful photographs for the website and **Hoots**; is now maintaining the HCAS Facebook page and has greatly improved its quality and reach; and has done many more behind-the-scenes activities as an ambassador for birds.

**Beverly Saltonstall** jumped right in when she and her husband purchased a summer home in the High Country at Powder Horn Mountain. She spent years helping to produce the quarterly HCAS newsletter, **Hoots**. In addition, she represented HCAS at festivals; initiated very successful Swifts Night Out events for Powder Horn Mountain residents; presented programs on Burrowing Owls both for HCAS and at Powder Horn; took over maintenance of the website – and is now developing a new website; and she continues as an ambassador for birds in Cape Coral, FL, where she stays busy leading Burrowing Owls tours from October to April.



Past HCAS Board President Bob Cherry awarded the 2018 Sue Wells Research Grant to **Taylor Paige Fulk**. Paige is a graduate student and teaching assistant at Appalachian State University. Her research focuses on how animal personality of adult birds, specifically Tree Swallows mitigates the effect of anthropogenic disturbance on nestling growth, health and stress physiology. Paige will provide an update regarding her research for a future edition of High Country Hoots, and present a program at one of our monthly meetings to discuss her results. We look forward to learning what she discovers.

## New Members

**Emmett Bills**, Boone

**Caroline & Gary Bradford**, Lenoir

**Barbara Brank**, Charlotte

**Chuck Darling**, JeffersonNC/Jupiter, FL

**Bob & Marjorie Hrozencik**, Vilas

**James Dollar**

**Mary Gray**, Boone

**Shelly Miller**, West Jefferson

**Tyler Pyle**, ASU

**Theresa & Pat Redmond**, Boone

**Lana Tester**, Vilas

**Gayle Rulifson**, Banner Elk/Greenville, NC

**Lisa Thompson**, West Jefferson

## Donations

**Bob & Marjorie Hrozencik and Bob Cherry** – Sue Wells Research Grant

**Julia Mode, Camille Annas, Joyce Watson, & Margaret Hampson** – Group donation to the HCAS Birding Scholarship in memory of Janet Palmer's mother, Evelyn Taylor, and in honor of Janet Palmer

**Sheryl McNair**

**Theresa & Pat Redmond**

**Judi Sawyer**

In support of HCAS's **Native Gardens for Schools** project at Hardin Park School:

**Foggy Mountain Nursery, Lansing** - donation of 2 boulders

**Highland Landscape, Blowing Rock** – donation of mulch

## Update: HCAS @ Work

A concern for all of us birders is the health of bird populations. Research has shown the single most critical factor in sustaining bird populations is the availability of native habitat. Luckily for us, that is something on which we all can have immediate and lasting impact. HCAS has made this issue one of its main priorities, and is working hard with area schools and parks to augment native landscaping. Additionally, HCAS has its new garden tours program to help landowners learn how to better landscape to help birds.

National Audubon has made "Native Plants for Birds" a major initiative for chapters across the country as well. As a way of kick starting the program, a new grant program from the Coleman and Susan Burke Center for Native Plants was initiated. HCAS applied for that grant in January and received \$1000. That funding was matched by the NC Native Plant Society's B.W. Wells grant program, resulting in \$2000 of total funding for a new native garden at Hardin Park School in Boone.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held in early May, at which North Carolina House of Representatives member Jonathon Jordan and Audubon North Carolina's Director of Bird Conservation for North Carolina Curtis Smalling spoke. Site prep and planting began soon afterward. The total number of volunteer hours spent on the project now stands at 61. Additionally, local businesses Foggy Mountain Nursery and Highland Landscaping made major donations to the effort. The project is far from complete, and major challenges with garden maintenance lie ahead, but hopefully the end result will be a native garden which benefits birds. More importantly, it will help to teach the next generations about the importance of native habitat for our bird populations.

Our community parks also provide a fantastic opportunity for supplementing native landscaping. Last year HCAS planted a number of native shrubs at Valle Crucis Community Park. This year, we used our Collaborative Grant money from Audubon NC and matched it with HCAS funds to plant a new native garden at Green Valley Park. As we move forward, we'll continue our focus on native plants for birds, as well as on the education of the public about the need for native landscaping.



*Groundbreaking for the Native Plant Garden at Hardin Park School, May 3 2018. Photo by D. Shetterly*

***Article and photo by Debbie Shetterly***



# Third Tuesdays



## Birds of Costa Rica – August 21 2018

HCAS webmaster Beverly Saltonstall will discuss birds she saw during a trip to Costa Rica in January. Costa Rica has 850 known species of birds, nearly 800 of which occur on a regular basis. This great diversity of species reflects the diversity of habitats found in the country. Beverly will be showing photos of some of the species she saw on the trip such as the beautiful Red-headed Barbet.



## Sue Wells Grant Research Update – September 18 2018

Tyler Pyle is a first-year graduate student working under Dr. Lynn Siefferman of Appalachian State University and was awarded the 2017 Sue Wells Grant for his research with Eastern Bluebirds. Tyler graduated from App State in the spring of 2016 with a degree in Ecology/Evolutionary/Environmental Biology. Tyler is currently studying the pathogen *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* in the Eastern Bluebird populations of the High Country. *Mycoplasma gallisepticum* is a pathogen that does a lot of damage each year to the poultry industry by spreading and infecting chickens with a chronic respiratory disease. Tyler is in the midst of finalizing his results, and is excited to share them with HCAS members.

## Light Pollution and Bird Migration – October 16 2018



Human-caused light pollution is now widespread over the planet, with the exception of the oceans and certain remote continental regions. Many birds migrate at night, and use the stars as a directional reference. What this means is that nearly all migrating birds encounter light pollution during their annual migrations. In some cases the presence of artificial lights can cause birds to become disoriented, which can lead to exhaustion and even death. HCAS's own Dr. Richard Gray will discuss how birds navigate during migration, how serious a problem light pollution is, and what we as individuals and as a group can do about it. Dr. Gray is currently a professor in the department of Physics and Astronomy at Appalachian State University. His research is in the field of stellar spectroscopy, and his interests include the discovery and classification of chemically peculiar stars. He is a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, a member of the International Astronomical Union of the American Astronomical Society.

## Results of the First Ever Watauga County Spring Bird Count

On May 2, 2018, 19 birders counted birds throughout Watauga County as part of Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Global Big Day. According to Team eBird, Watauga County's lists joined reports from nearly 30,000 fellow eBirders, tallying 6,924 species as a global team: this is two thirds of the world's birds in 24 hours! This is also a new world record for the number of bird species reported in one day.



Killdeer sheltering young, 5 May 2018, Boone Greenway Trail, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane

interesting photo of the day is from what looked like a mutant Killdeer with dozens of legs instead of the regular two - of course, it was a mom sheltering several young under her belly - still cute though.

HCAS member Guy McGrane organized the event for Watauga County and compiled the results. A few birders began in the wee hours of the morning on the Blue Ridge Parkway, and were rewarded with the sound of pair of calling Barred Owls, an Eastern Screech-Owl, and a Northern Saw-whet Owl at Sims Pond! In total, about 1500 birds representing 115 different species were reported. Other good finds included a Sora at Brookshire Park, and a Red-breasted Merganser at Price Lake. Twenty-three warbler species were reported, including Northern Waterthrush, Worm-eating Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and Blackpoll. The most

Noteworthy "misses" include Rock Pigeon, either Cuckoo species, White-eyed Vireo, either accipiter species, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Northern Mockingbird. This represents a great first effort, and with greater participation and increased coverage, this species total and overall bird number is likely to be surpassed. Please contact Guy McGrane ([badgerboy@wilkes.net](mailto:badgerboy@wilkes.net)) if you would like to receive a copy of the final tally.

## HCAS Backyard Wildlife Gardening Tour



We had 13 participants on June 26, 2018, a day that threatened rain but turned out to be beautiful. Jan's "yard" is a gorgeous blend that includes natural rhododendron thickets, shady glens and a spectacular stream flowing over rocks. Several fields of different ages are planted with wildflowers and mixed with wild colonizers. There are also flower beds, as well as native grown and planted trees. Her home is full of wonderful things; a talkative African gray parrot, an amazing marine aquarium with live corals, and walls hung with Jan's own professional-quality paintings of birds and other scenes. It was a fantastic chance to meet with new and old friends and learn about how our yards can

serve as significant wildlife habitat. Thank you Jan for hosting us!





## Darwin's Mockingbirds and their Extended Family

I am a Yankee transplant to the southeastern part of North America. I was born and raised in northwestern Pennsylvania, where representatives of the family *Mimidae*, also known as “mimids” or “mimic thrushes” are poor. Mimic thrushes are a strictly New World family of 34 passerine bird species that also includes common names such as mockingbirds, tremblers, and the New World catbirds.

I spent most of my adult life in Oregon, also a place where mimids are not well represented. It was kind of a big deal to see a Northern Mockingbird anywhere in Oregon, and birders would make a special trip to visit northeast Oregon to see a few eastern species that leaked over the state line such as American Redstart, Least Flycatcher, and Gray Catbird. For me, any species in this family was exotic and especially fun to hear... every mimid species, including our common Gray Catbird produces complex and exotic sounds, and all of them are capable of mimicking other avian species.



*LeConte's Thrasher, 28 February 2007, Moapa Valley, Clark County, Nevada*

When I had opportunities to bird along the Pacific Coast and the desert Southwest, thrashers were always target species. LeConte's Thrasher was like the Holy Grail of desert birds... this species lived in the most barren and otherwise uninteresting (to most people) habitat in the southwestern deserts, and it took some effort to find and observe. I remember the pleasant smell of creosote bush when a LeConte's Thrasher would pop up and survey its domain. If you have never spent time in the Colorado Desert, it is hard to describe! I also remember running a foot race with a LeConte's Thrasher in the desert scrub near Fort Paiute, California in an effort to get a photo – I lost!

I became very familiar with the species formerly known as “Mountain Mockingbird,” now referred to as Sage Thrasher when I lived in the high desert of eastern Oregon. I like the old name better. I will never forget the fun of watching Sage Thrashers teach their young how to pluck bugs from the radiators of vehicles that stopped at The Narrows Café and Store in Harney County, my home for three years. This was such a fascinating juxtaposition of remote and civilized... a bird species that mostly lived in mostly people-free habitat that quickly took advantage of the slightest shred of civilization that it encountered.

These experiences have made me more appreciative of the Brown Thrashers, Northern Mockingbirds, and Gray Catbirds that appear in my North Carolina mountain neighborhood. To anyone who hails from this area, these are just ordinary yard birds. To me, they are still pretty magical, especially Brown Thrasher. It has a raptor-like face with bright yellow eyes and a flashy long tail, and it easily melts into even a small shrub or skinny hedgerow.

Mockingbirds are perhaps the most important specimens Charles Darwin collected from the Galapagos Islands during his five-year voyage aboard HMS Beagle in the 1830s. Toward the end of his journey, he added specimens from San Cristóbal Island, where he saw mockingbirds that looked similar to those he had seen in South America. On Floreana, a neighboring island, the mockingbirds were consistently different, with darker breast markings, white bands on their wings, and longer beaks. The observation was Darwin's first hint that species might evolve over time.

So I say to anyone who has become accustomed to seeing Northern Mockingbirds, Gray Catbirds, and Brown Thrashers in your yard – this is a great family with a noble lineage that has led to great discoveries. We are fortunate that they grace our yards, hedgerows and thickets with their presence, and offer us a song or two... even when it is someone else's song!



*Sage Thrasher, or "Mountain Mockingbird," 31 March 2007, The Narrows, Harney County, Oregon*

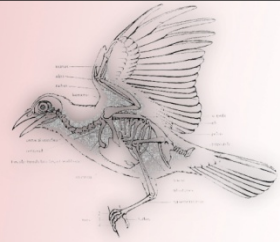


*Brown Thrasher, 5 April 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County, North Carolina*

***Article and photos by Steve Dowlan***



# The Science of Birds



## The Joy of Family Traditions

Does your family have traditions that are passed on from generation to generation? Maybe it's a story of your ancestors coming to America. It might be a favorite toy that your parents played with and now your kids enjoy. Or maybe it's a song that has been used by parents through the generations to sing their children to sleep.

It turns out that some birds have singing traditions that are passed on through the years from fathers to sons. Lead researcher Robert Lachlan of Queen Mary University of London wondered if these avian traditions last as long as human traditions can and so they looked into how persistent bird's traditions last.



*Swamp Sparrow in breeding habitat in northwestern Pennsylvania. Photo by S. Dowlan*

Lachlan and his collaborators recorded 615 male Swamp Sparrows in four states and then used computer software to analyze the songs. They found 160 song types spread across the bird's range and that each male sang a handful of songs.

Lachlan used a mathematical model to see how the bird songs would spread within the bird population over a 5,000 year time period. They also looked at how young birds acquired their songs, such as imitating one particular adult bird (maybe their father or possibly a bird that had especially good habitat) or picking a song that was particularly attractive.

variety of songs as they grew up they tended to sing the songs that were most popular in the group, rarely singing one that was rare. In this way the birds continued to pass on the songs that were most popular with previous generations. And they were able to copy these songs very well, with accuracy greater than 98%.

Their results showed that young birds didn't just randomly choose their songs. While they learned a

As with just about everything else in nature there are benefits to singing these popular, traditional songs. In this case it appears to be simply that females prefer males who sing the common group songs over songs that go against the family tradition. And this preference is so strong that these traditional songs can last for hundreds of year before they are replaced with something new.

**Article by Bob Cherry**

## ***Did You Know?***

For songbirds, woodpeckers, and many other bird families close to the passerines (songbirds), the size of the bird is not an indicator of its age. When baby birds fledge, they have fresh, unbroken flight feathers that may be longer than they will have after their first adult molt, and they are often heavier than they will be as adults. This is because baby birds become fat from being fed without having to work for their meals. Fledglings face an average mortality rate of over 40% during their first week or two. Most of this mortality happens just after they leave the nest. New fledglings can't feed themselves, can't fly well (or, in many cases, at all), and don't recognize potential predators or other perils.

A noticeable difference in size can help to determine the sex of a bird. Males are larger than females in most birds. This is especially true for polygynous species – those in which males mate with more than one female. For some shorebird species the situation is reversed when females mate with more than one male. Females tend to be larger for those species.

Another notable exception to the “male is larger” rule is in raptors and owls. Although the reason is uncertain, the most plausible explanation may be because of the relative rarity of live prey. If male and female raptors are different sizes, the disparity may limit competition between them. It is also thought that males evolved to be smaller because small live prey is more abundant than large prey, and the male does more hunting when the female is incubating. Another reason that females are larger may be to support egg production and incubation. Among raptors, the size differences are especially conspicuous among accipiters and other species that specialize in fast, agile prey.



***Although it is not easy to see unless a pair of Bald Eagles is close together, the male (right) is smaller and slimmer than the female (left). Photo by S. Dowlan***





Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation (GMSF) is home to more than 70 rare, threatened or endangered species. We are also globally recognized as a United Nations Biosphere Reserve. With this ecological diversity comes the need for continual surveying and monitoring. Grandfather Mountain is involved with several citizen science projects, in addition to collaborative research efforts and projects with state and federal agencies and many universities.

The three primary citizen science projects with an emphasis on birds are Audubon's Important Bird Area (IBA) point counts, Project Nest Watch (Cornell University) and Hawk Watch. GMSF has just completed this season's IBA point counts and is still conducting checks on its 15 nest boxes. Hawk Watch will occur in September, with an official counter on Linville Peak—across the Mile High Swinging Bridge—every day, weather permitting.

This past season, Steve Dowlan and Judi Sawyer conducted the IBA bird point counts for Grandfather Mountain. There are a total of 18 point locations on GMSF's property and Grandfather Mountain State Park property. A few of the species seen or heard this June were Canada Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Winter Wren, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Blue-headed Vireo and Hermit Thrush.

Currently, GMSF staff members are conducting regular nest box checks for Project Nest Watch. We have had two successful Carolina Chickadee nests and have many active and successful Tree Swallow nests.

Hawk Watch will be our next big birding event. Prior to Hawk Watch, GMSF executive director Jesse Pope will lead a training seminar for those interested in volunteering as spotters. We will be in contact with High Country Audubon Society prior, with any pertinent information and updates.

Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation invites you all to come visit, enjoy our hiking trails and include us in your list of locations for awesome birding. Thank you for all you do for birds and conservation!

***Article by Gina Diggs, Research Coordinator, Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation***

**On April 12, 2018, HCAS members took a field trip to the Burntfield Creek Trail, just off the John's River near the Johns River Camp, in Caldwell County, near the community of Collettsville. See Guy McGrane's summary of what they saw at:**  
<http://hcnature.blogspot.com/>





## Chimney Swifts - A Deafening Labor of Love at the MWRC

There is no sound that breaks the early morning rehab silence quite like the eruptive cacophony of dozens of hungry baby chimney swifts. Clinging to their makeshift “chimneys”, with each vying to be louder than the next, their collective voice is resounding and unambiguous. This morning welcome signals the first of numerous feedings each day as these orphaned babies are hand-reared at the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center (MWRC).

Due in large part to the dedication of MWRC Director Nina Fischesser, the center has earned a reputation statewide for its successful rearing of orphaned Chimney swifts. Generally, the MWRC admits 80-100+ Chimney swifts each summer. Most have been found inside fireplaces or otherwise displaced from their nests. Unlike almost all other baby birds – songbirds, waterfowl, raptors, even their aerial insect-eating counterparts like swallows and Purple martins – Chimney swifts generally will not pick up food on their own... At all. This means that their feeding regimen begins within minutes of their arrival at the center and continues until the day each is ready for release. The first feeding happens shortly after 8 am, with the last call of the day at 8 pm; in between, swifts are fed every 30 minutes, seven days per week.

In addition to its substantial labor-intensity, Chimney swift rehabilitation can be fraught with complications. Their Velcro®-like toes are easily snagged if pulled from their towels too quickly. Their still-growing beaks can be malleable if mishandled, and their long, delicate feathers must be pristine to ensure perfect flight. Care must be taken at every step to offer the very





best chance for not only a successful release to the wild, but to be strong enough for their future awe-inspiring migration.

During the course of their rehabilitation, swifts will transition from tiny, tissue-lined nests in the incubator to plastic aquariums with surgical towels draped over the side to encourage vertical clinging. The next step is a 3'x4' mesh-sided cage turned on end. Once flying, they will graduate to a 20' outdoor flight enclosure. Here, mesh sides allow clinging and climbing; a fabricated chimney gives them a roosting spot at night. Once they demonstrate swooping behavior, strong flight, and excellent maneuverability, they are evaluated for release.

It is nothing short of spectacular to witness a group of hand-raised baby swifts fly from a box, circle in flight, and join their counterparts soaring above. We like to think that some of those veterans might be rehabilitated swifts from years' past, taking the newcomers under their capable wings. Until then, it's time to feed swifts again...



***Article and photos by Amber McNamara***



## Small Fierce Predators Stalk Greenway Park

Hundreds of people use the beautiful Boone, NC, Greenway Park daily for recreation and likely do not think about the myriads of small predatory interactions that occur there among the resident animals. Indeed if you were the size of their prey you would definitely not want to be anywhere near these creatures.

Insects are among the fiercest of predators although some are quite beautiful also. The male ebony jewelwing damselfly is a stunning iridescent greenish/blue which presumably serves to attract a dull-colored female for mating. This type of mating system normally indicates that the female is choosing the males that are the brightest and presumably the most fit in terms of their genes. Their predatory nymphs are aquatic and the adults are usually found near water. We called them "snake doctors" when I was growing up in Georgia since they would sometimes land on water snakes while they were basking on branches.



*Ebony Jewelwing, 8 June 2018, Boone Greenway Marsh, Watauga County, NC.*

A somewhat similarly colored greenish iridescent terrestrial predator is the six spotted tiger beetle, yet males and females are colored the same. The purpose of the bright color is not known. They have large jaws and eyes and hunt actively on the ground for small insects, but also can fly. The juveniles live in burrows in the ground and catch prey at the surface.



*Six-spotted Tiger Beetle, 1 May 2018, Boone Greenway Marsh, Watauga County, NC.*

One of the most obvious predators living in marshes and ponds is the bullfrog, which advertises its presence by a loud call. This is a male as shown by the large ear drum which is wider than the eye. Males defend their pond territories by calls and fighting, and the size of a male and his depth of call can intimidate rivals and attract females. Bullfrogs are so-called "gape-limited" predators since they will eat almost anything that they can swallow, not only small prey such as spiders and grasshoppers but also baby alligators and snakes.





***Bullfrog, Boone Greenway Created Wetland, 4 May 2018, Watauga County, NC.***

Ridge Mountains where Boone is located. This individual was seen basking along the south fork of the New River on a cool day, in order to raise its body temperature to digest prey more efficiently. It specializes in feeding on aquatic prey and gives birth to live young in contrast to the predominant terrestrial ophidian predator, the black rat snake, which lays eggs. Few venomous snakes pose any threat to humans, yet there is a wide spread fear of all of them which has little factual basis. Indeed it appears that the phobia some people have for snakes is a learned cultural feature and not innate.

Snakes can of course return the favor and eat small frogs and tadpoles, as well as a wide variety of small prey. The amphibious garter snake is well known to most people and they do not usually fear it. But surprisingly, garter snakes actually have mild venom, as do ring-necked snakes that assist them in subduing prey. The occurrence of stripes on garter snakes is an interesting pattern that appears to make it harder for their predators such as birds to focus on a spot to attack them as they slide through the grass.

The northern water snake is common but often mistaken for the poisonous water moccasin which does not occur in the Blue



***Eastern Garter Snake, Boone Greenway Marsh, 1 May 2018, Watauga County, NC.***



***Northern Water Snake, Boone Greenway Marsh, 8 June 2018, Watauga County, NC.***

**Article and photos by Bill Dunson. Please visit Bill's blog at the Lemon Bay Conservancy:**

**<http://lemonbayconservancy.org/news-blog/nature-notes-by-bill-dunson/>**



***Eastern Ring-necked Snake, 27 April 2018, Blowing Rock, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane***



# THROUGH OUR LENS



## *The Nesting Season*



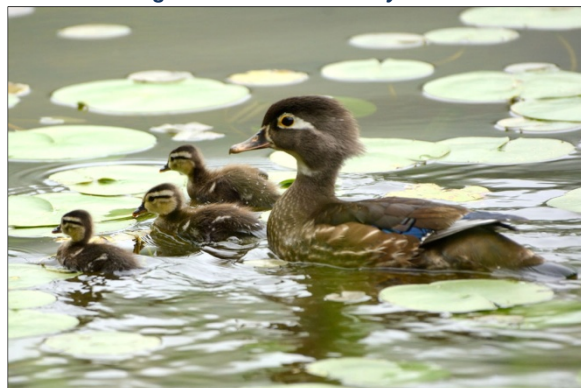
*Chestnut-sided Warbler nest at Trout Lake on 22 June 2018. Photos by S. McNair*



*Carolina Chickadee nest box at the Linville Creek Overlook neighborhood, Vilas, Watauga County. Eggs on 12 May, mother on the nest with recent hatchlings 23 May, and fully feathered nestlings on 4 June. Photos by S. Dowlan*



*Brown Thrasher with a dependent fledgling, 10 July 2018, Sawyer property, Roan Mountain, Carter County, TN. Photo by J. Sawyer.*



*Wood Duck hen with brood, 26 May 2018, Trout Lake, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray*



# The Nesting Season



**Eastern Screech-Owl, young in the nest box on 25 May 2018, and adult in the same nest box on 30 May 2018 at Judi Sawyer's property, Roan Mountain, Carter County, Tennessee. Photo by J. Sawyer.**



**Eastern Kingbird with dependent fledgling, 4 July 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan.**



**Northern Parula gathering nest material, 13 May 2018, Trout Lake, Watauga County Photo by R. Gray.**



**Carolina Chickadee carrying food, 12 May 2018, Judi Sawyer's property, Roan Mountain, Carter County, Tennessee. Photo by J. Sawyer.**



**Tree Swallow nestlings, 4 June 2018, Linville Creek Overlook neighborhood, Vilas, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan.**



**Carolina Chickadee removing a fecal sac, 20 May 2018, Judi Sawyer's property, Roan Mountain, Carter County, Tennessee. Photo by J. Sawyer.**



# *The High Country*



*Pileated Woodpecker, 2 June 2018, Trout Lake, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray*



*Eastern Screech-Owl, 30 April 2018, Brookshire Park, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane*



*Kentucky Warbler, 13 May 2018, Blue Ridge Parkway, Ben Miller area, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Baltimore Oriole, 4 July 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. McNair*



*Spotted Sandpiper, 16 April 2018, Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane*



*American Redstart, 29 April 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Common Yellowthroat, 27 May 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray*



*Northern Waterthrush, 27 April 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



# *The High Country*



*Golden-crowned Kinglet, 2 April 2018, Bass Lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Cedar Waxwing, 5 July 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Ellis*



*Solitary Sandpiper, 18 April 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Black-throated Blue Warbler, 3 May 2018, Blowing Rock, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane*



*Black-throated Blue Warbler, 21 April 2018, Trout lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Common Yellowthroat, 5 July 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Ellis*



*Eastern Kingbird, 2 May 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane*



*Willow Flycatcher, 30 April 2018, Brookshire park, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane*

# Farther Afield in the Carolinas



*Piping Plover, 8 May 2018, South Topsail Beach, Pender County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*White-rumped Sandpiper, 9 May 2018, Fort Fisher State Recreation Area Basin Trail, New Hanover County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Wilson's Plover, 9 May 2018, Mason Inlet Waterbird Management Area, New Hanover County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Bachman's Sparrow, 9 May 2018, Holly Shelter Game Land, Pender County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Clapper Rail, 9 May 2018, Fort Fisher State Recreation Area Basin Trail, New Hanover County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Short-billed Dowitchers, 9 May 2018, Mason Inlet Waterbird Management Area, New Hanover County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



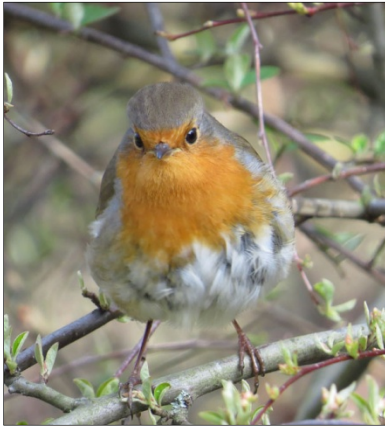
# Out in the Wider World



**Common Eider, 14 April 2018, near Edinburgh, Scotland, U.K. Photo by S. McNair**



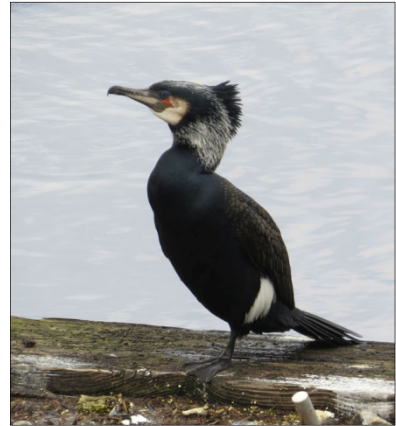
**Tufted Duck, 14 April 2018, near Edinburgh, Scotland, U.K. Photo by S. McNair**



**European Robin, 14 April 2018, Scotland, U.K. Photo by S. McNair**



**Northern Lapwing, 28 April 2018, Scotland, U.K. Photo by S. McNair**



**Great Cormorant, 14 April 2018, Scotland, U.K. Photo by S. McNair**



**Western Meadowlark, 5 May 2018, Paradise Valley, Humboldt County, Nevada. Photo by R. Gray**



**Swainson's Hawk, 5 May 2018, Paradise Valley, Humboldt County, Nevada.. Photo by R. Gray**



**Red Grouse, 22 April 2018 West Highland Trail near Glencoe, Scotland, U.K. Photo by S. McNair**

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August – September – October 2018

Please check our HCAS Yahoo group email regularly for changes and additions to the calendar  
<http://www.highcountryaudubon.org/calendarofevents.html>

## August

1	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
4	8:00 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Come Bird @ Brookshire</b> - Trip leader: Guy McGrane Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
8	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
15	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
18	9:00 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Birds, Bugs, and Blooms</b> - Trip Leader: Bill Dunson – Location to be announced.
21	6:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>HCAS monthly meeting</b> - Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: Beverly Saltonstall's trip to Costa Rica
22	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
29	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members

## September

	9:00 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Birds, Bugs, and Blooms</b> - Trip Leader: Bill Dunson - Date and location to be announced.
1	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Come Bird @ Brookshire</b> - Trip leader: Guy McGrane Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
5	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
6	6:30 p.m.	<b>Swifts Night Out – Lees-McRae College</b>
7 - 9	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>"Summit 2018: Migrations in the Mountains" hosted by Audubon North Carolina and Elisha Mitchell Audubon Society</b> – Crown Plaza Resort, Asheville, NC <a href="http://nc.audubon.org/summit-2018">http://nc.audubon.org/summit-2018</a>
9	6:30 p.m.	<b>Swifts Night Out - Wilkesboro Elementary School</b>
12	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
13	6:30 p.m.	<b>Swifts Night Out – Lees-McRae College RAIN DATE</b>
16	6:30 p.m.	<b>Swifts Night Out - Wilkesboro Elementary School RAIN DATE</b>
18	6:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>HCAS monthly meeting</b> - Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: Sue Wells Grant recipient Tyler Pyle will report on his research.
19	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
21-22	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Carolina Bird Club Fall Meeting</b> – Marriott Hotel, Greenville, SC <a href="https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/meetings/2018/Greenville/">https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/meetings/2018/Greenville/</a>
26	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members

## October

3	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
6	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Come Bird @ Brookshire</b> - Trip leader: Guy McGrane Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
10	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
12-14		<b>Hawk Migration Association of North America 2018 Conference</b> – Detroit, Michigan <a href="https://www.hmana.org/hmana-conference-detroit-2018-counting-towards-the-future/">https://www.hmana.org/hmana-conference-detroit-2018-counting-towards-the-future/</a>
16	6:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>HCAS monthly meeting</b> - Holiday Inn Express, Boone Program: ASU Professor Richard Gray
17	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	<b>Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk</b> - Trip Leaders: HCAS members



# Raptor Migration Monitoring – Fall 2018



## Grandfather Mountain

The Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation (GMSF) sponsors raptor migration counts every day in September, unless weather impedes visibility from either Linville Peak or Half-moon Overlook. GMSF is always happy to have volunteers to help the official counters. Executive Director Jesse Pope will conduct an instructional orientation for people who are interested in volunteering. Volunteers don't need to be experts in raptor identification; counters must just be willing to scan the skies and point out birds to those who can identify them.

GMSF asks that people commit to 4 hours of watching in order to get free admission to the park. Anyone who volunteers for more than 40 hours total will receive an individual Bridge Club Membership (annual pass). People who are interested in volunteering, and in participating in the orientation session should contact Gina Diggs, [research@grandfather.com](mailto:research@grandfather.com).

## Mahogany Rock

From August 15 to November 30, the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) will conduct an official Hawk Watch at the Mahogany Rock Overlook at Milepost 235 on the Blue Ridge Parkway near Sparta, North Carolina in Alleghany County. A large grassy area provides plenty of space to set up chairs and scopes. The overlook accommodates long-range views to the north, northwest, and south, with more limited views in all other directions. Restrooms and camping are available six miles south on the Parkway in Doughton Park. The town of Sparta has gas, food, and lodging five miles to the north. Bed-and-Breakfast lodging can be found within three miles of Mahogany Rock Overlook.

HCAS will schedule a field trip to Mahogany Rock in September. The scheduled date will depend on actual migration conditions. Please check the HCAS Yahoo group email for details. You are also encouraged to use the group email to see if others would like to join you there on any specific date. For information on the efforts at this location, see NC Birding Trail, Mountain Guide, p. 16, as well as this URL link: <http://hawkcount.org/siteinfo.php?rsite=300>.

## Blue Ridge Parkway – Eastern Watauga County

Guy McGrane will again be conducting hawk watches this fall along the Blue Ridge Parkway in eastern Watauga County. According to Guy: *We are trying to get a better idea of what site(s) may be the most productive for finding migrating hawks. Last year we concentrated on Osborne Mountain Overlook about 2 miles south of US421, and this site was very good, but there was some indication that a site further east at Elk Mountain Overlook, about 2 miles north of US421, might be even better. To compare these sites, we will attempt to station observers at each site on the same days.* If you would like to help out, please contact Guy at [Badgerboy@wilkes.net](mailto:Badgerboy@wilkes.net).

# Swifts Night Out



Chimney Swifts are residents in the Carolinas from early April through September or even October, in some places. They generally start building their nests in May. Both sexes help build the nest by breaking off dead twigs, fastening them together with their saliva, and then fastening them to the insides of chimneys or large hollow logs. They lay 3-6 white eggs mid-June. Unlike most songbirds, incubation requires 18 days. Both adults incubate and care for the young, which stay in or near the nest for 24 days or longer. The babies brace their short tails against the vertical walls and exercise their wings until ready to emerge. After nesting season, the Chimney Swifts start flocking together, and a thousand or more may roost in a single large chimney. There are numerous chimneys in the HCAS region which attract the flocks of Chimney Swifts. This year we are again scheduling two viewing opportunities.

## Lees-McRae College - Thursday, September 6

From Boone, follow North Carolina (NC) Highway 105 to Linville Gap (also known as Tynecastle). Turn right on NC Highway 184 and proceed to Banner Elk. Find the North Carolina Building on campus by using a map of Lees-McRae College at <http://www.lmc.edu/admissions/visit/files/lmc-campus-map.pdf>. Banner Elk can also be reached by taking U.S. Highway 421 north from Boone. Turn left on NC 194. Be sure to turn right in front of the Mast Store to stay on NC 194, and follow this more winding and more scenic route to Banner Elk. HCAS members will begin to meet at the college by 6:30 p.m. Bring a chair and picnic supper, if you want, or just come and enjoy the show at sundown!

We're also hopeful that Nina Fischesser, Director of the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center at Lees-McRae College, will have some Chimney Swifts ready for release that evening. The rain date for this event is Sunday, September 13.

## Wilkesboro Elementary School - Sunday, September 9

From Boone, follow Highway 421 South and take exit 286 B for NC 268, which is the first exit after you cross the Yadkin River. At the end of the ramp, go straight across NC 268 onto School Street. Follow School Street to its end. The parking lot will be on the right. There will be plenty of room to set out chairs to enjoy the event. We will gather in the parking lot in front of the chimney of an old unused boiler that the swifts have adopted. The chimney is shorter and on the same level as the parking lot. The swifts circle closely overhead and the sound is fantastic. You get a very close view of their activity.

Bring a picnic if you'd like. HCAS members will start gathering at 6:00 p.m. The swifts will start circling slowly and by 7:00 p.m. will start entering the chimney. The rain date for this event is Sunday, September 16.

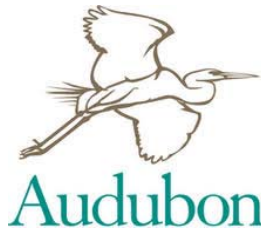
**Visit North Carolina Audubon Society's "Swift Night Out" web page at: <http://nc.audubon.org/news/join-swift-night-out-event-across-north-carolina>.**



## 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 



*Red-breasted Merganser, one of 12 seen on 27 April 2018 near Linville, Avery County. Photo by J. Sawyer.*



Hoots Volume 10, Issue 3 introduces quarterly field notes of bird sightings in the High Country from the previous three months. HCAS member Guy McGrane will summarize sightings of unusual and rare birds, as well as observed trends for our more common and expected species. Guy will usually glean these sightings from eBird, but please do forward your thoughts and comments, such as “I saw very few Belted Kingfishers in the High Country this winter as compared to last winter.” Sometimes what we are not seeing is as significant as what we are seeing!

The reporting period for sightings and observations in the current issue is March, April and May 2018. The regular schedule for upcoming issues will be:

- Field notes for June and July will be published in late November in Volume 10, Issue 4.
- Field notes for August, September, October, and November 2018 will be published in late February in Volume 11, Issue 1.
- Field notes for December 2018, and January and February 2019 will be published in late May in Volume 11, Issue 2.
- Field notes for March, April, and May 2019 will be published in late July in Volume 11, Issue 3.

This schedule accommodates completion of the field notes that is consistent with typical bird field note reporting periods while maintaining the current Hoots schedule for publication. Please submit sightings, observations, and photos of less common species, especially those not posted to eBird directly to Guy McGrane - [badgerboy@wilkes.net](mailto:badgerboy@wilkes.net).



*Northern Rough-winged Swallow, 5 April 2018, Price Lake, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane*



*Golden-winged Warbler, 5 May 2018, Hampton Creek Cove, Carter County, Tennessee. Photo by J. Sawyer*



## **SPRING MIGRATION SEASON – March, April, and May 2018**

**Snow Goose**, 1 at KERR on 16 and 18 Mar, and a flyover flock heard only at VALLE on 24 Mar

**American Wigeon**, 4 photographed at PRICE on 5 Apr.

**American Black Duck**, 1 photographed numerous times at VCCP from 10 Apr to 17 Apr

**Northern Shoveler**, 6 photographed at BASS on 2 Apr.

**Northern Pintail**, 1 photographed at CEMPOND on 19 Mar.

**Green-winged Teal**, 2 at HAYS on 21 Mar; 1 female photographed at VCCP on 25 and 26 Mar.

**Redhead**, 1 at BASS on 10 Mar.

**Ring-necked Duck**, a large flock of 57 at PRICE on 10 Mar.

**Greater Scaup**, 1 late and rare individual at KERR on 18 May.

**Lesser Scaup**, a large flock of 51 at PRICE on 18 Mar.

**Hooded Merganser**, a large flock of 15 at PRICE on 18 Mar.

**Red-breasted Merganser**, a fairly late single bird at PRICE on 5 and 6 May.

**Ruddy Duck**, 1 at BASS on 31 Mar.



**Green-winged Teal**, 25 March 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County.  
Photo by S. Dowlan



**Northern Pintail**, 19 March 2018, near Jefferson, Ashe County. Photo by G. McGrane



**American Black Duck**, 15 March 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County.  
Photo by S. Dowlan



**American Wigeon**, 5 April 2018, Price Lake, Watauga County.  
Photo by S. Dowlan



**Red-breasted Mergansers**, 16 March, Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane



**Northern Shovelers**, 2 April 2018, Bass Lake, Watauga County.  
Photo by S. Dowlan



**Snow Goose**, 16 March, Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane

**Double-crested Cormorant**, notably few sightings this spring throughout the reporting area.  
**Common Loon**, 1 photographed at PRICE on 8 April.  
**Horned Grebe**, a large flock of 30 included pair doing mating dance at KERR on 16 Mar.  
**Ruffed Grouse**, 1 photographed at BRPOBIDS on 6-Apr and 1 at HOLLOW on 25 May.  
**Great Egret**, 1 photographed at VCCP on 14 Apr and 2 at WHIPACAD on 5 May.  
**Sora**, 2 at BROOK on 30 Apr and 5 May; 1 at VCCP on 12 May.  
**Killdeer**, 1 female photographed with 4 fluffy chicks at GREEN on 5 May.  
**Lesser Yellowlegs**, groups of 4 and 8 at MULFIELD on 20 Apr and 25 Apr and 4 at VCCP on 27 Apr.  
**Greater Yellowlegs**, 2 at HATS on 21 Mar and 2 at MULFIELD on 25 Apr.  
**Least Sandpiper**, 3 reports of up to 6 from at LOWES from 8 May to 20 May and 2 groups of 2 and 7 at EASTWILKES on 7 May.



*Great Egret, 4 April 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Lesser Yellowlegs, 27 April 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Ruffed Grouse, 16 April 2018, Blue Ridge Parkway near Obids, Ashe County. Photo by G. McGrane*

**Bonaparte's Gull**, the only report this spring was from KERR of 1 bird on 16 Mar.  
**Laughing Gull**, 2 birds photographed at MULFIELD on 30 May- only 5th all-time report for the 5 county reporting area.  
**Ring-billed Gull**, 2 photographed at BROOK on 7 Apr and 2 photographed at VALLE on 15 Apr.  
**Herring Gull**, 1 very late bird at KERR on 18 May.  
**Osprey**, first documented nest in the area photographed at KERR from 27 Mar to 29 Apr. Nest success is not known.



*Bald Eagle on a nest, 11 April 2018, River Pointe Lane, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane*



*Bald Eagle nestling, 5 July 2018, River Pointe Lane, Watauga County. Photo by S. Ellis*

**Bald Eagle**, second successful nesting documented and photographed at RIVPT.  
**Golden Eagle**, 1 very late bird at ROAN on 31 May.  
**Northern Harrier**, 3 separate reports from Alleghany County at ENNICE from 10 Mar to 21 Mar.  
**American Kestrel**, a very late possible breeder at ENNICE on 24 May.  
**Merlin**, individuals at BROOK on 25 Apr, MTJEFFOL on 4 May and at BEACON on 13 May.  
**Peregrine Falcon**, birds apparently breeding at BIGLOST and at PROFILE.  
**Northern Saw-whet Owl**, 1 calling recorded at SIMSPOND on 5 May.  
**Barn Owl**, 1 found injured by a storm at HAYS on 1 Jun.



**Great Horned Owl**, 1 heard several times at Todd on 30 Apr and 1 at LINVILLE on 16 May.

**Alder Flycatcher**, breeding birds were noted at MEATCAMP and BROOK in late spring.

**Great-crested Flycatcher**, a large influx was noted throughout the reporting area from 17 May through 15 Jun. Some may have nested.

**Warbling Vireo**, a single bird was heard at BROOK on 3 Jun.

**Philadelphia Vireo**, a single bird was seen and heard at LEWISFORK on 7 May.

**Fish Crow**, birds were reported by nasal calls only at LAKES on 1 and 2 Apr. Reports of Fish Crow in the High Country should presently be treated with suspicion as there is no documentation for their occurrence, such as a recording of what is definitely Fish Crows vocalizing, and also because juvenile and female American Crows are known to utter very similar calls.

**Cliff Swallow**, colony sites were occupied during late spring at BROWNWOOD, ROMINGER, and ROARING.



*Rusty Blackbirds, 27 April, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan*



*Great-crested Flycatcher, 17 May, Linville Creek Overlook neighborhood, Vilas, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan*

**Winter Wren**, single birds were seen and heard at BEECH on 14 Jun, on 6 Jun at PONDMTN. Up to 8 birds were seen and heard on GRAND from the Swinging Bridge between 20 May and 24 Jun. 2 were singing on the Grandfather Trail on GRAND on 15 June, and 4 were singing (one recorded) on PROFILE on 20 Jun.

**Marsh Wren**, a single bird was seen and heard at BROOK on 30 Apr and photographed on 19 May.

**Hermit Thrush**, 5 were heard at ELKNOB on 24 May, 5 were reported on POND on 8 Jun, several were reported at GRAND on 15 Jun, and 4 were heard at BOONESCOUT on 18 Jun.

**Swainson's Warbler**, Singing birds were noted at PRICE on 9 and 23 May, at TROUT on 13 and 23 May (photographed), and at HOLLOW on the Tanawha Trail on 26 May and 23 Jun. Breeding appears to be increasing in area.



*Marsh Wren, 19 May 2018, Brookshire Park, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray*

**Yellow-breasted Chat**, a single bird was reported at BIGLAUREL on 5 Jun.

**Savannah Sparrow**, a noteworthy flock of 15 was present at VCCP from 5 Apr to 2 May, single birds were singing on territory at NILE on 17 May, at OSEE on 24 May, and at CHAPPELL on 5 Jun.

**Vesper Sparrow**, 1 bird was reported at BROOK on 1 Apr, and 2 birds were seen several times between 7 Apr and 2 May at VCCP. 1 bird was reported at ELKNOB on 19 and 22 May.

**White-crowned Sparrow**, 1 bird was at BROOK on 5 May and another was at ROBY on 15 May.

**Grasshopper Sparrow**, birds were reported from several locations at ENNICE on 14 May and 19 Jun. Up to 11 birds

were on territory at HAYS from 17 May to 3 Jun. A singing male was reported at PONDMTN on 6 Jun.

**Summer Tanager**, a migrating male was reported at TWINOAKS on 20 Apr.

**Blue Grosbeak**, two likely migrants were reported at WAGONER on 2 May, a possible breeding bird was seen at NILE on 17 and 24 May and on 19 Jun, and another potential breeding bird was reported at SPARTA on 20 Jun.

**Bobolink**, 2 males (likely migrants) were seen at VCCP on 27 Apr, 3 were at BROOK on 5 May and at STRATFORD on 9 May. Birds were breeding at the usual place at MTVERNON on 5 May, and a new breeding colony was found at CHAPPELL on 5 Jun and revisited on 12 Jun.

**Rusty Blackbird**, Birds were seen and photographed numerous times at VCCP beginning on 21 Mar. 2 lingering birds were still present and photographed on 27 Apr.

**Purple Finch**, 5 reports for the spring period is very low.



*Osprey on a nest, 16 April 2018, Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane*

**AREA KEY:**

BASS-Bass Lake, Watauga; BEACON-Beacon Heights Overlook on Blue Ridge Parkway, Avery; BEECH-Beech Mountain Area, Avery/Watauga; BIGLAUREL-Big Laurel Road Area, Ashe; BIGLOST-Big Lost Cove Cliffs, Avery; BOONESCOUT-Daniel Boone Scout Trail, Caldwell & Watauga; BROOK-Brookshire Park, Watauga; BROWNWOOD-Brownwood Bridge on New River, Ashe/Watauga; BRPOBIDS=Blue Ridge Parkway near Obids, Ashe; CEMPOND=Cemetery Pond near Jefferson, Ashe; CHAPPELL=Chappell Farm Road area, Watauga; ELKKNOB-Elk Knob State Park, Watauga; ENNICE-Ennice community, Alleghany; GRAND-Grandfather Mountain; GREEN-Boone Greenway, Watauga; HAYS-Hays Community area, Wilkes; HAYS-Hays Community area, Wilkes; HOLLOW-Holloway Mtn. Road; KERR-W. Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes; LAKES-Lake area Bass/Trout/Price, Watauga; LEWISFORK-Lewis Fork Overlook, Blue Ridge Parkway, Wilkes; LINCREEK-Linville Creek area, Watauga; LOWES=Lowe's Park at Riversedge on the Yadkin River Greenway, Wilkes; MTJEFFOL=Mt. Jefferson Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway, Ashe; MTVERNON=Mount Vernon Church and cemetery, Watauga; MULFIELD=Mulberry Fields on the Yadkin River Greenway, Wilkes; NILE-Nile Road area, Alleghany; OSEE-Osee Road area, Alleghany; PONDMTN=Pond Mountain Gamelands, Ashe; PRICE-Price lake, Watauga; PROFILE-Profile Trail, Avery; RIVPT-River Pointe Subdivision, Watauga; ROAN-Roan Mountain, Mitchell near the Avery border; ROARING-Roaring River Bridge over Yadkin River, Wilkes; ROBY=Roby Shoemaker Wetlands Park, Avery; ROMINGER-Rominger Rd. Bridge over Watauga River, Watauga; SIMSPOND-Sims Pond on Blue Ridge Parkway, Watauga; SPARTA=City of Sparta, Alleghany; STRATFORD-Stratford Road area, Alleghany; TODD-Todd Area, Watauga/Ashe; TWINOAKS-Twin Oaks community, Alleghany; WAGONER-Wagoner access area of New River State Park, Ashe; WHIPACAD-Whip-poor-will Academy, Wilkes; WHPLRD-White Plains Road, Wilkes; VALLE-Valle Crucis general area, Watauga; VCCP: Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga; VILAS, Watauga

## **Soaring Toward the Future: New Challenges in Raptor Migration October 12-14, 2018, Detroit, Michigan**

The Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA) presents its 2018 conference, "Soaring Toward the Future: New Challenges in Raptor Migration." Online registration at:

<https://www.hmana.org/conference/detroit/hmana-conference-detroit-registration/>



# High Country Hoots Submission Guidelines

**For the next issue (Nov-Dec-Jan), please have all material to the editor by October 12, 2018. Send all material to [OWLHOOTER@aol.com](mailto:OWLHOOTER@aol.com)**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Please contact me with questions! [Owlhooter@aol.com](mailto: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.

<http://www.highcountryaudubon.org>

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*The High Country Audubon Society is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization. Donations to the High Country Audubon Society are tax-deductible as allowed by applicable law.*

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