

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

High Country Audubon Society

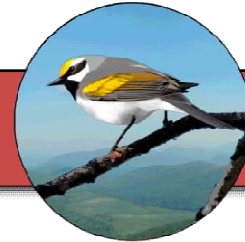


Serving Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties

Volume 10 – Issue 4

November-December 2018 and January 2019

President's Message



Dear Fellow Birders,

It seems like I start every Hoots President's Message the same way – where has the time gone? We were just talking about the excitement of coming migration and now it's November. We had a great fall migration season, though, with two very successful Swifts Nights Out as well as field trips to Rockfish Gap, Kiptopeke State Park, and Hefner Gap. In Kiptopeke, we were fortunate enough to experience a record day of Peregrine Falcons with 121 crossing overhead. HCAS members also volunteered at hawk watches either at Mahogany Rock or Grandfather Mountain. The Grandfather Mountain Hawk Watch had its second highest raptor count day on record. Exciting stuff!!!

HCAS also continued its popular weekly and monthly walks. Now that our weekly Valle Crucis walks have ended for the year, I'd like to thank Guy McGrane, Anita Clemmer and Steve Dowlan for their excellent guide services all season. I'd also like to thank Bill Dunson for leading our first season of "Birds, Bugs and Blooms" walks. These were quite popular, with a great deal of knowledge gained by those in attendance. Finally, we're always indebted to Guy McGrane for not only leading the monthly Brookshire Park walks throughout the year, but for tracking bird sightings in our 5-county region.



Enthusiastic HCAS members at Kiptopeke State Park, Northampton County, Virginia on 5 October 2018. Photo by D. Shetterly

The most exciting endeavor to me this fall was our "Wetlands Appeal" fundraising campaign. The Board of Directors of HCAS sincerely thanks all those who donated. We profoundly appreciate your dedication to this organization. To date, HCAS has raised \$6525 toward its goal of \$15,000. We're hoping that we can find grant funds to match our private funding, which will then help us achieve our goal. Although we had a September 30th deadline for the fundraising in order to establish the amount available as match, we always welcome further donations to this very worthwhile set of projects.

The funds will be used to build a viewing platform for the soon-to-be restored wetlands at Brookshire Park, and as funding allows, boardwalks at Foscoe Wetlands. Eventually we also hope to implement Curtis Smalling's bird-friendly plan for Green Valley Park. These projects won't begin on the ground until late next spring, so stay tuned.

Looking forward toward the winter season, we'll have our usual Christmas Bird Counts as well as our monthly Brookshire Park walks. Additionally, Martha Cutler is busy planning multiple field trips to wintering waterfowl locations, so check the website calendar and group email frequently for updates. Martha is also working on next year's monthly meeting programs. If you know of exciting speakers or topics, please let Martha know.

HCAS is actively working to improve our outreach capabilities, which we hope in the

long run will lead to more interest in birding across our 5-county region. We now have a new intern, Matthew Roach, a senior at ASU, working on our Facebook and Instagram accounts, as well as researching festivals and submitting information to the newspapers. Additionally, Beverly Saltonstall has launched our new website, which we hope is a more user-friendly design and which we think will better inform people about HCAS and its activities.

Finally, HCAS received an "Audubon in Action" grant late this summer, which will help ASU launch its own Audubon Chapter, and which provides funding to train students and HCAS members on how to successfully advocate for our birds. If you're interested in this training, let us know.

That's all for now. Stay warm, and happy birding.

Bill Skelton



Swifts Night out at Lees-McCrae College on 6 September 2018. Photo by D. Shetterly

Birds, Bugs and Blooms Walks

Article compiled from reports by Bill Dunson and Debbie Shetterly

Photos by Bill and Margaret Dunson

Bill Dunson led groups of up to 30 enthusiastic participants on Birds, Bugs and Blooms walks on July 21 at Brookshire Park, August 30 at the Shetterly property and on September 8 at Todd Island. The purpose of these tours is to examine and discuss the makeup of quality habitat for birds and wildlife, why it is important to do so, and how to implement changes that develop such habitat.



Birding along the Hillside Loop Trail at Brookshire Park, Watauga County on July 21.

On July 21 the third Saturday Birds, Bugs and Blooms walk was held at Brookshire Park on the Hillside Loop trail. The weather forecast was rainy but the actual weather turned out to be very pleasant. Twelve intrepid hikers turned out to discover what nature had to offer on this mid-summer morning. On the walk in from the third soccer field parking lot the group found an interesting mix of roadside weeds, forest edge, grassy meadow and creek side habitats. Willow Flycatchers and an Alder Flycatcher sound-alike are often found in the wet marsh with some emergent trees (willows and black cherries).

As the group ascended the forested hill they found a patch of beautiful yellow false foxgloves (*Aureolaria*) in bloom, a species which is parasitic on tree roots. Near the top of the hill there is a large field that is mowed periodically and has sparrows and goldfinches. As they crested the hill, they found a stand of large mature trees that provide shade and access to woodland birds. The view of Boone and the rolling ridges is spectacular from this vantage point. All agreed that this is one of the most under-appreciated nature trails in the area and plan to return again soon.

About 30 people attended the walk at the Shetterly property on August 30. Bill described the succession that likely led to the woods in its current mix of species. The Shetterlys then discussed some of the modifications they had made to enhance the bird and wildlife habitat. They planted arrowwood viburnum, black cherry, mulberry, and lots of wildflowers for pollinators. Bill identified a number of woodland species, especially the mountain holly (*ilex montana*) which is growing throughout the woods.



Group discussion at the Shetterly property, Watauga County on August 30.

Fourteen people attended the walk around the 0.9 mile loop at Todd Island Park on Sept 8, 2018. The riparian vegetation there is rank and weedy as affected by the riverside location. The best bird of the day was an Osprey seen carrying a fish while flying overhead. The best bug was a

praying mantis. There were numerous blooms of interest, including gaura, wing stem, iron weed, sun drops, spiderwort, Jerusalem artichoke, goldenrod, and mugwort.

The plant family of the day was the buckwheats. The family name for buckwheats is *Polygonaceae*, which means "many knees," and is named for the numerous joints along the stems. Climbing vines of false buckwheat (also known as bindweed, but not the same as the unrelated morning glory bindweed) were everywhere. Other common members of this family were seen, including various docks, smartweed, and tearthumb. Edible rhubarb is also in this family. This park is a great place to learn the differences between the leaves of black walnut and butternut. Since some birds migrate north in spring along rivers, this beautiful park could be a prime spot to watch for birds in April. Guy pointed out that it can be good for winter sparrows as well. This was the last Birds, Bugs and Blooms walk of the season, but the Dunsons will return next year when the snowbirds migrate back from Florida.



Birds, Bugs and Blooms walk at Todd Island, Ashe County on August 30 2018.

For a one-stop reference for North American Plants, visit the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service Plants Database home page at <https://plants.sc.egov.usda.gov/java/>

Topics with hyperlinks on the home page include:

- See a list of the plants in my state
- Learn about the wetland plants in my region
- Learn about all the endangered plants of the U.S.
- Learn about noxious and invasive plants
- Search for and view images of plants
- Read and print abstracts about important conservation plants
- Download data or posters
- Contribute plant distribution information to the PLANTS database
- Get ecological descriptions of sites from around the country
- View the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map
- And much more...

Kudos Corner



New Members

Paige Fulk, Boone
Thomas & Cathryn McNeil, Elizabethton, TN
Al & Mary Olson & Henry Bixby, Boone
Irene Burke, Powder Horn Mountain & Wake Forest
Jennifer Dotson, Boone
Matt Connell, Boone
Melissa & Bill Carter, Valle Crucis & Chapel Hill
Marlene Reed, Boone

Donations

Bob Cherry
Houck & K.B. Medford
Janet & Richard Paulette
Mark & Dolly Rose
Janie Wey

Kudos to Bob Williams, an HCAS friend from Hickory and Sugar Mountain, who presented a program on behalf of HCAS to the Burke County Master Gardeners. His main focus was backyard bird identification, but he also gave some general details about birding, binoculars, field guides, the formation of National Audubon in 1905, and the enactment of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act in 1918. They had a particular interest in learning about the Wilson Creek Important Bird Area, so Bob went to the effort to go to the IBA and get some photos to include in his program. He also provided the group with Audubon North Carolina's 700 Bird-Friendly Native Plants for North Carolina. We thank Bob for all the time and effort he put into his presentation.

Thank you to *Vidalia Restaurant & Wine Bar* for its HCAS sponsorship renewal. This will be its sixth year as a sponsor! Check the restaurant out and thank them personally for their support.

HCAS Wetlands Appeal

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

David Belanger
Emmett Bills
John & Bettie Bond
Caroline & Gary Bradford
Judi Brown
Brenda & Monty Combs
Martha Cutler
Cindy & Chuck Darling
Janet & Jeffrey Derick
Steve Dowlan
Jason Drake

Stephen Fleming
Patricia Geiger
Juliana Henderson
Dana & Nancy Hershey
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Frank Lewellen
Emory & E.V. Maiden
Lynne & Charles Mauney
Al & Mary Olson
Janet Palmer
Janet & Richard Paulette
Patricia Rusch

Julia Ralston
Mark & Dolly Rose
Judi Sawyer
Judy Scurry
Debbie Segal & Robert Knight
Debbie & Jimmy Shetterly
Gary & Janice Sortor
Francie Troy
Glenda Vance
Janie & Chris Wey
Bill & Vicky Wise



Why Can't They Just Leave the Names of Birds Alone?

Article and photos by Steve Dowlan

The pursuit of birding as a pastime is for many practitioners disconnected from the science of ornithology. This might be referred to as “small b” birding versus “big B” birding. For the majority of birders, many of whom spend all of their birding hours watching their feeders, the enjoyment of birds does not require any depth of knowledge about the science of birds.

When I started birding as a teenager and later as an excited novice, I had had the pleasure of “small b” birding with people who were much older than me. I respected many of these older birders as mentors, and a few had even birded with Roger Tory Peterson, iconic author of what is considered to be the first modern bird field guide. Peterson’s guide was the only game in town for a very long time! These mentors were generally a wealth of experiential knowledge, and they would willingly and enthusiastically pass on the wisdom they had accumulated. Their enjoyment of birds was often grounded in the permanence of the names they had learned as younger birders.

For many years... decades even, the common names they used did not change much, nor did the taxonomic order of bird families as they appeared in the Peterson Field Guide. Many common names represent no discernible relationship between the species and its field marks or habitat relationships. For instance, how often do you really see a red belly on a Red-bellied Woodpecker? How often have you seen a Magnolia Warbler in a magnolia tree? Are you any more likely to see a Tennessee Warbler in Tennessee than in North Carolina? Still, these common names, for the most part, had not changed since they were originally assigned.

The long-lasting and apparently durable taxonomic order of bird families prior to the 1980s was based on factors related to where and when a species first appeared in the fossil record, the ability of related species to interbreed, and on similarities in physical features (morphology) among families. As the pace and complexity of the science of birds accelerated, name changes and family realignments changed frequently through the 1980s and 1990s, along with the proliferation of new field guides. This became a constant source of irritation to my older birding mentors in the “small b” faction. The comment I heard more than once was; ***“why can’t they just leave the names of birds alone?”***

It is important, however to understand that the taxonomic sequence of bird species, families and orders always has been fluid, although more like molasses than water for most of the 20th century. Modern advances in gene sequencing have revolutionized the depth of understanding of these relationships at an ever-increasing rate, resulting in ever more frequent changes to names and relationships between bird species. Morphological and fossil evidence are still used, but information from the DNA of bird species has led to major updates in the common and scientific names, as well as the taxonomic order of species, families, and even orders of birds in the most recently published field guides, especially compared to those from 20 or even 10 years ago.

All of these changes are based on decisions of the American Ornithologists’ Union’s North American Classification Committee (NACC). The process for evaluating these changes occurs each year, when ornithologists gather as a committee to discuss and implement changes after considering the latest research and

analyses. This committee, presided over by 12 ornithologists and evolutionary biologists is tasked with a never-ending quest to assemble the evolutionary relationships between bird species and families. Each donates his or her spare time to the cause. These changes give birders the luxury few other naturalists have: a single, codified set of names and relationships. As of 2010 the NACC began posting their deliberations as well as the changes themselves in order to keep birders in the loop on why names changed. You can explore these changes at www.bit.ly/aouchanges.

The recent realignment of falcons in the taxonomic order of birds as presented in *eBird* away from hawks and eagles and toward songbirds and parrots has, I am certain, caused many honored but departed birders to rage from their graves, and it certainly will confuse anyone who has spent much time watching both falcons and parrots. If you focus specifically on the appearance, diets and behaviors of parrots and falcons, the two groups could hardly appear to be further apart.

Birds we know as parrots formerly appeared in the taxonomic sequence in field guides between pigeons and cuckoos as one family – *Psittacidae* in the order *Psittaciformes*. Species of parrots have plumages with bright saturated colors, are almost entirely vegetarian, are known for intelligence and social tendencies, are nonmigratory, and are found mostly in tropics. Parrots do not seem to be superficially similar to any other group of birds.



Species we know as falcons formerly were presented as the family *Falconidae* within the order *Falconiformes*, along with hawks, eagles and new world vultures. Falcons are generally

solitary top-level predators, and have plumage mostly in muted earth tones. Falcons are found from the tropics to the Arctic, and include a species with one of the longest migratory routes of all birds. The form and function of falcons appears to strongly resemble those of hawks, eagles, and kites to the casual observer. Because of these obvious differences, it is certainly fair to ask: “How can we be sure of this surprising and counter-intuitive change to the way we understand the relationship between parrots and falcons”?



Clues were found by examining the entire genome - the complete sequence of DNA - of species within the two groups. Specifically, researchers from universities in Germany and the United States studied unique “transposable element insertions” that are shared exclusively between closely related orders and families. The very simplest definition of a transposable element, also known as a “jumping gene” is that it is a specific DNA sequence that can change its position within a genome.

These jumping genes may create or reverse mutations and alter a cell's genetic identity and genome size. In a 2011 paper published in the journal *Nature Communications*, the researchers presented statistically significant evidence that, based on similarities in transposable elements parrots are the closest relatives of songbirds, and falcons are the second-closest related order. Another way to think about these relationships is that parrots, songbirds and falcons definitely share an ancestral species.

I completely understand the level of exasperation that would be experienced today by my birding mentors when a falcon is

suddenly no longer close cousin to an eagle, and instead a slightly-more-distant cousin to a shrike. It does not seem to make much sense. The Peregrine Falcon they had been observing and enjoying for decades still looked and acted like a Peregrine Falcon did when they first were introduced to the name, although some might have first observed a “Duck Hawk”... Their enjoyment of the species had not changed. A Peregrine Falcon was and still is a magnificent example of sheer power and mastery of flight. Shrikes are predatory and very regal birds, but nothing like falcons, right?

As a natural resource professional, I also appreciate the excitement of seeing the same falcon in a different big-picture context. It is fun to imagine an ancestral bird flying over my head that appears to be part falcon, part parrot and part shrike, diverging and changing through thousands of generations to become a Peregrine Falcon, Scarlet McCaw and Loggerhead Shrike, each thrilling to see and hear for unique reasons, but bonded by common ancestry. I enjoy the buzz when “counterintuitive” has become “realization.” Through evolution, life finds different paths to achieve similar outcomes.

I am grateful for the exposure I had to both the “small b” birders and the “big B” birders during my life and career. For me, the pastime of

birding and the science of birds coexist with no conflict, because both feed appreciation for the natural world and a sense of wonder, even if at different levels.

As I skate along the fringe between the pastime and science of birds, I fondly remember the friends and mentors, living and departed who encouraged me and influenced my appreciation for birds. They remind me that the science of ornithology has been greatly influenced by citizen practitioners who learned to diligently observe and record; **Walter Fye**, a businessman, trash collector and bird bander who handed me a live Yellow-breasted Chat when I was 15; **Bill Kehew**, a high school French teacher who invited me on to his porch better see his feeder birds; **Charles Robbe**, Professor Emeritus of History who taught me that I could hand-feed chickadees; **Harry Nehls**, a retired postal worker who deserves a statue in honor of his many decades of calm leadership in Oregon birding circles; and **Michel Kleinbaum**, Holocaust survivor, Korean War veteran, Manhattan jeweler, and field guide artist who told me harrowing stories of escape and joyous stories of discovery that I will never forget.

I owe each of them a debt of gratitude for instilling in me appreciation of both the pastime science of birds.

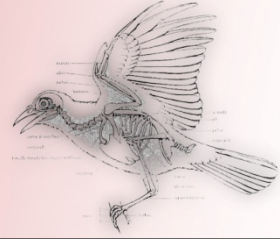


Yellow-billed Cuckoo 10 August 2008, Brookshire Park, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson,



Common Yellowthroat, 4 August 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

The Science of Birds



The Birds Overhead

Article by Bob Cherry

Seeing large flocks of birds flying overhead during spring or fall migration, it's easy to wonder how many birds are on the move. During migration every day new birds arrive as old ones continue their journeys in what seems at time to be an endless stream. But how many birds are there; that's what researchers at Cornell Lab of Ornithology wondered too.

Lead author, Adriaan Dokter, developed algorithms that looked at biomass measurements picked up by weather radar in several locations in the U.S. To do this they looked at total biomass and removed effects of weather and flying insects, leaving just the amount of birds that were observed. In this way they could determine how many birds flew over a given area during spring and fall migrations.



Using these data Dokter determined that an average of four billion birds flew south into the U.S. from Canada every fall. During the same time 4.7 billion birds migrated out of the U.S. to the tropics. In the spring the numbers were lower with 3.5 billion birds returning from the tropics and 2.6 billion birds going back into Canada.

You probably noticed from these numbers that the birds migrating in the spring were fewer than the number of birds migrating in the fall, and that the success of birds returning to the U.S. differed between the two borders. In fact

the birds coming to the U.S. from the south returned at a rate of 76% while those that returned to Canada had a rate of only 64% on average from 2013 to 2017.

This was a surprise to the researchers since the common assumption has been that birds wintering in the U.S. survive better than the birds wintering in the tropics, mainly due to the much longer, more hazardous migration that they endured. One reason the researchers came up with for why birds wintering in the U.S. have a higher mortality rate is because of increased habitat disturbance and that there are more buildings for the birds to crash into.

For more information about how radar can be used to follow bird migrations there a great summary on eBird at <https://ebird.org/news/radar/>

Did You Know?

Beginning in 1888, Church and Co. commissioned talented artists of the time to create original artwork featuring birds. The company's first series of "Beautiful Birds of America" trading cards used this artwork to promote the importance of preserving the environment. The 2x3 inch cards were produced and inserted in boxes of Arm & Hammer Brand Soda. The reverse side of each of the first two series of 60 cards promoted the brand and specified that the card "does not draw any prize."

The first two series of cards present examples of long-replaced names for common birds that we enjoy today. The reverse side of later series of cards included information about the featured species in addition to important reasons to buy only Arm & Hammer Brand Soda. In the following five decades, well over 500 different artworks were published in trading card sets of 15 and 30. In addition to birds, the cards were designed featuring flowers, animals, cow breeds, fish, champion dogs and Mother Goose characters. These cards are now coveted by collectors of bird art and "**ephemera**" - items of collectible memorabilia, typically written or printed, that were originally expected to have only short-term usefulness or popularity.





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

Thousands of Hawks Observed at Grandfather Mountain

Hawk migration occurs twice a year, as birds fly north to their breeding and nesting grounds in the spring, and then to warmer wintering grounds in the south, during the fall.

Topographic features, such as coastlines and mountain ridges concentrate and direct the birds, with mountain ridges serving as important leading lines.

Mountain ridges, like those found on Grandfather Mountain, are great at creating thermal air currents due to the exposed rock and steep ridgelines, which also create updraft. The thermals allow the birds to gain altitude and fly with less energy expenditure, thus conserving energy, which in turn aids in survival. The destinations differ for each species, but many migrate into Central and South America.

Systematic and organized counts for migrating hawks are conducted at approximately 300 sites across North America, with Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation (GMSF) registered as an official site, recognized by the Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA).

The count season runs from September through November, but the primary focus is the month of September. GMSF conducts counts every day in September, weather permitting. The data collected is entered into a database (hawkcount.org) and provides critical information about migration routes and raptor populations.

Many trained volunteers contribute to the observations and data collection that occur on Linville Peak, or on foggy days, from Half Moon Overlook. Official counters, experts at identification, identify and count the raptors, with the assistance of “spotters”, whose

primary role is to constantly scan the skies and communicate when and where birds are observed.

From September 1, 2018 to October 1, 2018 GMSF, with the assistance of staff and 37 volunteers, observed for a total of 160.37 hours. The enthusiastic volunteers logged a total of 537.35 combined hours.

As of October 1, GMSF observed a total of 6,562 migrating raptors. This includes 6,363 Broad-winged Hawks, the 2nd highest count ever for this buteo flying over Grandfather Mountain. Additional species and counts are: 1 Black Vulture, 16 Turkey Vultures, 20 Osprey, 48 Bald Eagles, 3 Northern Harrier, 29 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 16 Cooper’s Hawks, 3 Red-shouldered Hawks, 20 Red-tailed Hawks, 1 Golden Eagle, 7 American Kestrels, 3 Merlin, 2 Peregrine Falcons, 9 unknown buteos, 1 unknown falcon, and 18 unknown raptors.

Interesting to note, due to the impacts of Hurricane Florence and subsequent weather, we had an unexpected late “push” of Broad-winged Hawks (BWHA). On the Saturday of our last official weekend GMSF counted 4,559 BWHA, with very large kettles (a group of hawks rising on thermals), and on a couple of occasions smaller kettles merged to create much larger ones, at least one over 1,000 birds.

Also on this day we had 11 species of raptors (one of our highest diversity days), which included 11 Bald Eagles, our highest number of eagles recorded in one day. We also had the opportunity to see a Golden Eagle flying very close to Linville Peak, allowing observers to get a great view of this beautiful bird. In addition to the migrants, we also observed our resident, or local Peregrine Falcons, Sharp-shinned Hawks,

and Cooper's Hawks on many days. It was one of GMSF's best Hawk Watch seasons, and truly an amazing spectacle of nature.

Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation would like to thank all of our volunteers and

staff who assisted in this season's Hawk Watch, with special recognition to our Official Counters: Monty Combs, Steve Dowlan, Merrill Lynch, John Caveny, and Jesse Pope.

Online Raptor Study Resources

Hawk Migration Association of North America – HMNA mission statement: *To advance the scientific knowledge and promote conservation of raptor populations through study, enjoyment, and appreciation of raptor migration.* <https://www.hmana.org/#>

HawkCount - Count data and site profiles for over 300 North American Hawkwatch sites. <http://www.hawkcoun.org/>

Carolina Raptor Center – CRC Mission Statement: *Carolina Raptor Center ignites imaginations and inspires engagement in the natural world through the exploration and rehabilitation of birds of prey.* <http://www.carolinaraptorcenter.org/>

Raptor Research Foundation – An international scientific society whose primary goal is the accumulation and dissemination of scientific information about raptors. <https://raptorresearchfoundation.org/>

The Peregrine Fund – A Global Raptor Information Network <https://www.globalraptors.org/grin/indexAlt.asp>

Hawk Watch International - A non-profit organization that works to protect raptors and our shared environment through scientific research and public education. <https://www.hawkwatch.org/>

World Working Group on Birds of Prey and Owls – The WWGBP has been active for thirty years now and today plays an important role in the promotion of raptor conservation and research on an international level. <http://www.raptors-international.de/>

Hawk Mountain - The mission of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association is to conserve birds of prey worldwide by providing leadership in raptor conservation science and education, and by maintaining Hawk Mountain Sanctuary as a model observation, research and education facility. <http://www.hawkmountain.org/>



Rehabilitated Peregrine Falcon Returns to Soaring above Linville Gorge

Article by Amber McNamara, DVM, May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center



*Peregrine Falcon wearing leather hood for an exam.
Photo by N. Watkins*

Although many thousands of injured and orphaned wild animals have been admitted to the May Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, Peregrine Falcon patients are rare. In fact, since its inception in 1995, only two Peregrine Falcons have been admitted to the center for rehabilitative care. Good Samaritans found this injured falcon (PEFA 18-0623) sitting in the road in Burke County, NC in late June. On arrival to the MWRC, the physical exam yielded a dreaded analysis: swelling at the right elbow joint. For any flighted bird, swelling that includes a joint can be disastrous; a fracture in this area may limit the joint's range-of-motion as it heals, and damage to the soft tissues could minimize the joint's stability and function. For a Peregrine, however, the stakes are even higher: not only do they need to fly well, but they must maintain their control, precision and maneuverability at mind-blowing dive speeds.

Despite numerous small wounds and significant bruising, the falcon's radiograph offered good news – no fracture of the humerus, radius, or ulna. The range-of-motion in the elbow joint was fair, so physical therapy, pain medications, and time would be the prescription for this patient. It remains unknown what caused the injury, but a collision with a vehicle (HBC) was suspected.

The falcon, presumably a male due to his body weight and size, ate well while inside the clinic, dining on previously frozen quail, mice, and chicks. After 15 days of rest, he decided it was time to move. The next step was the center's 30-foot flight enclosure, in which he stayed for 3 weeks. Sides of the cage are slatted to minimize outside visual stimuli, and staff/students only entered the cage once per



Radiograph: Appalachian New River Veterinary Associates

day to change water and offer fresh food. On August 1, he graduated to the 60-foot flight space. Initial long flights were clunky, noisy,



Peregrine falcon held by MWRC Director Nin Fischesser – release day! Photo by C. Walker.

and took significant effort - nowhere near the criteria for a successful hunter in the wild. But

he was flying, so that meant only one thing: he needed more time.

After nearly 8 weeks in the large flight enclosure, the falcon's proficiency in the air was markedly improved. He rocketed from his perches with ease, flew incredibly strong, and banked flawlessly. Staff put him through his paces (so to speak) to ensure conditioning was adequate prior to release.

When that time came, MWRC director Nina Fischesser knew just the spot: an outcropping at Wiseman's View overlooking the Linville Gorge Wilderness area, very near where the falcon was found. A 5-minute hike in was the final leg of 98 total days of rehab, and the falcon was more than ready for his return to freedom. There was absolutely no hesitation when he flew from the box, banked left, and soared out over the gorge.

HCAS field trip to Kiptopeke State Park Field Trip



Palm Warbler, 4 October 2018, Kiptopeke State Park, Northampton County, Virginia. Photo by G. McGrane



Peregrine Falcon, 4 October 2018, Kiptopeke State Park, Northampton County, Virginia. Photo by G. McGrane



A Farewell to the Blue Ridge

Fall and the approaching winter have finally gotten my attention with a low temperature of 38 F on our back deck the second week of October. The leaves have hardly changed due to an extended period of cloudy/rainy and warm days. A storm front Oct. 10-11 dumped 9 inches of rain, causing impressive flash floods on local streams. The South Fork of the New River flows close by but several hundred feet lower, so we are not personally threatened by such storms. But the river did flood briefly and impressively on Oct. 11 and spread out into its historic flood plain at nearby Brookshire Park. It is interesting to see these floods and contemplate how animals and plants in the riparian zone cope with them.

Lichens benefit from the hydration provided by heavy rains. Note how bright green this lungwort has become due to the symbiotic algae and cyanobacteria in its fungal tissues.



Such a three-kingdom amalgam of organisms is an ancient partnership which thrives best in

mature forests with little air pollution. I was thrilled to find abundant growths of this beautiful lichen along the Blue Ridge Parkway near Trout Lake.



Very few native flowers are in bloom by early October so we have planted a variety of non-invasive exotics in our yard to extend the nectar season for butterflies. This cone flower is actually an Echinacea hybrid and is thus little removed from a native purple cone flower. It illustrates the genius of design of the composites which pack large numbers of fertile disc flowers in the center, with each showy petal also being an individual flower, although not always fertile.

In contrast at Valle Crucis recreational park I encountered a striking orange comma butterfly on a garbage can. The coloration of the outside of the wings when the butterfly is resting is quite camouflaged; note the silvery "comma" mark. Yet the inside of the wings are brightly

colored, more so in this fall form than in the darker summer form. It does not generally feed on nectar but on tree sap, rotting fruit and dung fluids that contain salts and amino acids. I have noticed that it is strongly attracted to human sweat, where it is likely obtaining sodium salts lacking in its plant based foods.



The southern Appalachians are a global center of biodiversity for salamanders which are more abundant in cool wet surroundings. I found this northern gray chequered salamander in my yard at 3400 feet elevation after heavy rains.



This plethodontid lacks lungs and can only respire through its skin. Unlike many amphibians it lays terrestrial eggs that hatch directly into tiny replicas of the adults.

This is a time of extensive migration of birds to warmer climates for the winter. In early October we have enjoyed seeing large numbers of rose-breasted grosbeaks that are migrating to the tropics. Two winter males (red breasts) and three brownish females/juvenile males are shown here avidly eating sunflower seeds at our feeder.



The huge bills are well adapted for seed crushing. The differences in sexual coloration are classic- gaudy males for sexual attraction and bland females for camouflage on the nest.



It is less well appreciated that birds such as blue jays also migrate. Indeed a careful observer will note that large numbers of blue jays are streaming to the south at the same time that neotropical migrants and hawks are doing so. Yet there will be blue jays present in winter; these are most likely northern birds that have moved to the south for the winter, while our summer residents have also shifted to the south. Male and female blue jays are identical in coloration (they have a structurally generated blue color due to diffraction of light)- why is that so different from the grosbeaks? Clearly their system of mate choice is quite distinct and based on behavior, not coloration.

As is the case for many birds, we also are "snowbirds" now heading to Florida for the winter. We will be able to enjoy seeing butterflies and flowers all winter and engage in wildlife gardening all year.



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/>

HCAS Swifts Night Out at Lees-McRae College



Dr. Amber McNamara prepares to release 14 Chimney Swifts at Lees-McCrae College on 6 September 20128.
Photos by D. Shetterly

THROUGH OUR LENS



Pollinators



Monarch on Brazilian vervain, 21 July 2018, Dunson yard, Boone, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson



Bumblebee on Wild Bergamot, 2 July 2018, Sawyer property, Roan Mountain, Carter County, TN. Photo by J. Sawyer.



Orange Sulphur on Purple Coneflower, 3 August 2018, Sawyer property, Roan Mountain, Carter County, TN. Photo by J. Sawyer.



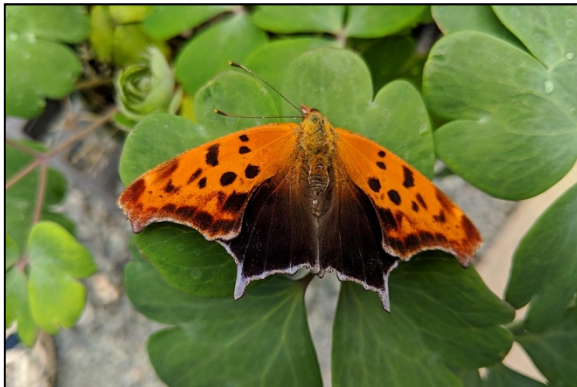
Eight-spotted Forester Moth, 14 July 2018, Linville Creek Overlook neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan.



Common Buckeye, 12 August 2018, Dunson yard, Watauga County, Photo by B. Dunson.



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail on Joe-pye Weed, 9 August 2018, Sawyer property, Roan Mountain, Carter County, TN. Photo by J. Sawyer.



Question Mark, 19 July 2018, ASU Biology Greenhouse, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan.

Pollinators



Thread-waisted wasp on Boneset, 22 July 2018, Sawyer property, Roan Mountain, Carter County, TN. Photo by J. Sawyer.



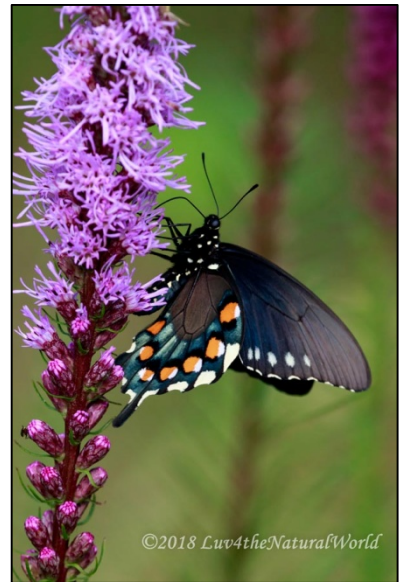
Viceroy, 7 August 2018, GreenValley Park, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson



Mullein with bumblebee, 2 July 2018, Brookshire Park hill trail, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson



Black Swallowtail, 30 September 2018, Linville Creek Overlook neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan.



Pipevine Swallowtail on Dense Blazing Star, 7 July 2018, Sawyer property, Roan Mountain, Carter County, TN. Photo by J. Sawyer.



Silver-spotted Skipper, 14 July 2018, Linville Creek Overlook neighborhood, Vilas, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan.



Monarch, 2 August 2018, Linville Creek Overlook neighborhood. Photo by S. Dowlan.

Pollinators and Predators



Snowberry Clearwing Moth, 4 August 2018, Linville Creek Overlook neighborhood, Watauga County Photo by S. Dowlan.



Spicebush Swallowtail, 10 August 2018, Brookshire Park, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, 10 August 2018, Dunson yard, Boone, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson



Pearl Crescent on sweet basil, 4 August 2018, Linville Creek Overlook neighborhood, Vilas, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan.



American Rubyspot, 15 August 2018, Fries, Grayson County, Virginia. Photo by B. Dunson.



Band-winged Meadowhawk, 13 August 2018, Linville Creek Overlook neighborhood Photo by S. Dowlan.

Birds of the Wider World



Black-winged Kite, 4 August 2018, Marievale Bird Sanctuary, Gauteng, South Africa. Photo by R. Gray



Eurasian Hoopoe, 10 August 2018, Free State Botanical Gardens, Free State, South Africa. Photo by R. Gray



Swainson's Francolin, 3 August 2018, Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve, Gauteng, South Africa. Photo by R. Gray



Green-winged Pytilia, 2 August 2018, Suikerbosrand Nature Reserve, Kareekloof, South Africa. Photo by R. Gray



Malachite Sunbird, 10 August 2018, Free State Botanical Gardens, Free State, South Africa. Photo by R. Gray



Gray-hooded Gull, 2 August 2018, Marievale Bird Sanctuary, Gauteng, South Africa. Photo by R. Gray



Namaqua Dove, 11 August 2018, Krugersdrif Dam, Free State, South Africa. Photo by R. Gray

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November – December 2018 and January 2019

Please check our HCAS Yahoo group email regularly for changes and additions to the calendar

<http://www.highcountryaudubon.org/calendarofevents.html>

November

3	8:00 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
10	9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Forsyth Audubon Second Saturday Bird Walk - Location varies. For details check http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar
22 - 25		Waterfowl Weekend at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge , Chincoteague Island, Virginia. Contact: 757-336-6122 or fw5rw_cnwr@fws.gov . https://www.fws.gov/nwrs/threecolumn.aspx?id=2147582946

For a full schedule of birding festivals and events please visit

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

December

For the most up-to-date contact information for the Christmas Bird Counts, visit <https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/christmas/>

1	8:00 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
8	9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Forsyth Audubon Second Saturday Bird Walk - Location varies. For details check http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar
14		Mount Jefferson Christmas Bird Count (Ashe County, NC)
21		Grandfather Mountain Christmas Bird Count (Watauga, Avery and Caldwell Counties, NC)
21		New River Christmas Bird Count (Allegany County, NC and Grayson County, VA)
30		Stone Mountain Christmas Bird Count (Wilkes and Alleghany counties, NC).

January

5	8:00 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
5		Upper Yadkin Valley Christmas Bird Count (Wilkes County, NC)
12	9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	Forsyth Audubon Second Saturday Bird Walk - Location varies. For details check http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar
17 - 21		Everglades Birding Festival , Davie, Florida. Contact: Paddy Cunningham, 754-201-1141, birdpaddy@yahoo.com . http://evergladesbirdingfestival.com/
18 - 20		Wings of Winter Birding Festival , Springville, Tennessee. Contact Joan Howe, 731-642-2091 x303 or wingsofwinterbirds@gmail.com .
19 - 20		28th Annual Tennessee Sandhill Crane Festival , Birchwood, Tennessee. Contact Jennifer Patten, Event Coordinator, info@snowgoosefestival.org , 530-592-9092.
23 - 28		22nd Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival , Titusville, Florida. https://scbwf.org/

To learn more about the history and importance of Christmas Bird Counts, please visit

the National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count page at

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>

Remember to Report Your Bird Sightings on eBird

Launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology at Cornell University and the National Audubon Society, eBird gathers basic data on bird abundance and distribution around the world. The goal of eBird is to maximize the utility and accessibility of the vast numbers of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional bird watchers. If you choose to participate in the eBird effort, your observations, including photos and sound recordings you upload yourself join those of others in an international network. All of this collected information is freely available through internet queries in a variety of formats. As of July 7, 2018, over 412,000 eBirders have entered almost 30 million checklists from around the globe.

eBird

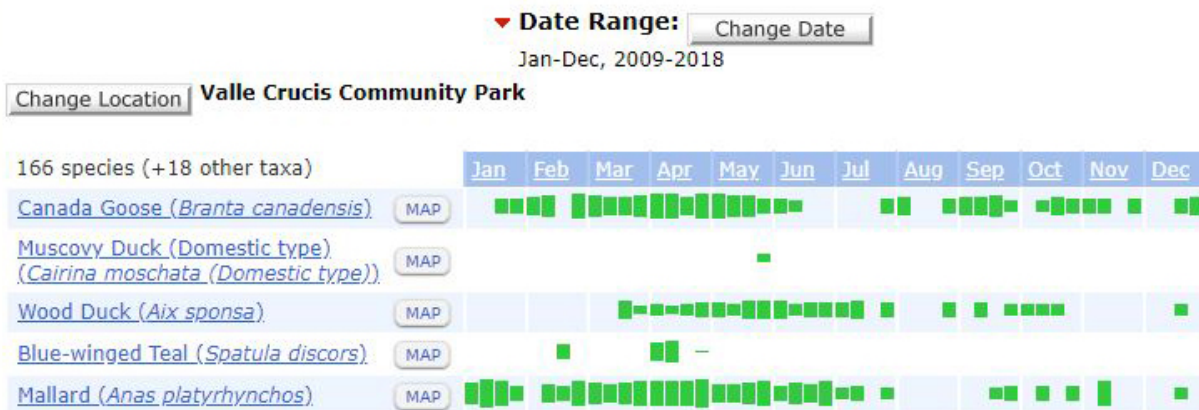


Observations entered into eBird range from a single species that was observed while mowing the lawn to extensive lists with photo and sound recordings made while birding all day. eBird encourages a broad range of observation types, and makes data entry easy. Some beginning birders are reluctant to enter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

Also a great tool for planning your own birding outings, eBird can produce checklists of expected species for a local hotspot or an entire country. You can even create an illustrated checklist that includes photos from those who have birded the area before you. Here is what you will see if you explore Watauga County's records on eBird: <https://ebird.org/region/US-NC-189?yr=all>. To better understand how eBird works and create an eBird account, visit eBird's help page at <https://help.ebird.org/?t=>. Join your friends, join the fun, and be a citizen scientist!

The Cornell Lab
of Ornithology

Bird Observations



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



HCAS member Guy McGrane will summarize 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 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 June and July 2018. The regular schedule for upcoming issues will be:

- 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.
- Field notes for June and July 2019 will be published in late November in Volume 11, Issue 4.

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.



Chestnut-sided Warbler, 2 June 2018, Moses Cone Memorial Park, Trout Lake, Watauga County. Photo by R. Gray

June and July 2018

Common Loon, an apparent first year bird was first reported from PRICE on 15 July and stayed through the end of the period.



Common Loon, 21 July 2018, Price Lake, Watauga County. Photos by S. Dowlan (from a kayak)

Double-crested Cormorant, from one to several birds was reported at PRICE and TROUT from 15 July through the end of the period.



Double-crested Cormorant, 20 July 2018, Price Lake, Watauga County. Photos by B. Dunson

Great Egret, one stopped by POWDER on 27 July.

Bald Eagle, a single bird was reported from PINERUN on 17 July, raising questions about possible nests in that area. Another bird was reported at CRUMP on 19 July, which could also be a new nesting site.

Osprey, a single bird, likely a very early fall migrant, flew over VCCP on 20 July. One flew by MAHOG on 29 July, noted as the earliest fall Osprey in over 20 years watching at that site.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo, starting in approximately mid June, Cuckoos started increasing in the high country after being mostly absent in May. These birds appeared not to be breeding as they were only making their CLOOM calls and not the usual breeding song ka-ka-ka-ka-kowlp-kowlp-kowlp. This increase appeared to be timed with the increase of bagworms in the area.

Black-billed Cuckoo, a single bird was reported from US221 on 17 July and found again a few days later.

Barn Owl, 1 found injured by a storm at HAYS on 1 Jun was released in apparently good health that same night. Also, an apparent juvenile was reported as falling from the same nest on 4 July, and appeared to be uninjured.

Red-headed Woodpecker, this report was accidentally omitted from our spring reports in the last newsletter. A single bird was reported at PRICE on 9 May.

Great-crested Flycatcher, a large influx was noted throughout the reporting area through 15 Jun. No nesting activity was found, and the birds are thought to be late migrants.

Purple Martin, 2 birds were reported at VCCP on 1 July.

Winter Wren, In addition to the known populations in the Grandfather area, single birds were seen and heard at BEECH on 14 Jun, on 6 Jun at PONDMTN.

Hermit Thrush, 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. A high count of 11 was reported during a 12 mile hike from Profile trailhead to Boone Scout trailhead on 11 July.

Swainson's Warbler, a singing bird was noted at HOLLOW on the Tanawha Trail on 23 Jun.

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

Savannah Sparrow, a pair of birds was found at CHAPPELL on 5 Jun.

Grasshopper Sparrow, A singing male was reported at PONDMTN on 6 Jun.

Blue Grosbeak, a likely breeding bird was seen at NILE on 19 Jun, and another potential breeding bird was reported at SPARTA on 20 Jun. A single bird, likely transient, was reported at VCCP on 1 July but could not be refound.

Bobolink, a new breeding colony was found at CHAPPELL on 5 Jun and revisited on 12 Jun.

AREA KEY:

BEECH-Beech Mountain Area, Avery/Watauga; BIGLAUREL-Big Laurel Road Area, Ashe; BOONESCOUT-Daniel Boone Scout Trail, Caldwell & Watauga; CHAPPELL-Chappell Farm Rd, Watauga; CRUMP-Crumpler area of Ashe/Alleghany; GRAND-Grandfather Mountain; HAYS-Hays Community area, Wilkes; HOLLOW-Holloway Mtn. Road; NILE-Nile Road area, Alleghany; MAHOG-Mahogany Rock area on BRP, Alleghany; NILE-Nile Road area, Alleghany; PINERUN-Pine Run Road, Watauga; PONDMTN-Pond Mountain Gamelands, Ashe; POWDER-Powderhorn Mtn, Watauga; PRICE-Price lake, Watauga; PRICE-Price Lake, Watauga; PROFILE-Profile Trail, Avery; SPARTA-City of Sparta, Alleghany; TROUT-Trout Lake, Watauga; US221-US221 access New River State Park, Ashe; VCCP: Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga; VCCP-Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga



Recent and noteworthy sightings of birds throughout the Carolinas can be viewed at the Carolina Bird Club's web site at

<https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/sightings/>

High Country Hoots Submission Guidelines

For the next issue (Nov-Dec-Jan), please have all material to the editor by January 12, 2019. Send all material to OWLHOOTER@aol.com

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Please contact me with questions! Owlhooter@aol.com
Your feedback is welcome too!**

Steve Dowlan, Editor, High Country Hoots



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

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Newsletter submissions: Owlhooter@aol.com
Webmaster: Beverly Saltonstall

E-mail: contactus@highcountryaudubon.org

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

<http://www.highcountryaudubon.org>

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