

# HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

## High Country Audubon Society

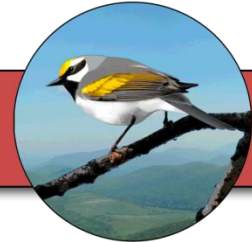


Serving Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties

Volume 11 – Issue 2

May - June – July 2019

### President's Message



*Dear Fellow Birders,*

Hello everyone, it's our favorite time of the year—Migration!!! I hope all of you are able to join us on some of our many scheduled walks and events. We've added quite a few Saturday activities this year to hopefully allow working folks and students to attend. Martha faithfully keeps the calendar current, so check our website frequently to find out what's happening. Also, if you decide at the last minute to go bird one of our hotspots, please feel free to post on our group email to see if others want to join in.

In an effort to branch out into more counties, one of our added walks this year will be our New River State Park Wagoner Access walks the second Saturday of each month during the season. Thank you to Doris Ratchford for leading these hikes—it's a treat to bird with Doris!

Also, Bill Dunson will be leading his extremely popular "Birds, Bugs and Blooms" walks. They will once again be on the third Saturday of the month. Check this newsletter for the walk descriptions. I'm really looking forward to them again! On the fourth Saturday of every month, we'll be doing a Valle Crucis walk. We've heard from so many of you that our VCCP walks are only during the week, so here's your chance to bird on the weekend! We, of course, will be continuing Guy's popular Brookshire Park walks the first Saturday of each month. Guy is branching out and including more naturalist information on his walks, so come join us for a wonderful experience in nature!

During the last few months, HCAS' outreach has benefitted greatly from the hard work of Riley Visser (our intern). Riley will be graduating in May, and has a new job in Japan. We wish you all the best, Riley, and thank you so much for putting us on such a great outreach track!

Riley has also worked hard on getting the new ASU Audubon Chapter started. Its new president, Evan Wunder, is a fantastic birder and has a ton of energy and great ideas. The High Country is indeed lucky that Evan is attending ASU! Look for some combined HCAS/ASUAS beginning in the fall.

Thank you also to Steve Dowlan for initiating our first beginning birding classes. Look for another session sometime in June. To update you on our wetlands projects, all three are moving quickly along. The first bird blind at Brookshire Park should be completed sometime early summer. The Foscoe Wetlands access and initial trail should be complete prior to our Annual Meeting at Grandfather/Foscoe Community Park on July 16th at 5pm. The Green Valley Park native canopy plantings will also occur in June—a busy month!!! Thanks again to all you who contributed to the campaign!

Finally, the terms of two of our long-time, dedicated board officers are expiring. Vice President, Richard Gray, will be spending a great deal of time in South Africa, so is leaving the board. Treasurer, Janet Paulette, will be staying on as Membership Chair. We are deeply indebted to both of these wonderful people for their commitment to HCAS! Of course, that means that we now have openings on the board. If you would like to contribute to the future successes of HCAS, please let us know. Happy Migration!!



## Come Bird @ My Hotspot

**May 5, 2019 – Sunday.** We will bird Merrill Lynch's Echo Valley Farm off of N.C. Highway 88 just east of Trade, Tennessee. Because of severely limited parking at the farm, we will meet at the Trade, Tennessee Post Office ([map](#)) to shuttle people to the farm, which is very close. There is a limit of 10 people so contact Martha Cutler to sign up early. Check the HCAS group email for updates as the date approaches. . Email [cutford@skybest.com](mailto:cutford@skybest.com). Phone 336-877-4031.

**May 14, 2019 – Tuesday.** Martha Cutler and Doug Blackford residence and the Todd, Ashe County - 7932 3 Top Rd., Todd, NC 28684, 8am – 11am. Meet at the Cutler/Blackford house ([map](#)). We'll walk around the property and perhaps go into Todd afterward to see what is along the river. \*There will be no weekday rain date, but there is a second chance on Sat. 5/12 for folks who are busy during the week. Check the group email for carpooling arrangements. Email [cutford@skybest.com](mailto:cutford@skybest.com). Phone 336-877-4031.

**May 19, 2019 – Sunday.** Hampton Creek Cove Natural Area, Carter County, Tennessee ([map](#)). Meet at Judi Sawyer's house at 7:30 a.m. and then carpool over to Hampton Creek Cove. Judi will have refreshments at her house. Judi will lead participants around the Tennessee Natural Area near Roan Mountain where we hope to see Golden-winged Warblers among other species. Check the HCAS group email for carpooling arrangements. Email [jsawyer105@gmail.com](mailto:jsawyer105@gmail.com). Phone 423-481-1184. You can read about Hampton Creek Cove at <https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/environment/program-areas/na-natural-areas/natural-areas-east-region/east-region/na-na-hampton-creek-cove.html>.

## Kudos Corner

**Thanks to the following for their support of HCAS with donations:**

Mast General Store, Inc., matching funds for  
Lauren Sinclair's donation  
Jesse Pope  
Francie Troy

**Welcome New Members**

Charlie Brady  
Brenda Liddle  
Evan Wunder

# Third Saturday Birds, Bugs, and Blooms Nature Walks

Nature Walk leader Bill Dunson is a retired biology professor from Penn State University . All hikes will go rain or shine. There is no fee or requirement for reservations. Call, text or email Bill Dunson for further information: 276-233-6364 cell phone, [wdunson@comcast.net](mailto:wdunson@comcast.net) Visit his nature blog at: <http://lemonbayconservancy.org/news-blog/nature-notes-by-bill-dunson/>

## **May 18, 2019: Tomkins Knob/Jeffress Park along the Mountain to Sea Trail, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.**

This nature walk will focus on identifying plants and birds and discussing patterns of community ecology in Jeffress Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway. We will hike an approximately 1.6 mile section of the Mountains-to-Sea Trail from the southern boundary of Jeffress Park to the Tomkins Knob parking area. This trail has a firm surface with few rocks and a moderate incline. At the start there is an interesting early successional meadow with seasonal wildflowers. We then enter a pine woodland followed by an extensive, mature hardwood forest, which should provide us with a nice variety of spring ephemerals including trilliums, orchids, and Jack/Jill in the pulpit (and their strange sex lives). We will also be examining the biodiversity of shrubs and saplings, the role of shade tolerance in community dynamics, and the ecology of light gaps. A predominant shrub here is mountain holly, *Ilex montana*, which appears to be unusually resistant to deer herbivory. The trail passes along the western side of the ridge line which marks the eastern edge of the escarpment dropping down to the Piedmont. We should hear Rose-breasted Grosbeaks singing on the ridge, and see/hear a variety of other neotropical avian migrants. Birding by ear will be taught if you lack binoculars. We will meet 2.1 miles north of the intersection of US 421 and the Parkway; there is a Jeffress Park sign on the eastern side (approximately at MP 274.1)- pull over there into the grassy meadow edge. There will be a shuttle from the Tomkins Knob parking area to bring drivers back to the start.

## **June 15, 2019: Osborne Mountain Overlook to US 421 along the Mountains-to-Sea Trail, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.**

This nature walk starts at the Osborne Mountain Overlook at MP 278 on the Blue Ridge Parkway. We will park there and provide a shuttle back from the northern end of the walk. We will hike about 1.25 miles north along the Mountains-to-Sea Trail until it crosses US 421. There is a wide variety of habitats/communities ranging from grazed/mowed fields, to sub-climax white pine forests, to climax hardwood forests with numerous light gaps. The trail follows the eastern slope of the steep Appalachian escarpment. We expect to see a wide variety of birds, insects and flowers depending on the weather. We will especially examine the degree to which steep slopes may provide limited protection from the widespread adverse impact of deer herbivory. The trail is easy hiking with some rocks and moderate inclines.

## **July 20, 2019: Brookshire Park Hill Trail, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.**

We will walk a 1.9 mile loop on the Hill Trail at Brookshire Park in Boone, NC. Meet at the northern-most parking lot for field 3. If you turn into Brookshire Rd from US 421/221 just west of the S Fork of the New River, you will continue past the two main soccer fields until you see a sign for field 3 and turn into a gravel lot on the right. We will be walking on a trail that gradually ascends several hundred feet. There is an interesting mixture of woods and old field vegetative types.

**August 17, 2019: New River, Todd Island Park, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.**

We will identify and discuss all plants and animals seen. The goal is to learn more about the community ecology of this exceptionally interesting river flood plain site in the middle of the South Fork of the New River. The edible and medicinal qualities of the plants will also be discussed and comments from the audience are welcomed. Todd Island Park is at the intersection of Castleford Road and Railroad Grade Road just south of Todd. It may be reached by traveling north on Brownwood Road from US 421 near Deep Gap, or driving east on Castleford Road from NC Route 194 to the second crossing of the river. Alternatively you may drive south on Railroad Grade Road from Todd.

**Sept. 21, 2019: Boone Greenway, 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.**

As we walk we will talk about all aspects of nature, plants and animals. The loop trail is about 2.5 miles total and starts at the Hunting Hills Lane parking lot. Despite being in the near center of Boone there is a wide variety of interesting natural habitats. The trail passes a constructed wetland, continues along and across the New River, ascends a hill into climax hardwood forests, passes through a former farm area with degraded vegetation, passes a restored flood plain wetland and crosses playing fields which floods during rains and provides habitat for migrating birds.







**Article by Amy Renfranz, Director of Education and Natural Resources, Grandfather Mountain Stewardship Foundation**

## **Grandfather Mountain Adult Field Course Schedule**

Examine specific aspects of the park ecosystem through just the right combination of fun field excursions and classroom presentations. Our course leaders are experts in their fields and include professors, naturalists, scientists, and acclaimed photographers, writers, historians, and artists. Please visit our website for minimum participant ages and other details about each course. Most courses run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and lunch will be eaten in the field. Please bring your own lunch. Rates do not include taxes. To register: <https://grandfather.com/events/category/featured-events/>

### ***The Joy of Spring Birding***

**May 4, 2019**

***Steve Dowlan, High Country Audubon Society***

***Limit: 12 • \$60/ \$20 Bridge Club***

May is an exciting month for birding in the High Country. Songbirds are arriving every day from as far away as South America, flying at night so that can use daylight hours to feed and rest. Some stay to set up territories and raise young through the late spring and summer months, and some just stop on the mountain long enough to find high-protein food and store energy so they can move on to the boreal forests of Canada and Alaska. Join Steve Dowlan to delight in the joy of spring birding!

### ***Sketching Spring Ephemerals***

**May 18, 2019**

***Preston Montague, The North Carolina***

***Naturalist***

***Limit: 12 • \$60/ \$20 Bridge Club***

Designed for enthusiasts with little to no artistic training, this foundation course focuses on creating accurate and beautiful botanical illustrations. Participants will learn basic observation and drawing techniques with pen and pencil and will use colored pencils to apply vibrant color. Though designed for beginners, students with more intermediate skills are encouraged to join in, too.

### ***Rocky Top: The Art of Grandfather's Trail System***

**June 15, 2019**

***John Caveny, Resource Management Specialist***

***Limit: 12 • \$60/ \$20 Bridge Club***

Known as one of the most rugged mountains in the southeastern United States, Grandfather Mountain's trails share the same status. Often times, unique approaches have to be used to maintain this trail system. GMSF's Natural Resource Management Specialist, John Caveny, has been maintaining the trails within the park for 6 years, and few people know the ins and outs of the trail like he does. This course will provide participants with an in-depth look at how to sustainably maintain hiking trails, as well as discover the interesting history of the mountain's trail system.

### ***Investigating High Elevation Pollinators***

**June 26, 2019**

***Dr. Clyde Sorenson, North Carolina State University***

***Limit: 12 • \$60/ \$20 Bridge Club***

We all know that rare plants grow atop Grandfather Mountain, but just who pollinates them? Join Dr. Sorenson to investigate the landscape with a special eye for bees, beetles, wasps, and butterflies.

***Exploring Grandfather Mountain's Geologic Window***

***July 12, 2019***

***Dr. Anthony Love, Appalachian State University***

***Limit: 12 • \$60/ \$20 Bridge Club***

There are more than 300 million years of history written into Grandfather's rocks. Join Dr. Love to learn to decipher the stone, and discover a world so complex and amazing that it will change your perspective of the Appalachian Mountains forever.

***Fungi of the Cloudland Forest***

***August 10, 2019***

***Dr. Coleman McCleneghan***

***Limit: 12 • \$60/ \$20 Bridge Club***

The southern Appalachians are world-renowned for different types of fungi from mushrooms to lichens and are home to more than 2,000 species. Here's a chance to observe many kinds of fungi at higher elevations and learn how to identify them by size, shape, and color.

***Spiders: Identification, Diversity, Ecology, and Biology***

***August 24, 2019***

***Dr. Kefyn Catley, Western Carolina University***

***Limit: 12 • \$60/ \$20 Bridge Club***

Participants will be introduced to the biology of spiders, with an emphasis on the ecological roles of spiders, their incredible diversity, and techniques to identify specimens to species level. Excursions and will provide the opportunity for hands-on exploration of spider diversity and behavior.

***Fall Color Sketchbook***

***October 5, 2019***

***Preston Montague, The North Carolina Naturalist***

***Limit: 12 • \$60/ \$20 Bridge Club***

Designed for enthusiasts with little to no artistic training, this foundation course focuses on creating accurate and beautiful botanical illustrations. Participants will learn basic observation and drawing techniques with pen and pencil and will use colored pencils to apply vibrant color. Though designed for beginners, students with more intermediate skills are encouraged to join in, too.

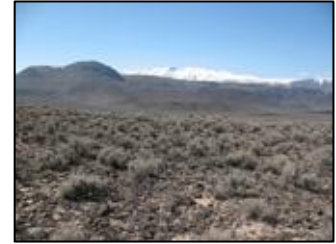


# Third Tuesdays



## Oregon's Great Basins and Ranges – May 21 2019

Holiday Inn Express Boone, 1943 Blowing Rock Rd, Boone, NC 28607, 6:30pm – 7:30pm. Most people think of Oregon as a very green place with tall trees and abundant rainfall. Although this is true for the western one-third of the state, most of Oregon consists of wide open spaces and panoramic views of very dry habitats. Retired Natural Resource Specialist Steve Dowlan birded the eastern part of Oregon for over 25 years, and lived and worked for three years in Harney County, the driest and highest of southeastern Oregon's counties. Steve will provide glimpses of the history, landscape, plants and wildlife of a land of extremes at the northern edge of North America's Great Basin. It is a landscape that never fails to impress.



## Patagonia – June 18 2019

Holiday Inn Express Boone, 1943 Blowing Rock Rd, Boone, NC 28607, 6:30pm – 7:30pm. Sheryl McNair will narrate a slide show from her December hiking trip in Patagonia. She will discuss local birds, the hikes and a little of the geology of the area, including the glaciers.

## HCAS Annual Meeting – July 16 2019

Foscoe Grandfather Community Center, 233 Park Rd, Banner Elk, NC 28604, 5:00pm – 7:30pm. Prior to a potluck meal we will meet for a short walk in the adjacent wetland area. We hope this will give us a chance to see the work being done to make the wetland area accessible to the public. The meeting will include election of officers and presentation of the Sue Mills Research Grant. Please bring your own utensils, plates, bowls and cups so we can minimize the amount of waste generated.





## The Littlest Birds Sing the Prettiest Songs

*Article and photos by Steve Dowlan*

Everyone who observes and appreciates birds has favorite species. These favorites are sometimes based on appearance, or a particular experience with the species, or its frequency and behavior at the feeder, or its name... there are no limits to the reasons a species garners special appreciation. I have all sorts of favorites based on a long list of reasons. High on my list of favorites is a very nondescript sparrow that inhabits a large swath of sagebrush steppe and brushy mountain slopes in the intermountain west, with outlier populations in British Columbia, Yukon and extreme southeast Alaska. It isn't much to look at, but when it sings, it is undeniably enchanting. My favorite singer is Brewer's Sparrow, a member of the genus *Spizella*.

All *Spizella* sparrows sing trilling songs, but male Brewer's Sparrows songs may last 10 to 15 seconds and consist of 5 to 10 distinct sections. Roger Tory Peterson once likened these complex songs to "a Chipping Sparrow trying to sing like a canary." These long songs are sung when they are trying to attract mates early in the breeding season, and each male will usually switch to a shorter version when he has found a mate. The short song lasts 1.5 to 3 seconds and is typically composed of 2 trilled sections – the first section is usually faster and higher pitched. Some elements of each song type are very similar to phrases sung by Clay-colored and Chipping Sparrows. Songs differ somewhat in quality between the two recognized subspecies – the more widespread sagebrush subspecies sings a somewhat buzzier song than the timberline form found much further north.

My association with Brewer's Sparrows is from my time birding in eastern Oregon. I spent



*Brewer's Sparrow, 14 May 2007, Double 00 Road, Harney County, Oregon.*

many days and nights camping in sagebrush steppe (also called the high desert by native "Bunchgrassers") over 20 years, and I saw and heard many Brewer's Sparrows everywhere I went. The encounter I remember best occurred along a goat-path road in extreme southeast Oregon not far from McDermitt, Nevada. I decided to go to this remote spot to see and record songs of Virginia's Warbler. This was only the sixth record for Oregon, and it needed to be documented. The journey off of U.S. 95 was what a fellow birder described as a "white-knuckle epic," hands glued to the wheel, bouncing over large volcanic tire-shredding rocks on a two-track path that actually had a road name that I have long forgotten. I arrived in the early evening after a two hour drive that got me barely ten miles from pavement. One headlight on my aging Isuzu Trooper had popped out of its fitting from all the shock of the journey.

Other birders had gathered at the remote canyon, and after chatting about the plan to search for the warblers in the morning, we



retired to our separate campsites. It was a warm early June evening, also early in the breeding season for the elevation (about 4,500 feet), and all of the local breeding birds were singing evening songs. With no sounds of vehicles or people to distract, and the smell of sagebrush and bitterbrush flowers saturating the air, I was treated to an amazing chorus of long songs from Brewer's Sparrows, with support from Green-tailed Towhees. I had brought along a parabolic microphone to record the warblers, so I just let the tape roll. The sparrows kept sing well past dark... it was pure magic! We had no trouble finding and recording Virginia's Warblers the next day. Despite the popped headlight (easily repaired) and a flat tire (thankfully after I was back on pavement) the trip was a memorable on several levels.



*Field Sparrow, 2 December 2018, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County, North Carolina.*

Although no Brewer's Sparrows sing in the North Carolina High Country, two of its close relatives offer their own versions of *Spizella* trills in our area. Chipping Sparrows arrive early in spring, and they will sing their very dry, flat, almost mechanical sounding trills throughout the day in open park-like habitat with trees. Field Sparrows remain in the High Country

throughout the year, and also begin to sing early in the mountain spring. This *Spizella* prefers open habitat with tall grass, shrubs and small trees, and brambles – what we sometimes refer to as “old field” habitat. Both species may be seen and heard from the same “edge” location in the High Country – both species are feeding together on my platform feeder as I write this sentence – but their habitat needs do not really overlap much.

Field Sparrows are also rather plain, but are a bit more colorful than their sagebrush-loving cousins. Our eastern populations are a bit brighter and browner than their slightly larger cousins from the Great Plains. The most familiar Field Sparrow song consists of a long, accelerating series of short whistles that build to a rapid trill. Songs last about 4 seconds, sound much like a bouncing ball coming to rest. In early morning, males sing a more complex song, which begins with the trill followed by longer notes, and is used during territorial interactions.

Hearing Field Sparrows from my open window brings back memories of those beautiful evenings with Brewer's Sparrows in the sagebrush steppe. I can almost smell sagebrush after a light rain when I hear their songs in my neighborhood, and envision dusty two-track roads that wind through the Basin and Range province of the intermountain west. It is a *Spizella* spell that joins west to east for those of us who enjoy the sound of birds as much as the sight of them and it can turn wet bright green eastern fields into dry mint-green sagebrush plains in our mind's eye. If you ever visit the Intermountain West in spring, I recommend that you take time to camp in the sagebrush and just open your ears. You will not regret it!

#### **RESOURCES**

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brewers\\_Sparrow/id](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brewers_Sparrow/id)

# 俳句

# HAIKU

***Fury in pursuit  
Head first through thorny brambles  
Death without warning***

*Steve Dowlan*



***Elusive and shy  
Days go by without a sight  
Look, quick! Get your shot!***

*Judi Sawyer*

***Singing high and bold  
Curious watchful wary  
Small brown trickster gone***

*Steve Dowlan*



***standing oh so still  
watching waiting patiently  
sudden rapid strike***

*Al and Mary Olson*



***Impress your neighbors  
By rounding up all the weeds  
Cancerous desire***

*Guy McGrane*

***Curse those LBBs  
sure beats the hell out of me  
please light in a tree!***

*Mary Olson*

# Did You Know?

## OWL EYES ARE AMAZING!

**An owl's eyes** are large and forward-facing in order to improve hunting efficiency, especially under low light conditions. Owls do not really have eye balls... They have elongated tubes that are held in place by bony structures in the skull called *sclerotic rings*. Because of this structure, an owl cannot "roll its eyes" or move its eyes at all - it can only look straight ahead.



Photo by S. Dowlan

Owls compensate for this by being able to turn their heads up to 270 degrees left or right from the forward facing position, and almost upside down.

Owl eyes may account for one to five percent of the bird's body weight, depending on species, and owls have *binocular* vision – they can see an object with both eyes at the same time and in three dimensions (height, width, and depth). This means that they can judge distances in a similar way to humans.

Owls look at the world with a field of view for an owl of about

110 degrees, with about 70 degrees being binocular vision. Humans, by comparison have a field of view that covers 180 degrees, with 140 degrees as binocular vision.

Most Owls see in limited color or in monochrome.

Owls are not blind in strong light, contrary to what is sometimes said about them. Some species of owls can actually see better than humans in bright light. Their pupils have a wide range of adjustment, allowing the right amount of light to strike the retina.

Owls are equipped with three eyelids, including a normal upper and lower eyelid. The upper eyelid closes when the owl blinks, and the lower closes when the owl is asleep. The third eyelid, called a *nictitating membrane* is a thin layer of tissue that closes diagonally across the eye, from the inside to the outside. This cleans and protects the surface of the eye.

See <https://www.owlpages.com/owls/articles.php?a=5>  
for more diagrams and descriptions

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May – June – July 2019

Please check our HCAS Yahoo group email regularly for changes and additions to the calendar  
<http://highcountryaudubon.org/calendar-2/>

## May

1 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
4 – Sat.		Global Big Day – Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. See <a href="https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-4-may-2019">https://ebird.org/news/global-big-day-4-may-2019</a> for more information
4 – Sat.	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane. Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
8 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
11- Sat.		International Migratory Bird Day
11 – Sat.	9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Wagoner Access Bird Walk, New River State Park, 358 New River State Park Road, Laurel Springs, Ashe County, NC. Wet weather requires boots and check listserv for cancellations.
11 - Sat.		Watauga County Spring Bird Count. Contact Guy McGrane – badgerboy@wilkes.net
14 – Tue.	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Cutler/Blackford residence 7932 Three Top Rd. Todd, NC. Email cutford@skybest.com. Phone 828-773-3536.
15 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
18 – Sat.	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Watauga County, Echo Valley Farm near Zionville. There is a limit of 10 people so contact Martha Cutler to sign up early. Check the HCAS group email for updates as the date approaches. . Email cutford@skybest.com. Phone 336-877-4031.
18 – Sat.	9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Third Saturday Bird, Bugs, and Blooms Nature Walk. Tomkins Knob/Jeffress Park along the Mountain to Sea Trail. Call, text or email Bill Dunson for further information: 276-233-6364 cell phone, wdunson@comcast.net
19 - Sun	7:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ My Hot Spot. Carter County, Tennessee. Hampton Creek Cove Natural Area. Contact Judi Sawyer, jsawyer105@gmail.com, 423-481-1184
21 – Tue.	6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	Third Tuesday HCAS monthly meeting, Holiday Inn Express, Boone. Presenter is Steve Dowlan
22 - Wed	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - No trip leader / no host
25 – Sat.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leader: Steve Dowlan
29 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members

## June

1 – Sat.	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane. Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
5 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
8 – Sat.	9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Wagoner Access Bird Walk, New River State Park, 358 New River State Park Road, Laurel Springs, Ashe County, NC. Wet weather requires boots and check listserv for cancellations.
8 – Sat.	9:00 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.	Forsyth Audubon Second Saturday Bird Walk - Location varies. For details check <a href="http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar">http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar</a>
12 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
15 – Sat.	9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Third Saturday Bird, Bugs, and Blooms Nature Walk. Osborne Mountain Overlook to US 421 along the Mountains-to-Sea Trail. Call, text or email Bill Dunson for further information: 276-233-6364 cell phone, wdunson@comcast.net
18 – Tue.	6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	Third Tuesday HCAS monthly meeting, Holiday Inn Express, Boone.



19 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
26 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: No Host
29 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: Steve Dowlan

## July

3 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
6 – Sat.	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane. Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
10 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
13 – Sat.	9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Forsyth Audubon Second Saturday Bird Walk - Location varies. For details check <a href="http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar">http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar</a>
16 – Tue.	6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	Third Tuesday HCAS monthly meeting, Holiday Inn Express, Boone.
17 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
20 – Sat.	9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Third Saturday Bird, Bugs, and Blooms Nature Walk. Brookshire Park Hill Trail. Call, text or email Bill Dunson for further information: 276-233-6364 cell phone, <a href="mailto:wdunson@comcast.net">wdunson@comcast.net</a>
24 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
27 – Sat.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: Steve Dowlan
31 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members

For a full schedule of birding festivals and events throughout the U.S. please visit  
<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/birding-festivals/>

***Calendar Reminder: A monthly fourth Saturday bird walk at Valle Crucis Community Park and a monthly Third Saturday Birds, Bugs, and Blooms Nature Walk has been added to the field trip schedule.***



## 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

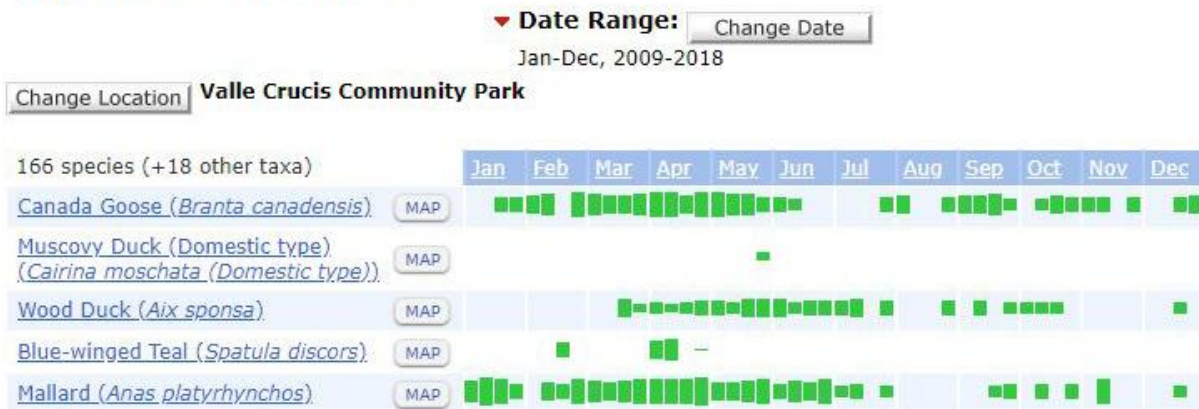


Observations entered into eBird range from a single species that was observed while mowing the lawn to extensive lists with photo and sound recordings made while birding all day. eBird encourages a broad range of observation types, and makes data entry easy. Some beginning birders are reluctant to enter 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 summarizes sightings of unusual and rare birds, as well as observed trends for our more common and expected species in the High Country for each Hoots issue. Guy usually gleans these sightings from eBird, but please do forward your thoughts and comments, such as "I saw very few Belted Kingfishers in the High Country this winter as compared to last winter." Sometimes what we are not seeing is as significant as what we are seeing! The reporting period for sightings and observations in the current issue is December, January, and February 2019. Frequently cited locations are abbreviated, with a key to abbreviations at the end of field notes.

*The most notable thing about the winter was much lower numbers of sparrows than usual, especially including White-throated, Swamp, White-crowned, Fox, and Field Sparrows. All of these sparrows were tough to find this winter in the region, and when they were found it was almost always a single bird.*

**Cackling Goose**, 2 at RIVERSEDGE on 15 Feb and staying in area through end of period



*Cackling Goose, 16 February 2019, Interflex Retention Pond, Wilkes County. Photo by R. Gray*

**American Wigeon**, 2 at Ronda community in Wilkes on 15 Dec, 3 at KERRSCOTT on 27 Dec, one at MULBERRYFIELDS on 3 Jan, one at RIVERSEDGE on 3 Feb

**Green-winged Teal**, 4 at Ronda community in Wilkes on 15 Dec, 1 male at Lake Louise in Alleghany Co. on 1 Feb

**Northern Shoveler**, 5 at CAMPHARRISON on 28 Jan thru 15 Feb, single at MULBERRYFIELDS 1 and 2 Jan was probably the same bird as the one reported at RIVERSEDGE on 6 Jan

**Redhead**, one at CAMPHARRISON on 28 Jan, up to 6 at WOODFIELD from 17-23 Feb, large group of 19 at BASSLAKE on 19 Feb, one at BASSLAKE on 24 Feb

**Canvasback**, a flock of up to 8 birds stayed in the Wilkesboro area in Wilkes County from 31 Jan through 23 Feb

**Common Goldeneye**, a flock of up to 10 birds stayed at WOODFIELD from 3-23 Feb

**Lesser Scaup**, 2 at KERRSCOTT on 31 Jan, one at Lake Louise in Alleghany Co. on 1 Feb, one at CAMPHARRISON on 5 Feb, 2 at Bullhead Pond on 18 Feb, 12 at WOODFIELD on 23 Feb, 4 at BASSLAKE on 24 Feb

**Greater Scaup**, 11 at WOODFIELD on 23 Feb





**Redhead**, 24 Feb 2019, Bass Lake, Watauga County.  
Photo by R. Gray



**Canvasback**, 5 Feb 2019, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane

**Ring-necked Duck**, 1 at POWDERHORN 5-8 Feb, 9 at BASSLAKE on 10 Feb, 5 at BASSLAKE on 18 Feb, 4 at Bullhead Rd in Alleghany Co. on 18 Feb, very large flock of 55 at BASSLAKE on 25 Feb



**Common Merganser**, 5 February 2019, Powderhorn Mountain Community, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane

**Common Merganser**, 2 males at POWDER on 5 Feb were first report in about 40 years for Watauga Co.

**Horned Grebe**, 3 at KERRSCOTT on 27 Dec and one there on 3 Jan; up to two at YMCA Camp Harrison in Wilkes, on 3 Jan and also on 28 Jan and 5 Feb; one at Watauga River Road on 17 Jan was first winter report for Watauga County.

**Northern Bobwhite**, VCCP 2 Dec

**Ruffed Grouse**, BRP (Ashe /Wilkes) 3 Dec , Milepost 266 on BRP in Ashe Co. on 9 Feb, TODD on 15 Feb

**Wild Turkey**, large group of 47 near Meat Camp area of Watauga Co. on 14 Feb

**Wilson's Snipe**, Lomax community in Wilkes on 15 Dec, 2 at VCCP on 24 Feb

**American Kestrel**, one at ASUFARM on 18 Dec, one at Sugar Grove in Watauga, 11 and 26 Dec, one near Meat Camp community of Watauga Co. on 8 Feb, one at TODD on 26 Feb



**Merlin**, 28 January 2019, W. Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane

**Merlin**, one at KERRSCOTT on 3 Jan thru end of period apparently overwintered in the area, LINCREEK 5 Feb

**Northern Saw-whet-Owl**, one at Nettle Knob Road in Ashe Co., 27 Dec

**Great Horned Owl**, 2 at TODD on 25 Feb

**Golden Eagle**, River Road off of Nile Road just north of VA border with Alleghany Co, 4 Jan

**Bald Eagle**, US221, 3 Dec, Back building nest at Hounds Ears Club in Watauga on 30 Dec, seen repeatedly in KERRSCOTT area but no nest found





**Bald Eagle**, 26 December 2018, River Pointe Lane, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

**Broad-winged Hawk**, one at HICKKNOLL, 23 Dec was a first county report for winter and an apparent late migrant

**Black Vulture**, uncommon in winter in the mountains, 2 at LINCREEK on 10 Feb

**Ring-billed Gull**, not common above the blue ridge, 3 were at Bullhead Road in Alleghany Co. on 15 Feb. The flock at KERRSCOTT had up to 400 birds on 17 Feb

**Horned Lark**, at the Lomax area of Wilkes Co., flock of 27 on 15 Dec, and 2 heard on 30 Dec

**Loggerhead Shrike**, one found on the Mountain City CBC, just 5 miles from Watauga Co. border near Neva TN, 1 Jan. This site, at around 2200 ft. elevation, is significantly lower than anywhere in the NC high country. We're still looking for our first bona fide record for the high country.

**Blue-headed Vireo**, one reported at RIVERSEDGE on 21 Feb was only our 2nd ever winter report for the 5 county region.

**Gray Catbird**, one was found throughout the period and apparently overwintered at the Mulberry fields area on the Yadkin River Greenway in Wilkes Co, one at KERRSCOTT, 3 Jan ; one at BROOKSHIRE 2 Feb and again on 10 Feb

**Brown Thrasher**, One at Corbett McNeil Rd in Watauga Co., 17 Jan and one in the Fleetwood community of Ashe Co. 23-27 Jan, were quite unusual in the dead of winter. Also one in the Roaring River area of Wilkes Co. on 20 Feb was



**Savannah Sparrow**, 17 February 2019, Lowes Park at River's Edge, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane

not quite as unusual at that lower elevation.

**Savannah Sparrow**, flock of 12 at White Plains Road in Wilkes on 29 Dec, single at Reddies River Greenway in Wilkes Co. on 1 Jan, and group of 5 at RIVERSEDGE on 17 Feb

**Fox Sparrow**, up to 2 at TODD on 9-20 Feb

**Purple Finch**, scarce this winter in the high country, several were found at BENMILLER, a few came to feeders at POWDER, and a large group were at Bullhead Road in Alleghany Co.

**Pine Siskin**, very few in the area this winter, up to 5 at LINCREEK on 2 and 3 Jan, 2 at VCCP on 24 Feb

**Red-winged Blackbird**, None were found in the high country this winter during Dec and Jan, but they started returning in early Feb with the earliest returns at TODD on 7 Feb



**Pine Warbler**, 21 December 2018, Boone Greenway area, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane

**Rusty Blackbird**, one apparently overwintered at ECHO, seen sporadically from 4 Dec through 16 Feb at a feeder. This appears to be a first indication of a blackbird of any type truly spending the entire winter in Watauga Co, as almost all disappear through January. In Wilkes Co., a large group of up to 34 birds was with a large flock of mostly cowbirds, but including grackles and red-winged blackbirds, at RIVERSEDGE on 17 and 18 Feb, and could possibly have overwintered in the area as there was a massive flock of mostly cowbirds that eluded complete identification during the Upper Yadkin CBC, and 3 birds were found

mixed with grackles and red-wings at MULBERRYFIELDS on 2 Jan.

**Pine Warbler**, one near GREENWAY on the CBC starting 21 Dec. for about a week; one at POWDER 5-18 Feb was quite early, one at GREENWAY on 1 Mar could have been the same bird from the CBC in December staying through the period, but more reports would be needed to confirm overwintering.

**Palm Warbler**, one at KERRSCOTT on 18 Dec, and RIVERSEDGE on 5 Jan and again on 17 Feb probably overwintered in the Wilkesboro area.

#### **AREA KEY:**

**ASUFARM:** Appalachian State Experimental Farm, Watauga Co. **BASSLAKE**-Bass Lake, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga. **BENMILLER**-Ben Miller Road, Watauga. **BRP**-Blue Ridge Parkway.

**CAMPHARRISON:** YMCA Camp Harrison in Wilkes Co. **HICKKNOLL**-Hickory Knoll development (private), Watauga. **KERRSCOTTRES**- W. Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes. **LINNCREEK**-Linville Creek Crossing & Overlook development (private), Watauga. **POWDER**-Powderhorn Mountain development (private), Watauga. **RIVERSEDGE:** Lowe's Park at River's Edge, Wilkes Co. **TODD:** Todd community on Border of Ashe and Watauga Cos. **VCCP**-Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga. **WOODFIELD:** Woodfield residential development and ponds, Wilkes Co.



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 (August – September - October), please have all material to the editor by July 19, 2019. 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 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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