

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

High Country Audubon Society

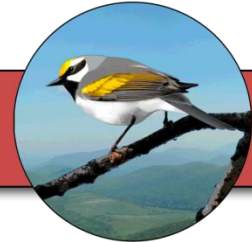


Serving Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties

Volume 11 – Issue 3

August-September-October 2019

President's Message



Dear Fellow Birders,

Hello everyone, it's been a busy summer, as well as a very exciting one!! We've had several really interesting sightings of birds that are uncommon here in the High Country during the summer. For example, red-headed woodpeckers, blue grosbeak, yellow-breasted chat, and several instances of a black-billed cuckoo. I'm sure Guy will elaborate on our various sightings, but it's a great time to be living in the High Country!

We've also made progress with our Wetlands Campaign projects. As many of you witnessed during our annual meeting, the Foscoe Wetlands trail is now complete, making it possible for us to easily access the center of the wetlands. Hopefully, we'll have some interesting birding there, especially during migration seasons. We thank Blue Ridge Conservancy for partnering with us and allowing us access to the wetlands. We also completed the majority of the Green Valley Park project and are just waiting until fall to plant the remaining black cherry trees. They were a bit too fragile to plant this summer. Again, we thank the board of Green Valley Park for their willingness to work with us on this project. Finally, we've finished stage one of the Brookshire Park project. We now have a viewing area with benches overlooking the eventual wetlands at the park. Stage two cannot proceed until the county completes the actual wetland restoration project. We will then erect a bird blind somewhere within the wetlands. HCAS appreciates Watauga County partnering with us on this project. We also still need to erect the signs at both Green Valley Park and Brookshire Park. Once again, thank you to all those who contributed to this Campaign.

We're also completing our first summer of expanded bird walks, with walks every Wednesday and Saturday throughout the season. Thank you very much to our leaders, Guy McGrane, Steve Dowlan, Anita Clemmer, Bill Dunson and Doris Ratchford. Also thank you to Martha Cutler, Sheryl McNair and Richard Gray for substituting when necessary.

Steve Dowlan's early summer workshops were very popular, so Steve is offering another class August 24th. This class will focus on migration and promises to be very informative. Register early!

Finally, we'll be planning our fall field trips soon, so stay tuned to the website calendar for details. Additionally, keep watch for information on the hawk watches as September approaches. Thank you to both Cindy Darling and Beverly Saltonstall for their continued work with the website so that we can all stay informed!
Enjoy the fall migration!

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!!

Bill Stiles

Brookshire Park Project - Stage 1



HCAS Annual Meeting - 16 July 2019

All photos by Monty Combs





Welcome new members of HCAS!

Lori Arent
Gordon Carr, Boone, NC
Greg Goodman, West Jefferson
Chuck Hennings, Blowing Rock/Cocoa, FL
Patty Masten, Charlotte
Susan & Bob Powers, Lenoir
Nancy Sluzinski, Marion
Claire Turner, Deep Gap

Thank you to these who have supported HCAS with donations.

Irene Burke
Brenda & Monty Combs
Jim & Carole Haselton
Chuck Hennings
Al & Mary Olson
Janet & Richard Paulette
Susan & Bob Powers

Donations of materials are also much-appreciated!

Bill & Margaret Dunson donated a welded wire roll, T posts, landscape cloth and pins to the HCAS project at **Green Valley Community Park**. The materials were used to fashion cages to protect the newly-planted trees from deer damage.

Guy McGrane donated additional welded wire and picked up a load of mulch at the recycling center which he and other volunteers spread around the trees at **Green Valley Park**.

Vulcan Materials donated granite dust for the new viewing area at **Brookshire Park**.

Our Volunteers Are Wonderful!!

HCAS has undertaken several projects this year which required the help of volunteers. Heartfelt gratitude goes out to these who gave their time and energy to help make amazing things happen!

Martha Cutler & Doug Blackford
Bill & Margaret Dunson
Pat Geiger
Guy McGrane

Mary & Al Olson
Doris & Jim Ratchford
Debbie & Jimmy Shetterly

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

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.

Bird Identification Class at Valle Crucis Community Park Prepare for Fall Migration!

August 24, 2019. This four hour Saturday session will begin at 8:A.M and will focus on shedding some light on the most confusing species pairs and species groups that regularly pass through and sometimes spend winters in the High Country. Specifically, we will look at waterfowl, vireos, warblers, and sparrows. If time permits, we may also have a look at in-flight raptors. Plan on classroom sessions that last 45 minutes to an hour, with brief field birding breaks in the park. I will post a pdf document of the class slides for each student to download after the session. Bring note taking tools, your favorite field guide (I like the Sibley Guide to Birds), binoculars, and footwear suitable for wet grass. The session will be limited to 12 people – another session can be added if enrollment tops 12. To enroll, send a text message to Steve Dowlan (814-319-2332) or an email to owlhooter@aol.com. A donation of 10\$ to HCAS is requested for participating in the class.



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/>

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.

Grandfather Mountain Hawk Watch

September 1 @ 9:00 A.M. - September 30 @ 6:00 P.M - Guests are invited to join the mountain's naturalists as they count and celebrate the annual spectacle of the fall raptor migration. Participants can meet daily at Linville Peak, across the Mile High Swinging Bridge, weather permitting. Hawk Watch Orientation is scheduled for August 30th at 10am on the second floor of the Top Shop. Email hawkwatch@grandfather.com or call 828-737-0833 for additional information.

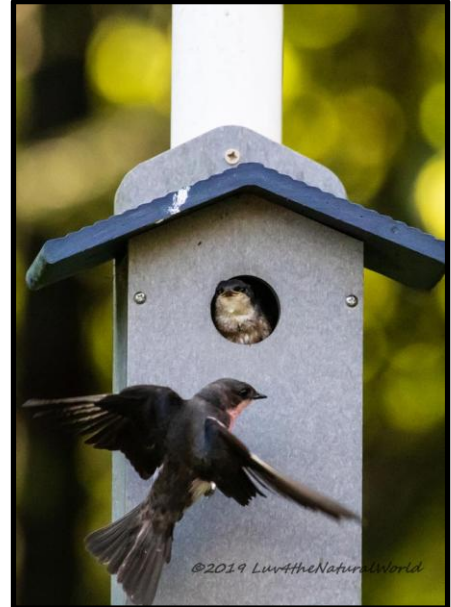
PHOTO ESSAY

Fledging Day for Tree Swallows

At Judi Sawyer's House on Roan Mountain



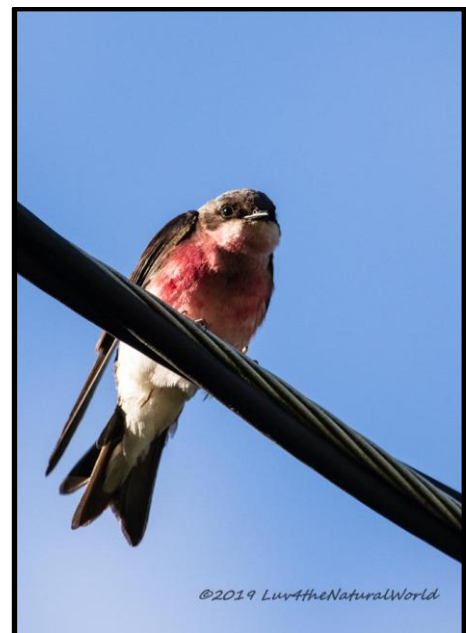
A "helper" female appearing to feed a nestling. 11 June 2019.



The "helper" bird leaving the nest. 11 June 2019.



The female parent flying up to feed a nestling. 11 June 2019.



The "helper" female on the wire; she was very close to the male parent. 11 June 2019



The male parent feeding two of the four fledglings that same afternoon. 11 June 2019.



The male parent feeding another nestling in a tree nearby. 11 June 2019.



The female parent feeding two of the nestlings the morning after the day they fledged. They had made it across the lane in front of my house to the power line over the field. 12 June 2019



The female parent feeding the same nestling as in the photo above. 11 June 2019.

All photos by Judi Sawyer

Hawkwatch at Elk Mountain Overlook 3 Days a Week in September

Guy McGrane will be organizing a Hawk Watch at Elk Mountain Overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway this September. We will watch 3 days a week, Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday, beginning at 10 A.M., weather permitting, for the entire month. Everyone is welcome to participate, and it's a good idea to bring sunscreen, sunglasses, hat, and binoculars/scope. Elk Mountain Overlook is the first overlook north of US421 on the parkway, and has excellent viewing into the Piedmont.

Third Tuesdays



High Country Audubon Society meets March through October on the third Tuesday of the month at the Holiday Inn Express Boone, 1943 Blowing Rock Rd, Boone, NC 28607, from 6:30pm – 7:30pm. Please check <http://highcountryaudubon.org/calendar-2/> for up-to-the-minute information on presenters and program topics.

Sue Wells Research Grant – August 20

Taylor Paige Fulk will report on the results of her research funded by the HCAS Sue Wells Research Grant.

Hope for Hemlocks in the NC High Country and Beyond – September 17

Thom Green, outreach associate for the Hemlock Restoration Initiative, will discuss the ecological importance of hemlocks in Western North Carolina, their value as bird habitat, and the biology of the invasive hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) that is threatening them. The presentation will address how chemical, biological and silvicultural treatment methods are being used together to reduce the impact of HWA on hemlocks in our state, and will touch on new research findings, new treatment techniques, and best management practices. Audience members will learn about actions they can take on their own, and where to find resources to assist them in their own hemlock management.

Forests for Birds: What Birds Need and How We Can Help – October 15

Curtis Smalling will wind up our 2019 program series with this talk.



Things I have learned—but you probably already know...

Article by Sheryl McNair

I'm often startled to learn something I didn't previously know about various birds, or something that contradicts what I thought I knew. I thought I would share these tidbits in the hope that others could share their moments of insight or flashes of understanding. I think the biggest contradiction to my previous "knowledge" started with Curtis Smalling commenting "...and female Cardinals sing". Not too long after that, eBird came out with an email stating that many female birds sing—including at least 40 East Coast birds. Among these are several warblers, such as American Redstarts, Ovenbirds and Yellow Warblers. That was a surprise, since I recalled that in my early days of birding, I had been introduced to Breeding Bird Surveys (BBSs) and they were explained to me as tallying the numbers of birds singing—and the researchers could then approximate the total population based on the assumption those were all singing males. I wonder if the past BBS results were adjusted at all based on this new knowledge?

I always thought one of the distinct identification tips for a Field Sparrow was the pink bill—until I observed a sparrow in my Maryland yard (not Field Sparrow habitat) with a pink bill. Closer inspection and field guide research revealed that juvenile Chipping Sparrows had pink bills.

Similarly, I thought those scolding sounds were the province of chickadees, titmice and wrens. I was confounded to learn that Blue-headed

Vireos have a similar scolding sound in their repertoire.

Recently, I thought I might have heard a Belted Kingfisher—I heard a rattle similar to a Kingfisher, but much shorter & less distinct. Lo and behold, it was a female Baltimore Oriole!

I know there has been a previous Hoots article about distinguishing Chipping Sparrows' calls from Dark-Eyed Juncos and Pine Warblers. My quite unscientific distinguishing technique is that, generally, Chippies sound like those rotating water sprinklers, Juncos an old-fashioned telephone ringing, and Pines a musical trill. But, I also find that when they occur together, there seems to be quite a bit of overlap—as though they are happy to mimic each other. (I wish it were not so...perhaps it's just aging ears or eyesight?)

Lastly, for now, I thank Martha Cutler for informing me of the existence of "eclipse" plumage in waterfowl. I was in Maine, and seeing lots of birds that didn't match any description in my Sibley's Field Guide. They looked similar to Common Eiders, but their plumage was all wrong. Once I started Googling "eclipse", I had my birds! Most field guides just don't have room to cover eclipse plumage—and since waterfowl in eclipse are quite vulnerable, since they are flightless, they hide away from sight even more than usual. I discovered recently that in eclipse, a male Wood Duck's primary difference from a female is the red eye ring.

THROUGH OUR LENS



Black-billed Cuckoo, 3 June 2019, Dunson yard near Boone, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson



Bobolink, 20 May 2019, Mount Vernon Baptist Church Cemetery near Boone, Watauga County. Photo by J. Sawyer



Purple Finch, 30 April 2019, Ratchford yard, Ashe County. Photo by D. Ratchford



Worm-eating Warbler, 23 April 2019, Mountains-to-the-Sea Trail near Phillips Gap, Ashe County. Photo by R. Gray.



Ovenbird, 16 April 2019, Stoney Fork Valley Scenic Overlook, Blue Ridge Parkway, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



House Wren, 26 May 2019, New River State Park, US221 Access, River Run Trail, Ashe County. Photo by R. Gray

Do You Know?

Boreal forests are among the few places on earth that are still mostly untouched by the ever-expanding footprint of human endeavors. The role of boreal forests in sustaining some bird populations is extraordinary... They are arguably the “bird factory” of North America, and play an extraordinary role in sustaining some bird populations. During spring migration as many as 3 billion birds migrate north to breeding grounds in the boreal forest. In round numbers, 80% of the waterfowl species of North America, 63% of the finch species, and 53% of warbler species breed in boreal forests, and for nearly 100 species, 50% or more of their entire breeding populations occur in boreal forests. For 35 species, more than 80% of their entire breeding populations is found in boreal forests. Up to 5 billion birds then migrate south out of the boreal each fall after breeding, often in waves segregated by sex and age.

Most of our “confusing fall warblers” are observed on the way south from boreal forests:

Warbler species almost totally dependent on boreal forests

Tennessee warbler, *Oreothlypis peregrina*
 Magnolia warbler, *Setophaga magnolia*
 Cape May warbler, *Setophaga tigrina*
 Yellow-rumped warbler, *Setophaga coronata*
 Kirtland's warbler, *Setophaga kirtlandii*
 Palm warbler, *Setophaga palmarum*
 Bay-breasted warbler, *Setophaga castanea*
 Blackpoll warbler, *Setophaga striata*
 Northern waterthrush, *Parkesia noveboracensis*
 Connecticut warbler, *Oporornis agilis*
 Mourning warbler, *Geothlypis philadelphia*

Warbler species that are very dependent on boreal forests

Orange-crowned warbler, *Oreothlypis celata*
 Nashville warbler, *Oreothlypis ruficapilla*
 Chestnut-sided warbler, *Setophaga pensylvanica*
 Black-throated green warbler, *Setophaga virens*
 Blackburnian warbler, *Setophaga fusca*
 Black-and-white warbler, *Mniotilta varia*
 Ovenbird, *Seiurus aurocapilla*
 Wilson's warbler, *Cardellina pusilla*
 Canada warbler, *Cardellina canadensis*

To better understand the timetable for these species' passage through the High Country, go to eBird's **Bar Chart** for Watauga County - <https://ebird.org/barchart?r=US-NC-189&yr=all&m=>. Simply tap on the “Change Location” button at the top of the page to create a bar chart for another county. As these birds begin to pass through the High Country, remember the key field marks that will assist in sorting out the most difficult identification conundrums:

- Presence/absence of wing bars
- Color of undertail coverts
- Streaks/no streaks on the underside
- Presence/absence of eye ring
- Presence/absence of eye line
- Arrangement of yellow vs. white on the underside
- Foot color



Blackpoll Warbler in basic (fall) plumage. Photo by Steve Dowlan

Greater and Lesser Scaup Spend the Summer in the High Country

An adult male Lesser Scaup was first observed at a privately owned pond along Church Hollow Road in Foscoe on 16 March 2019, and has remained through the third week of July. A nonbreeding female Greater Scaup was first observed at Bass Lake on 25 June 2019, and was still present through the third week of July. These locations are just five miles apart, and no other diving ducks of any species were reported from the High Country counties to eBird after 4 May, when a Bufflehead was seen at Simms Pond along the Blue Ridge Parkway.



Adult male Lesser Scaup on 31 May 2019. Photo by B. Dunson



Nonbreeding female Greater Scaup on 25 June 2019. Photo by B. Dunson



Nonbreeding female Greater Scaup on 25 June 2019. Photo by G. McGrane



Nonbreeding female Greater Scaup on 25 June 2019. Photo by G. McGrane



Nonbreeding female Greater Scaup on 16 July 2019. Photo by B. Dunson



Nonbreeding female Greater Scaup on 26 June 2019. Photo by S. Dowlan

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August – September – October 2019

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

<http://highcountryaudubon.org/calendar-2/>

August

3 – Sat.	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane. Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
7 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
10- Sat.	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.aspx (map)
10 – 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. Check listserv for cancellations.
14 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
20 – Tue.	6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	Third Tuesday HCAS monthly meeting, Holiday Inn Express, Boone. Presenter is Taylor Paige Fulk
21 - Wed	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - No trip leader / no host
24 – Sat.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Bird ID Class at Valle Crucis Community Park – Getting ready for fall migration. Contact Steve Dowlan, 814-319-2332 or Owlhooter@aol.com.
25 – Sun.	9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Third Saturday Bird, Bugs, and Blooms Nature Walk – <u>CHANGED FROM August 17!</u> Todd Island Park, 1219 Todd Railroad Grade Rd, Todd, NC 28684. Call, text or email Bill Dunson for further information: 276-233-6364 cell phone, wdunson@comcast.net
28 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members

September

4 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
7 – Sat.	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane. Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
11 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
14 – 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.
14 – Sat.	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 – Tue.	6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	Third Tuesday HCAS monthly meeting, Holiday Inn Express, Boone. Presenter is Thom Green
18 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
21 – Sat.	9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Third Saturday Bird, Bugs, and Blooms Nature Walk. Greenway Parking Lot, 355 Hunting Hills Ln, Boone, NC 28607. Call, text or email Bill Dunson for further information: 276-233-6364 cell phone, wdunson@comcast.net
25 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: No Host
Sept 27 – Oct 4		2019 Little St. Simons Island Fall Birding Days, 1000 Hampton River Club Marina Drive, St. Simons Island, Georgia 31522. https://www.littlestsimonsisland.com/promotions#fall-birding-days
28 – Sat.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: Steve Dowlan

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August – September – October 2019

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

<http://highcountryaudubon.org/calendar-2/>

October

2 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
2 - 5		16th Alabama Coastal BirdFest, a Birding & Nature Festival, 5 Rivers Delta Resource Center, 30945 Five Rivers Boulevard, Spanish Fort, AL 36527. alabamacoastalbirdfest@gmail.com
5 – Sat.	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Come Bird @ Brookshire - Trip leader: Guy McGrane. Meet at parking area near the picnic shelter.
9 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
12 – Sat.	9:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Forsyth Audubon Second Saturday Bird Walk - Location varies. For details check http://www.forsythaudubon.org/Activities/Calendar
15 – Tue.	6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.	Third Tuesday HCAS monthly meeting, Holiday Inn Express, Boone. Presenter is Curtis Smalling
16 – Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
15 - 20		Wings Over Water Wildlife Festival, National Wildlife Refuges Visitor Center, US Fish & Wildlife Service, 100 Conservation way, Manteo, North Carolina 27954. http://www.wingsoverwater.org/
23– Wed.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: HCAS members
17 - 20		Cape May Fall Festival, Grand Hotel of Cape May, 1045 Beach Ave Cape May, New Jersey 08204. https://njudubon.org/nja-events/cape-may-fall-festival/
26 – Sat.	8:30 a.m. 11:00 a.m.	Valle Crucis Community Park Bird Walk - Trip Leaders: Steve Dowlan
30 – 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/>



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

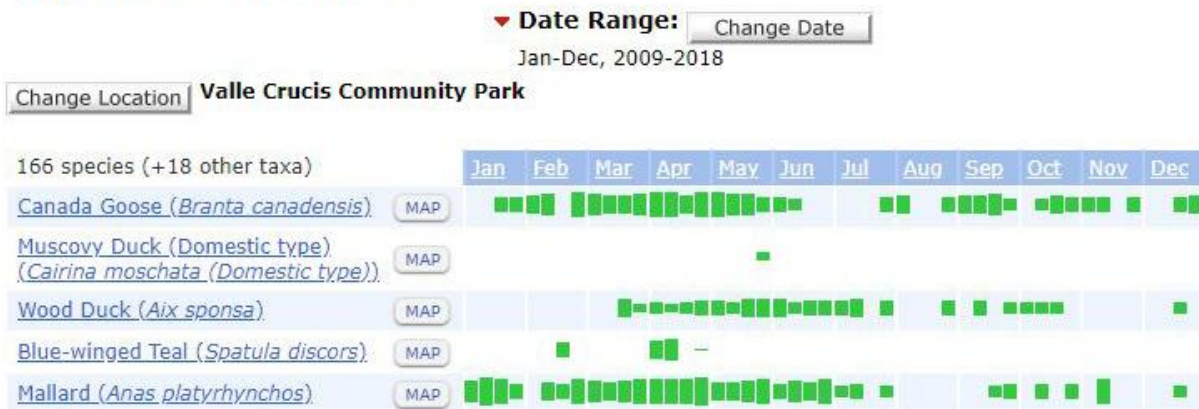


Observations entered into eBird range from a single species that was observed while mowing the lawn to extensive lists with photo and sound recordings made while birding all day. eBird encourages a broad range of observation types, and makes data entry easy. Some beginning birders are reluctant to enter 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 March, April, and May 2019. Frequently cited locations are abbreviated, with a key to abbreviations at the end of field notes.

The most notable thing about spring birding in the high country was probably the scarcity of migrating warblers, which was noted on a regional scale as well, by many observers, as reported to the *carolinabirds* listserv.

Cackling Goose, 2 at RIVERSEDGE continued from winter and stayed through 27 Mar.

Blue-winged Teal, flock of 3 to 13 at PRICE from 24 Mar through 3 Apr may have been several different groups; flock of 8 at LANDHARBOR on 31 Mar.

Gadwall, one male at SIMSPOND on 06 Mar and a female at BASS on 10 Mar.

Redhead, a flock of 4 at WOODFIELD on 09 Mar was part of the same flock that spent late winter in that area.

Ring-necked Duck, a flock of 61 at BASS on 06-10 Mar was quite a high number for the area.

Lesser Scaup, a flock of 24 at POWDERHORN on 3 Mar was quite large.

Greater Scaup, one at RIVERSEDGE on 11 Mar, one at LANDHARBOR ON 11 Mar.

American Wigeon, 8 at LANDHARBOR on 23 Mar was likely the highest number reported for Avery County.



Cackling Goose, 10 March 2019, Interflex Ponds, Wilkesboro, Wilkes County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Canvasback, one at LANDHARBOR on 11 Mar appears to be only the third report for the northern mountains of NC.

Red-breasted Merganser, from 1 to 6 at PRICE from 6 Mar to 30 Apr; from 4 to 14 birds at KERRSCOTT from 05 Mar thru 15 Apr, one at LANDHARBOR on 23 Mar and 31 Mar.

Common Merganser, one at LANDHARBOR on 6 Mar appears to be the first report for Avery Co.,



Gadwall, 6 March 2019, Simms Pond, Blue Ridge Parkway, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane



American Bittern, 23 April 2019, Brookshire Park, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane



Red-breasted Merganser, 6 March 2019, Price Lake, Blue Ridge Parkway, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Wilson's Snipe, up to 3 at GREENWAY from 3 Mar thru 9 Apr; 1 at VCCP on 8 Apr.

American Woodcock, up to 3 at ECHOVALLEY on 9 Mar and 7 Apr; one on 17 Mar at



Ring-billed Gull, 24 March 2019, Bass Lake, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

and only the 4th report for the northern mountains of NC.

Common Loon, one at LANDHARBOR on 23 Mar; one to two at PRICE on 27 Mar thru 27 Apr; up to 3 at KERRSCOTT from 3 Mar to 15 Apr.

American Bittern- one at BROOKSHIRE from 23 to 28 Apr was well seen and photographed.

Great Egret, one at RIVERSEDGE on 16 Mar appears to be the earliest spring report for the 5 county region.

Ring-billed Gull, one at BASS on 24 Mar.

Bonaparte's Gull, one at CAMPHARRISON on 13 Apr, and one at KERRSCOTT on 15 Apr.

HOLLOWAY, one at ASU on 19 Mar, and one at PONDMTN on 31 May.

Ruffed Grouse, one at Milepost 264 on the BRP, Ashe Co., on 2 Mar; and another at Green Mountain Road in Watauga Co., on 13 Mar.

Osprey, our first report of the year was at KERRSCOTT on 23 Mar. Again this spring, a pair attempted to nest at Fort Hamby Campground at KERRSCOTT and appeared to fail.

Merlin, an overwintering bird at BANDITSROOST was last seen on 5 Mar; migrants were one at BROOKSHIRE on 1 Apr, one in Ashe Co. on hwy 194 on 3 Apr, one at

ASU, on 26 Apr one at Roaring River, Wilkes Co., on 28 Apr.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird, First of spring in area on 9 Apr at HICKKNOLL

Eastern Whip-poor-will, First of spring in area were two separate birds on 29 Mar, one on Browntown Road in Wilkes Co, and another on Chelsea Lane in Alleghany Co.

Tree Swallow, Our earliest reports of returning birds were on 10 and 11 Mar at VCCP and RIVERSEDGE, , while the first report of large numbers was 23 birds at RIVERSEDGE on 16 Mar.



Great Egret, 16 March 2019, Lowe's Park at River's Edge, Wilkes County. Photo by J. Sawyer

Brown Thrasher, first of spring at LINNCREEK on 15 Mar.

Vesper Sparrow, 1 to 4 at GREENWAY from 24-30 Mar, 3 at KERRSCOTT on 27 Mar, and one at VCCP on 4 Apr.

Savannah Sparrow, one at Green Knob Mount Road, Watauga Co., on 25 Mar and again on 3

Apr; up to 11 birds at GREENWAY from 29 to 31 Mar; up to 6 birds at VCCP from 4-8 Apr.

Red-winged Blackbird, 375 at BROOKSHIRE on 7 Mar may be a high count for the high country.



Vesper Sparrow, 27 March 2019, Kerr Scott Reservoir Dam, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane

Rusty Blackbird, a good sized flock of up to 35 birds continued from the winter at RIVERSEDGE until 16 Mar; a few birds were at Church Hollow Road near Foscoe, Watauga Co., from 3 to 16 Mar; one at BROOKSHIRE on 7 Mar; one at GREENWAY on 30 Mar; three at VCCP on 3 Apr.

Pine Warbler, 2 birds at GREENWAY on 1 Mar were likely our first spring warblers returning, although its possible these birds wintered at this location, after their last report nearby in December.



Rusty Blackbird, 10 March 2019, Lowe's Park at River's Edge, Wilkes County

Louisiana Waterthrush, one on 4 Apr at GREENWAY was our earliest report this year

Palm Warbler, up to 2 birds reported at FORTHAMBY on 7, 12, and 24 Mar were very early and may have overwintered in the area.

Tennessee Warbler, one at ECHOVALLEY on 4 May during the Spring Count.

ASU- Appalachian State University, Watauga Co. BASS-Bass Lake, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga. BRP-Blue Ridge Parkway. CAMPHARRISON: YMCA Camp Harrison in Wilkes Co. ECHOVALLEY- Echo Valley Farm near Trade, TN, in Watauga Co. GREENWAY- Boone Greenway, Watauga Co. HICKKNOLL-Hickory Knoll development (private), Watauga Co. HOLLOWAY – Holloway Mtn Road near Tanawha Trail, Watauga Co. KERRSCOTT- W. Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes Co. LINNCREEK-Linville Creek Crossing & Overlook development (private), Watauga Co. LANDHARBOR- Linville Land Harbor Lake, Avery Co. PONDMTN- Pond Mountain Gamelands, Ashe Co. POWDERHORN-Powderhorn Mountain development (private), Watauga Co. PRICE- Julian Price Memorial Park, Watauga Co. RIVERSEDGE: Lowe's Park at River's Edge, Wilkes Co. SIMSPOND – Sims Pond in Julian Price Memorial Park, Watauga Co. VCCP-Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga Co. 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/>



Brown Thrasher with dependent fledgling, 10 July 2019, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

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

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 Audubon Society

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

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

<http://www.highcountryaudubon.org>

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