

HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

High Country Audubon Society

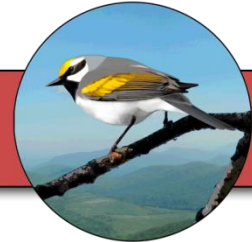


Serving Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties

Volume 11 – Issue 4

November 2019 to January 2020

President's Message



Dear Fellow Birders,

Hello and Happy New Year!! I hope everyone is staying warm. HCAS had a great 2019, and the Board is looking forward to exciting activities and projects for 2020.

Our Wetlands Appeal Campaign was very successful, thanks to many of you. With the money raised, approximately \$7200, we were able to work with Blue Ridge Conservancy to construct the trail at Foscoe Wetlands into the center of the property in order to enhance birding there. We also finished the Green Valley Park project, with the planting of native trees along the riparian zone, plus the erection of an informational sign at the canoe access. We're awaiting completion of the Brookshire Park wetlands restoration by the Town of Boone before we construct our second birding area at the park, but that should occur early this spring.

We received good news this January, with HCAS being awarded two grants from National Audubon. The first, the Collaborative Grant, provides \$998 for the establishment of a kiosk area at Brookshire. This grant requires us to match some of the funds with our own, so we will use HCAS funding to purchase additional plants for the Brookshire Park project. Additionally, we received a Burke Grant totaling \$9948. This grant involves working with New River Conservancy on their project to restore wetlands to the 24 or so acres on the other side of the river at Brookshire Park. NRC's grant does not provide for the planting of mature trees along the river, so this Burke Grant will provide funding for that. It also includes a commitment on the part of HCAS to host field trips for area schools, as well as a commitment to work toward a native plant resolution from the Town of Boone. Exciting projects! Thank you to Bob Cherry for his work writing these two proposals.

To update you on the state of HCAS – our Board continues to change as long-time Board members move on and as new members become active. Janet Paulette will be resigning from the Board this year – we wish to thank Janet for her many years of service to HCAS. She is indispensable! Additionally, we're converting to a less labor-intensive version of Hoots, as you will soon notice. We're retaining the President's Message, and Guy's wonderful section on bird sightings, but we will not have the large sections of bird articles as in the past. Hopefully, this will create a newsletter that many more people will take the time to read. We appreciate Steve Dowlan's hard work on Hoots!

We're also in the process of converting our group email from Yahoo Groups. As you may or may not know, Yahoo is no longer hosting group emails in the same manner. So, in order to post a message to

everyone at HCAS, you just need to email directly from your email account to highcountryaudubon@yahoo.com - this will reach everyone. The difference is that nothing is now stored and there is no webpage from which to access previous chats. This is extremely inconvenient, so we're looking for another method – stay tuned!

Finally, to update you on the finances of HCAS, we currently have a standing balance of \$10,562.75. This does not include the grant money that will be deposited within the next month. HCAS continues to sponsor the Sue Wells Research Grant and the Young Birders Scholarships each year. These are part of our commitment to encourage the next generations to enjoy birds and birding. One of the reasons that we receive grants is that we commit to matching the grants with our own funds. Much of our money is spent in that manner.

We'll have a full schedule of field trips and bird walks again this year, plus our second year of birding classes, so please continue to check the website calendar for these events. Happy birding!



Helping Birds – Audubon's Climate Watch

Article and photos by Judi Sawyer



I know that by now most of you have seen the results of the most recent Audubon Climate Report (<https://www.audubon.org/climate/survivalbydegrees>). It's a pretty dismal outlook for the future of the birds that bring us so much joy, with two-thirds of America's birds at risk of extinction. Like many of you, I've been asking what I can do to make a difference. And, like most of you who are Audubon members, I had received multiple emails from Audubon encouraging me to participate in their Climate Watch program.

A few weeks ago, I received yet another of those emails and decided to see what was involved. In a nutshell, Climate Watch is a

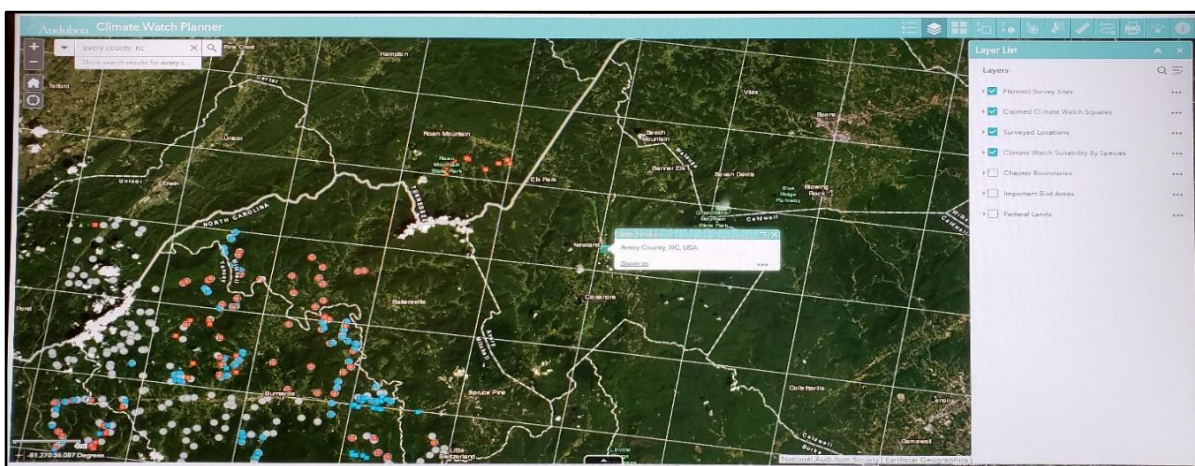
Community Science project designed to explore how American birds are responding to climate change. Participation in Climate Watch aims to build a better world for birds by using citizen science to test and improve climate models. And the good news is you don't even have to be an experienced birder to join in.

With the winter count period (January 15-February 15) approaching fast, I reached out to the closest coordinator listed in the Participant

Guide. Although, I'm an active participant and board member to High Country Audubon, I live just 5 miles over the border in Roan Mountain, TN. The coordinator, while not required to participate, was very helpful in answering questions and ensuring that I was getting myself set up correctly. The basic steps to participation are this:



1. Select your target species: Eastern species consist of Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Eastern Towhee, American Goldfinch and Eastern Bluebird. I selected White-breasted Nuthatch, but which one you choose is up to you. If you are inexperienced, you only have one species to learn and you can enlist the help of others to help you bird your area. Claim your Climate Watch Square: It is extremely helpful to watch the webinar on this topic. I didn't and it made it a little more challenging to navigate the ArcGIS map used by Audubon. I selected the square in Carter County that includes my yard, the town of Roan Mountain, and Roan Mountain State Park. In the image below, you can see the area that includes Western NC and Eastern TN. The dots represent squares where counting is ongoing and you can see the count areas that I plotted in my area in Roan Mountain. As you can see, there are a lot of areas in the High Country that need our help!



2. Plan your survey locations: This was a fun project for me. The idea is to pick locations that are within the count square, at least 200 m apart as the crow flies, and that contain suitable habitat for the species you are counting. Not sure about habitat? Cornell Lab of Ornithology's website for each species has habitat information under the "Life History" tab. Here's what they have to say about White-breasted Nuthatches: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/White-breasted_Nuthatch/lifehistory.



3. After perusing the map of my square and getting a feel for the boundaries, I set out to drive around and get GPS coordinates on my 12 survey locations. I had an idea of where I was going to go starting with my own yard and making my way, via Teaberry Road over to Roan Mountain State Park. I selected sites that required a bit of hiking, but that was only because I enjoy hiking. Sites that you do by car are just as acceptable but you should be sure to pick spots that can be accessed by

someone else if you are unable to do your count. I decided to select extra sites so that I could remove some that were too close together or, ended up being out of the count square after I got them on the map. I downloaded a free GPS app to record my coordinates and then searched for them on the map to plot them. Again, watching the webinar was very helpful, along with the detailed instructions in the participant guide.

4. The only thing left to do is to survey the locations sometime between now and February 15th. This involves going to each of the 12 locations I have chosen and counting for White-breasted Nuthatches (or your chosen species) for 5 minutes at each location. After 5 minutes you simply record how many of that species you saw or heard and move on to the next location. All locations should be done in the same day with early morning being the best time, in most cases to see/hear the most birds. I had planned to count today (Sunday, January 19th), but the ridiculously cold and windy conditions made the birding difficult since most of the birds were hunkered down out of the wind. That's the nice thing about having a month to survey; I'll pick a day with better weather if at all possible!



I hope that you'll consider participating in this important Citizen Science project. You can participate on your own, with a friend or friends and with or without the help of a coordinator. Since you likely won't be reading this until the winter count is nearly over, it's perfectly fine to start with the summer count and you'll have plenty of time to get set up.

If you want more information on what is involved or you're ready to get started, here is a link to the Participant Guide: <https://www.audubon.org/news/participant-resources-climate-watch>. It includes a list of

coordinators by state. There is also a story map that explains more about the project here: <https://www.audubon.org/features/esri-climate-watch> and a link to the webinar for claiming your climate square and setting up your map here: <https://nationalaudubon.app.box.com/s/8pstp8i362l88nctt1spxqb8guvutzq>. There are lots of other resources in the participant guide.

Also, if I can answer any questions about my experience as a first-time participant, feel free to email me at jsawyer105@gmail.com. Hope to see you out birding!!

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Please check our HCAS web site regularly for the full HCAS activity calendar
<http://highcountryaudubon.org/calendar-2/>

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

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

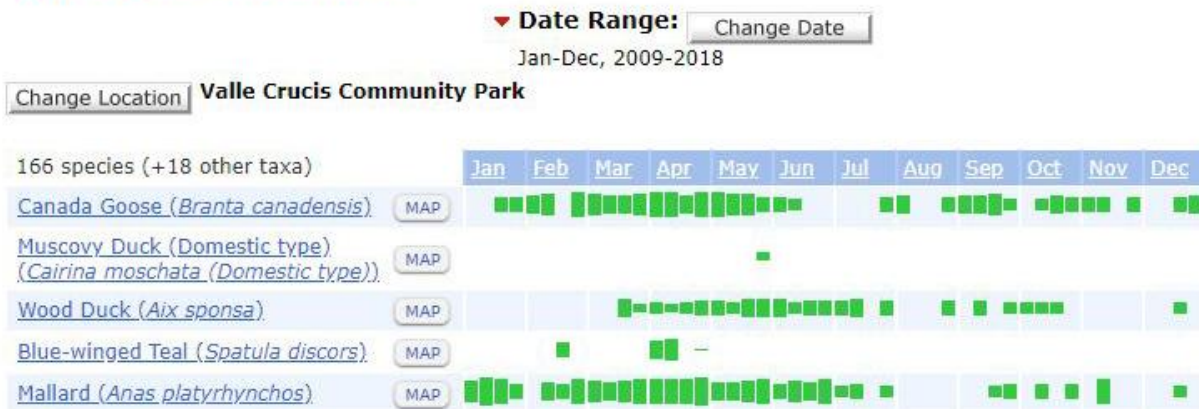


Observations entered into eBird range from a single species that was observed while mowing the lawn to extensive lists with photo and sound recordings made while birding all day. eBird encourages a broad range of observation types, and makes data entry easy. Some beginning birders are reluctant to enter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

Notable sightings in five-county area for June and July 2019

Presence thru the summer of both species of Scaup was quite unusual and noteworthy, though both birds were strays and not breeding.

Greater Scaup, a female bird first reported from BASSLAKE on 25 JUN, stayed through the end of the period, and into the fall, eventually getting tangled in fishing line and cut free.



Greater Scaup, 15 JUL 2019, Bass Lake, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson

Lesser Scaup, a single male continued from the spring at Church Hollow Rd., Watauga Co, thru the period. This bird was first detected at this location 6 March.

Northern Bobwhite, a pair of birds reported on 2 JUL at Green Knob Mt. Road, Watauga Co., could possibly have been released birds or escaped pets, but the habitat of extensive fields next to woods was intriguing.

Eurasian Collared-Dove, a single bird was heard calling at ROARINGRIVER on 2 JUN, and 2 photographed on 17 SEP in the same area, were likely the same breeding pair.

Black-billed Cuckoo, an adult carrying food was photographed on 3 JUN at Chestnut Knob, Watauga, and seen several during the same time period, and was a very likely breeder. A heard-only bird on Railroad Grade Rd. in Ashe Co. on 9 JUL was also unexpected.

Spotted Sandpiper, a report of one bird at ELKSHOALS on 15 & 19 JUL was fairly early and unusual for the area. Another reported from Brookshire Park, Watauga, was only somewhat early.

Double-crested Cormorant, one reported at several of the High country lakes in late JUN was somewhat unusual for summer, but there does seem to be an increasing trend. Another pair at Price Lake, Watauga, on 29 JUL was a good find.

American Woodcock, one was flushed from the path near the river at Meat Camp on 6 JUL. Summer sightings for the species are very infrequent in the reporting area.

Great Egret, a group of 6 reported at ROARING RIVER, on 18 JUN, were quite early post-breeding wanderers. This is only the 2nd report of the species in the month of JUN for the 5-county region. A single reported at BASSLAKE on 14 JUL was likely part of an earlier group of 8 birds, which were only identified as “large, white heron-like birds”, on the same day and place.

Little Blue Heron, group of 6 juveniles reported at POWDERHORN on 1 JUL were quite unusual.

Bald Eagle, a single bird seen along the New River at ELKSHOALS was somewhat unusual for that area in summer.



Little Blue Heron, 30 JUN 2019, Powder Horn Mountain neighborhood, Watauga County. Photo by B. Saltonstall

Great-Horned Owl, one reported at ELKKNOB on 30 JUN was fairly unusual for the high elevation location. At least two begging hatch-year birds were heard frequently from late June through July at the LINVILLECREEK.

Red-headed Woodpecker, a pair of birds seen on 2 JUL on Big Hill Rd, Watauga, were likely post-breeding wanderers, as no more reports were posted from the area.

American Kestrel, starting on 21 JUN, and continuing into July, one to three birds were reported at Meat Camp Church in Watauga Co., likely indicating continued breeding at this site. Belated reports were received of breeding there from several past years. The first summertime report of this species from Ashe Co. was made

from Summer Haus Bridge on the New River on 6 JUL.

Winter Wren, one singing on 30 JUN at ELKKNOB was somewhat unexpected for the site. Singing birds were detected during Grandfather Mountain Point Counts in June – one along the Black Rock Trail, 2 along the Grandfather Mountain Trail, and one along the Profile Trail at Shanty Spring, all in Avery. One was heard at Viaduct View along the Boone Scout Trail, Watauga. These are expected locations for this species during the breeding period.

Hermit Thrush, one singing at ELKKNOB on 30 JUN was long overdue as we have had probable breeding there for several years, but with few actual recent detections. Singing birds were detected during Grandfather Mountain Point Counts in June – 3 along the Grandfather Trail, one at Shanty Spring on the Profile Trail, both in Avery, and 2 at Flat Rock View along the Boone Scout Trail. These are expected locations for this species during the breeding period.

Yellow-breasted Chat, a likely breeder continued from May at LINVILLECREEK., reported on 4 JUN. Also, one to several persistently singing, for at least a week, birds near the end of JUNE, were likely either breeding or attempting to establish territory, at Elk Mountain Overlook on the BRP in Watauga Co. They were first reported on 20 MAY but not again until 22 JUN, and continued through 8 JUL.

Bobolink, several birds were again found this year at CHAPPELL, on 17 JUN, suggesting an established breeding colony.

Swainson's Warbler, singing bird reported from Allison Lane in Alleghany Co. on 3 JUN was likely a local breeder. A single bird reported seen and heard near Todd was a first report of the species for Ashe Co., and was very likely a migrant. A singing bird was reported at the Julian Price Park Campground on 16 JUL, continuing from the previous reporting period.

Tennessee Warbler, a single bird at Sugar Mountain in Avery Co. on 22 JUL was very early.



Yellow-throated Warbler, 17 JUN 2019, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Magnolia Warbler, Again this summer, reported from the Beacon Heights overlook in Avery Co. several times, the species appears to have established long-term breeding at the site.

Location Key for this reporting period:

BASSLAKE = Bass Lake in Moses Cone Memorial Park, Watauga; CHAPPELL= Chappell Farm Rd, Watauga; ELKKNOB=Elk Knob State Park, Watauga; ELKSHOALS=Elk Shoals Access on New River State Park, Ashe; LINVILLECREEK= Linville Creek Crossing neighborhood, Watauga; POWDERHORN=Powderhorn Mtn, Watauga; ROARINGRIVER=Roaring River community, Wilkes

Notable sightings for HCAS five-county region for August, September, October and November, 2019

The most notable aspect of fall birding in the region was the spectacular showing of migrating songbirds, both in sheer numbers and in diversity of unexpected species, and also the fact that they again this year, lingered quite late, setting many records for late date in the region



Blue-winged Teal, 23 OCT, Bass Lake, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane

Blackburnian Warbler, confirmation of breeding was reported with a pair of birds, one singing and carrying food, at Tompkins Knob on the Blue Ridge parkway, near the Watauga/Ashe Co. line on 12 JUN.

Yellow-throated Warbler, a singing male was found throughout the period at Valle Crucis Park in Watauga Co., likely a breeding bird at this 2800 foot site, quite high for the species in the southern Appalachians.

Blue Grosbeak, a singing first-year male, first seen on 15 JUN and again on 7 JUL was likely either a breeder or attempting to set up territory, at Summer Haus Bridge on the New River in Ashe Co., where there are no confirmed breeding records.

Cackling Goose, 6 birds were with a large flock of Canada Geese at WILKESCC on 20 NOV.

American Black Duck, always difficult to find in our region, 4 were at KERRSCOTT on 8 NOV.

Blue-winged Teal, a flock of 15 at KERRSCOTT on 27 AUG were somewhat early. A flock of 75 at VALLECAY on 21 SEP and later seen on other area lakes up till 26 SEP, with counts of up to 80, was a very large number. A flock of 5 at PRICELAKE on 13 OCT and another of 7 at BASSLAKE on 23 OCT might have been the remnants of the previous larger flock, lingering slightly late.

Green-winged Teal, a flock of 26 at PRICELAKE on 13 OCT was a very high number for the area. 4 were at PRICELAKE on 8 NOV, the same date a group of 8 were at KERRSCOTT.



Green-winged Teal, 8 NOV 2019, Bass Lake, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Gadwall, Never common in the high country, a flock of 4 was a good find at PRICELAKE on 6 NOV, and a single which could have been one of the same birds was at BASSLAKE on 8 NOV. 40 at KERRSCOTT on 8 NOV was a large flock.



American Wigeon, 8 NOV 2019, Bass Lake, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Ring-necked Duck, a flock of 100 at KERRSCOTT on 8 NOV was quite large.

Greater Scaup, a female bird first reported from BASSLAKE on 25 JUN, stayed through at least 10 NOV, when it became entangled in fishing line

and was cut free, after which it was not seen again.

Lesser Scaup, a single bird continued throughout the period, after spending the summer, at Church Hollow Rd. in Watauga Co. The only migrants found in our region were a pair at KERRSCOTT on 8 NOV.



Lesser Scaup, 30 AUG 2019, Church Hollow Road, Foscoe, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Ruddy Duck, never common in the high country, on 2 NOV one was at BASSLAKE and another pair was at PRICELAKE, and another was found at the RIVERSEDGE (Wilkes), where they are somewhat more common. A pair of likely previously reported birds was at BASSLAKE on 5 NOV and a single on 6 NOV. One was at KERRSCOTT on 21 NOV.



Gadwall, 8 NOV 2019, Bass Lake, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

American Wigeon, one stopped in at Broyhill Park in Blowing Rock, Watauga Co., on 7 OCT. On 8 NOV, 6 birds were present in the high country with 4 at BASSLAKE and 2 at PRICELAKE. 25 at KERRSCOTT on 8 NOV was a large number. A single male was at WILKESCC on 27 NOV.

Black Scoter, a first ever record for the northern mountains was found at PRICELAKE on 8 NOV, when a first-winter bird was well described, with a diagnostic picture posted on ebird. The bird did not stay overnight.

Surf Scoter, a first winter bird was a very exciting find at PRICELAKE on 8 NOV, being only the 3rd ever report for the species in the northern mountains. Diagnostic photo on ebird.

Red-breasted Merganser, a flock of 11 visited PRICELAKE on 23 NOV.

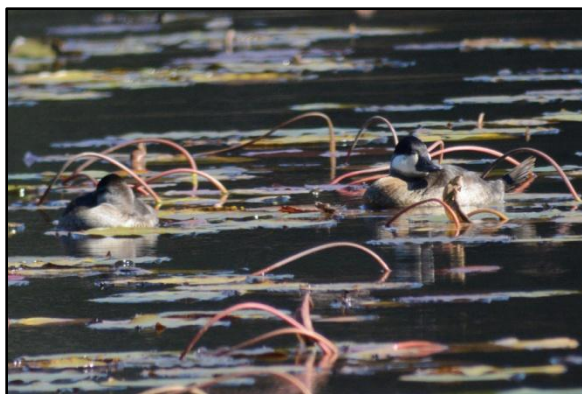
Common Merganser, a female on the Watauga River at VALLECRUCIS was a great find on 17 AUG.



Black Scoter (L) and Surf Scoter (R), 8 NOV 2019, Prices Lake, Julian Price Memorial Park, Watauga County. Photo by A. Nelson

Horned Grebe, 6 at KERRSCOTT on 8 NOV. were the only ones reported in our region this fall.

Eurasian Collared-dove, 2 birds seen and photographed at ROARINGRIVER on 17 SEP, were likely the same birds found in the same area in early June during a Breeding Bird Survey.



Ruddy Ducks, 8 NOV 2019, Bass Lake, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Ruffed Grouse, one of this elusive, and apparently declining, species was reported from Brinegar Cabin on the BRP in Wilkes Co. on 22 SEP.

Black-billed Cuckoo, a single bird was at ECHOVALLEY on 10 AUG. Another at TROUT on 12 SEP could have been the same bird discovered at nearby Flannery Fk. Rd the next day.



Greater Scaup, 5 SEP 2019, Bass Lake, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Eastern Whip-poor-will, one which continued from the breeding season at TODD, stayed quite late, last detected on 23 SEP.

Common Nighthawk, Massive numbers were noted flying over the fields on either side of the Watauga River near Foscoe in Watauga, on 12 SEP, very conservatively estimated at 550 birds but likely much more. Large numbers were also found on 30 AUG at LINVILLECREEK(150), POWDERHORN(245), and ELKMTNOL(490); on 31 AUG at Osborne Mtn Overlook in Watauga(340); and on 3 SEP at TODD(229).



Common Nighthawk, 30 AUG 2019, Linville Creek Crossing neighborhood, Vilas, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan

Rufous Hummingbird, one juvenile showed up at a feeder in central Allegheny Co. on 10 OCT, was banded and identified to species, and stayed until 20 NOV. American Coot, a single bird showed up at WOODFIELD on 21 OCT.

Semipalmated Plover, a single bird at KERRSCOTT was the first in the area for several years.



Greater Scaup, 7 OCT 2019, Bass Lake, Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson

Solitary Sandpiper, one at VALLECAY on 22 SEP.

Bonaparte's Gull, 5 birds in with a flock of Ring-billed Gulls was a good find at KERRSCOTT on 8 NOV.

American Woodcock, one was seen at MEATCAMP on 2 OCT.

Wilson's Snipe, one was at GREENWAY on 22 OCT.

Anhinga ((NOT A RECORD)), a fairly sketchy report from PRICELAKE on 17 NOV should be considered unconfirmed. There are no previous reports in the northern mountains and suspected birds should be thoroughly investigated and exhaustively documented.

Double-crested Cormorant, one at PRICELAKE on 10 AUG was fairly early.

Green Heron, one reported at VALLECRUCIS on 16 NOV appears to be our latest fall report for the region.

Great Egret, a single was seen at APPSTATE on 16 AUG.

Osprey, one at ECHOVALLEY on 19 AUG was slightly early

Swallow-tailed Kite, one at BROOKSHIRE on 13 AUG was quite unusual for Watauga County, the high country, and the entire region.

Northern Harrier, at MAHOGANYROCK, 2 on 20 SEP, and one each on 21, 22, and 26 SEP, and singles on 10 and 11 OCT; one at ELKMTNOL on 22 SEP, one each day on 21 and 22 SEP at GRANDFATHER.

Mississippi Kite, a single was seen at ECHOVALLEY on 19 AUG, quite rare in the high mountains. 27 counted at MAHOGANYROCK during the hawkwatch on 3 SEP was a record-shattering high count, consistent with the northward range expansion of the species in recent years. A single was seen at MAHOGANYROCK on 20 SEP.

Broad-winged Hawk, High counts during migration were 6110 at MAHOGANYROCK on 19 SEP, 2198 at Grandfather Mtn. On 20 SEP, and 2024 at ELKMTNOL on 20 SEP.



Common Merganser, 18 AUG 2019, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by S. Dowlan



Common Merganser, 17 AUG 2019, Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga County. Photo by J. Sawyer

Double-crested Cormorant, one at PRICELAKE on 10 AUG was fairly early.

Great Horned Owl, though probably fairly common in the high country, finding them is difficult. One was reported from the early morning of 6 OCT at New River State Park, Wagoner Access in Ashe Co.

Merlin, one at TROUTLAKE on 25 SEP.

Olive-sided Flycatcher, one at Rough Ridge on the BRP in Avery Co. on 2 SEP was a nice migrant.

Willow Flycatcher, a very late bird was seen at HICKKNOLL on 13 OCT. This was almost a month later than the previous late date for the northern mountains, and just one day earlier than the record late date for the state.

Philadelphia Vireo, one at Fleetwood in Ashe on 25 AUG was quite early. One at CHESKNOB on 15 SEP. One at ELKMTNOL on 17 Sep. One at TROUTLAKE and another at GREENWAY on 20 SEP. 2 at BENMILLER on 23 SEP. One 28 SEP at VALLEYCAY. One at CHESKNOB on 29 SEP

Warbling Vireo, one at TROUTLAKE on 3 SEP was a good find.



Philadelphia Vireo, 6 OCT 2019, Dunson Home, Watauga County. Photo by B. Dunson

Brown-headed Nuthatch, a heard-only bird at MAHOGANYROCK on 19 SEP was quite unusual for that location on top of the Blue Ridge.

Marsh Wren, one found at Roby Shomaker Park in Avery Co. on 6 OCT continued through the 8th, and was a good find for that area. Another at ECHOVALLEY was unusual for that high elevation, dry land site.

Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a count of 30 at ECHOVALLEY on 28 OCT was a high number

though apparently fairly expected for the location and date.

Gray-cheeked Thrush, This species was found more this fall than ever before, with birds detected at the following locations and dates: VALLECAY 17 AUG, Glade Valley community in Alleghany Co. on 21 SEP and 1 OCT, APPSTATE 25 SEP (2 ID'd by spectrogram from recorded flight calls), ECHOVALLEY 25 SEP and 2 NOV (latter date quite late), TROUTLAKE 28 SEP, HICKKNOLL 6 OCT, New River State Park, Wagoner Access in Ashe Co. on 6 OCT.

Purple Finch, a female bird at Hanging Rock Ridge, Watauga Co. on 6 AUG appeared to be rather unhealthy and probably had stayed from the previous period in its weakened condition. Not common this fall in the high country, a single bird was reported from VALLECAY on 2 NOV.

Red Crossbill, a single bird was seen at POWDERHORN on 4 AUG.

Pine Siskin, 2 were reported at VALLECRUCIS on 27 OCT.

Grasshopper Sparrow, one at MEATCAMP on 4 AUG was probably a first for that location.

White-crowned Sparrow, one was at KERRSCOTT on 21 OCT. One was at VALLECRUCIS on 27 OCT.

Vesper Sparrow, one found at Bluff Mountain on the BRP on 1 OCT was a good find for that area.

Savannah Sparrow, always tough to find in the high country, 4 were at GREENWAY on 16 OCT, and at least one stayed til 22 OCT. 5 were at VALLECRUCIS on 25 OCT.

Lincoln's Sparrow, Not uncommon in the high country in fall, but worth noting, one was at CHESKNOB on 9 OCT. 2 birds were at GREENWAY on 12 OCT and another on 23 OCT. One at KERRSCOTT on 21 OCT was a good find for that county. One was at VALLECRUCIS from 25 OCT to 5 NOV.

Bobolink, 2 males, one of which was photographed in transition plumage, were at

VALLECRUCIS on 2 AUG. One was seen at VALLEYCAY on 15-17 SEP. 2 winter-plumaged birds were at VALLECRUCIS on 25 OCT.

Common Grackle, a massive flock of well over 2000 birds was noteworthy on BROADSTONERD, on 6 OCT.

Red-winged Blackbird, a large number of over 200 was with a mixed blackbird flock on BROADSTONERD, on 6 OCT. While not a large number for blackbird flocks in general, it's quite large for the high country.

Rusty Blackbird, one was at VALLECRUCIS on 16 NOV.

Northern Waterthrush, one found at Roby Shomaker Park in Avery Co. was pretty unusual for that area. One at VALLECRUCIS on 9 OCT was a good find.

Orange-crowned Warbler, one was at CHESKNOB on 29 SEP. Another was noted at ECHOVALLEY on 2 NOV.

Nashville Warbler, always a good find, one was at TODD 10 SEP, another at MOSESCONE on 17 SEP, and one at TROUTLAKE on 22 SEP.

Hooded Warbler, a male seen at GREENWAY on 10 NOV was extremely late, shattering the record for late fall by about a month for the entire northern mountain region.

Location Key for this reporting period:

APPSTATE=Appalachian State Univ Campus, Watauga; BASSLAKE=Trout Lake in Moses Cone Park, Watauga ; BENMILLER=Ben Miller Road, Watauga; BROADSTONERD=Broadstone Road, Watauga; BROOKSHIRE =Brookshire Park, Watauga; BRP=Blue Ridge Parkway, all counties; CHESKNOB=Chestnut Knob, Watauga; ECHOVALLEY=Echo Valley Farm, Watauga; ELKMTNOL =Elk Mountain Overlook, Watauga; GREENWAY=Boone Greenway, Watauga; HICKKNOLL=Hickory Knoll, Watauga; KERRSCOTT =Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes; LINVILLECREEK=Linville Creek Overlook near Vilas, Watauga; MAHOGANYROCK=Mahogany Rock Overlook on the Parkway, Alleghany; MEATCAMP=Meat Camp Environmental Study Area, Watauga; MOSESCONE = Moses H. Cone Memorial Park, Watauga; POWDERHORN=Powderhorn community, Watauga; PRICELAKE=Price Lake in Julian Price Park, Watauga; RIVERSEDGE=Lowe's Park at Riversedge, Wilkes; ROARINGRIVER=Roaring River community, Wilkes; TODD=Todd community, Watauga/Ashe border; TROUTLAKE =Trout Lake in Moses Cone Park, Watauga; VALLEYCAY=Valle Cay community, Watauga; VALLECRUCIS=Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga; WILKESCC=Wilkes Community College, Wilkes; WOODFIELD=Woodfield community, Wilkes

Bay-breasted Warbler, one at ECHOVALLEY on 27 OCT was a late date for the county.

Blackpoll Warbler, difficult to find in the fall, especially so in the lowlands of Wilkes Co., one at ROARINGRIVER, on 16 OCT was a very good find and quite late as well.

Black-throated Blue Warbler, two males found at BENMILLER on 25 OCT set a late date for the county, and likely the latest date ever recorded in the northern mountains.

Palm Warbler, a single bird reported at WILKESCC on 27 NOV was very late.

Black-throated Green Warbler, two separate birds found on 25 OCT, one at BENMILLER and the other along the BRP in Doughton Park along the Wilkes/Alleghany Co. border, were quite late, the date likely being the latest ever recorded in the northern mountains.

Canada Warbler, slightly late were one at HICKKNOLL on 1 OCT, and another near TODD on 4 OCT.

Summer Tanager, one seen, heard (picky-tuck call), and photographed at CHESKNOB from 17-20 SEP was probably the best documented ever in Watauga Co. and perhaps the entire mountain region, for this species which is often misidentified by visiting birders from the piedmont, because its song cannot safely be told from that of our common Scarlet Tanagers.

High Country Hoots Submission Guidelines

For the next issue (February – March - April), please have all material to the editor by April 15, 2020. 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 or Farther Afield in the Carolinas**. 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. PLEASE do not embed your photos in a MSWord document!

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

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

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

Steve Dowlan, Editor, High Country Hoots



High Country Audubon Society

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

Newsletter Editor: Steve Dowlan
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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