

# HIGH COUNTRY HOOTS

## High Country Audubon Society

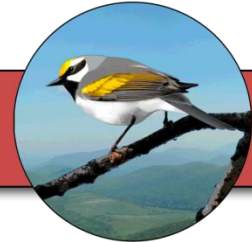


Serving Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Watauga, and Wilkes Counties

Volume 12 – Issue 1

February 2020 to July 2020

### President's Message



**Dear Fellow Birders,**

Hello everyone, wow, this spring is nothing like what we had planned!!! I hope everyone is able to get out and bird individually during migration. Make sure to visit the newly-constructed wetlands at Brookshire Park. We've already had reports of some shorebirds that normally are not that common in our area.

Guy has sent out a notice regarding the May 9th spring bird count, and I hope many of you will be able to contribute. He has very thoroughly listed the various areas that are still open to birding, so take a look, and pick your spot! Cindy is also periodically notifying us about virtual birding events organized by AudubonNC. For now, we'll have to be satisfied with virtual events. AudubonNC has requested that all chapters cancel all in person events through the end of June. Hopefully, we'll still be able to have our annual meeting in July at Valle Crucis Community Park, as well as resume our scheduled walks. We've decided not to have an intern this summer due to the circumstances, so thank you very much to Adrianna Nelson and Christina Collins for volunteering to maintain our social media. It's a good place to check for the latest updates. Our website calendar is also being kept up-to-date.

In other news, the Burke's grant that we received in January has multiple commitments. We have met the first one, which was asking the Watauga County Commissioners to establish a native plant resolution, which encourages the County to utilize native plants on all county properties and in development projects. Second, we'll be working with New River Conservancy to plant mature trees along the New River opposite Brookshire Park later this year or more likely next spring, and finally, we'll be organizing field trips with local schools to visit that same area and learn about the importance of riparian vegetation.

We're also hoping to finally be able to construct the bird blind at Brookshire Park once the wetlands restoration is complete.

Lastly, with Janet stepping down from the board in July, we are looking for a membership chair. Please let us know if you'd like to contribute your services.

That's all for now. Please stay safe.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'All State'.

# Love is in the Air!

## Breeding Season has begun in the High Country

Article and photos by Judi Sawyer



**Mr. and Mrs. Grumpy**

**W**hile migration has yet to hit full swing, breeding season is off to a good start on my little acre, just across the North Carolina border in Roan Mountain, Tennessee. It's always an exciting time for me, with nesting birds all around.

Mr. Grumpy, the resident Brown Thrasher, showed up right on time on March 20th and within days of singing at the top of his lungs he'd found himself a girl. By March 28th they were busy collecting nesting materials and diving into the boxwood in the back yard to set up house. The Grumpies are about as entertaining as birds get and they're inseparable. It's so much fun to watch them scurrying around the yard and to hear Mr. Grumpy singing softly to Mrs. Grumpy. I can't tell if they've started laying eggs yet; the nest building usually lasts 5-7 days and they generally start laying eggs soon after completion. They will lay 2-6 eggs and generally start incubation when the last, or penultimate



**Brown Thrasher gathering nest material**



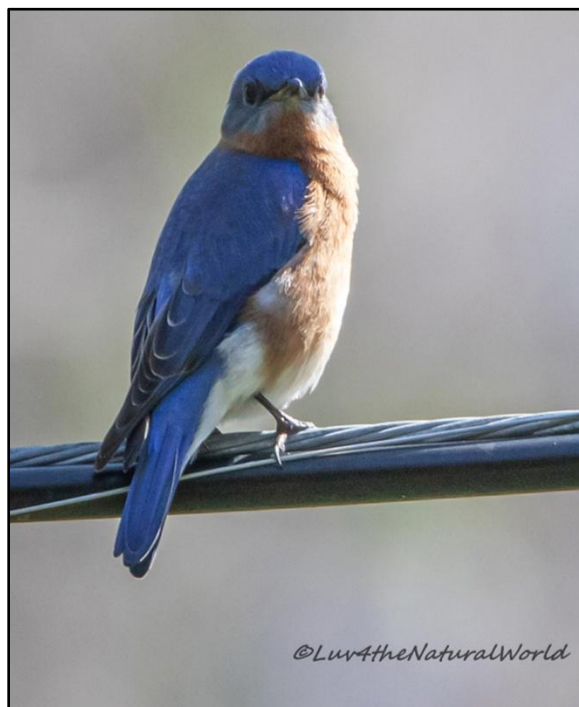


**Blair and Bernie nest building**



**Blair on the nest**

(next to last) egg is laid. Incubation is 10-14 days and the nestling period is 9-13 days. I likely won't know the outcome until I see the fledglings being herded around the yard by their parents. Last year they had 5 and it was a joy to watch them.



**Bernie keeping watch**

Bernie and Blair, the two Eastern Bluebirds, started building a nest around March 27th and it has become clear by watching the behavior of these two little lovebirds...er, Bluebirds...that Blair is busy incubating eggs. Bernie maintains a watchful eye either from the power line in the side yard or from high in the locust tree in the front yard while Blair spends much of her time in the nest box. She pops out every now and then to visit with Bernie and catch a bite to eat. Then back to the nest box she goes! Clutch size is 2-7 eggs. The incubation period is 11-19 days, with the average being 14 days so I'm looking forward to little nestlings in a couple of weeks. The nestling stage will last from 17-21 days.

This past Friday I looked out to see a Carolina Chickadee, under close supervision of her mate, building a nest in a nest box in the back corner. Clutch size is from 3-10 eggs. The female incubates the eggs and, interestingly, she will cover the eggs with a fur nest lining, often



*Chickadee eggs from 2018*



*Brown Thrasher with mealworms*



*Tree Swallow*

giving the appearance of a nest still under construction. Carolina Chickadees incubate for 12-15 days and the nestling period is 16-19 days.

Aside from those known nests, I'm pretty sure that the Song Sparrows, of which there are at least a couple of pairs, have been busy building nests in their usual spots. The Eastern Towhees have been singing up a storm and the Titmice and Robins have been chasing each other around trying to catch a mate for several days now. The Tree Swallows have been checking out the box they used last year but have yet to make up their minds. Last but not least, I hope to have Screech Owls nesting in the box that they've used for the past two years. I look forward to seeing all the fledglings when the time comes and I wish them success at building their families!\*References for this article are Cornell Lab of Ornithology's All About Birds and Birds of North America websites.



## 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

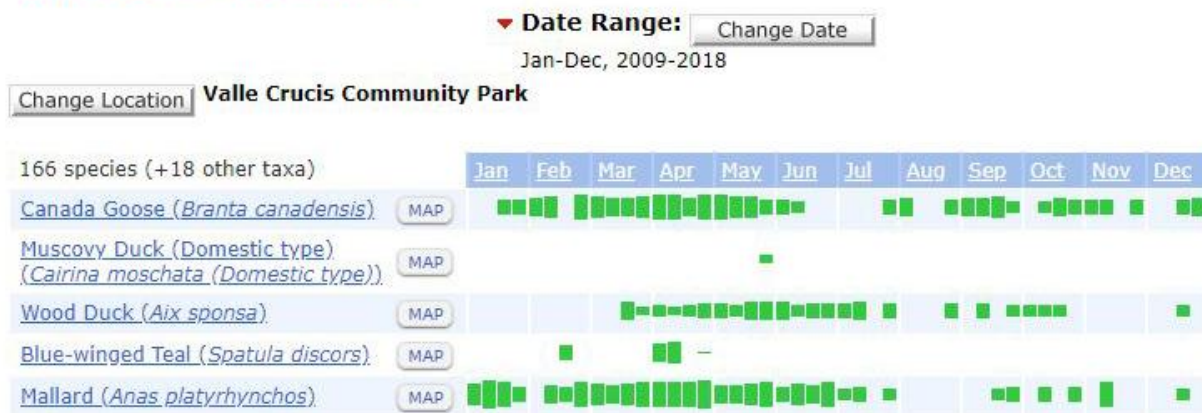


Observations entered into eBird range from a single species that was observed while mowing the lawn to extensive lists with photo and sound recordings made while birding all day. eBird encourages a broad range of observation types, and makes data entry easy. Some beginning birders are reluctant to enter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



### Bird Observations



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

## 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/>



### New Members

Diane Arbour, Hickory

Gina Diggs, Sugar Grove

Laura England, Sugar Grove

Barbara Miller, Lenoir

Paulette Playce, Wilmington

Brent & Kathryn Seagle, Beech Mountain/Gainesville, FL

Thomas Walters, Banner Elk

### Donations

#### *General Fund:*

Diane Arbour

Barbara Brank - donation to "honor everyone who jumped in to help the scaup entangled in the fishing line"

Beth Carrin

Martha Cutler

Frank Lewellen

John Sawyer

Judi Sawyer

Brent & Kathryn Seagle

Janie Wey

Pat Geiger

Laura England

#### *Sue Wells Research Grant:*

Bob Cherry

Pat Geiger

#### *Young Birders Scholarship & Conservation/Education:*

Judi Sawyer

Pat Geiger

#### *Conservation/Education:*

Pat Geiger

Juliana Henderson

Judi Sawyer



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 December 2019, and January and February, 2020***

Continuing from the fall, this winter again saw an unusual lack of sparrows of all types throughout the area, and an almost total absence of any irruptive species such as finches, red-breasted nuthatches, siskins, etc. A recent trend intensified, with birds showing up in wintertime that usually are further south: a white-eyed vireo in late February was stunningly early, an Orange-crowned Warbler was only the second wintertime record, some blue-winged teal near Blowing Rock were the earliest ever, a Yellow-throated Warbler spent the winter near Pores Knob in Wilkes Co., an unprecedented occurrence, and a Merlin apparently spent its fifth straight winter at Kerr Scott Reservoir.



***Blue-winged Teal, 25 February, Chetola Resort, Watauga County. Photo by A. Nelson***

***Snow Goose***, a single flyover bird was reported above US421W near Ferguson, NC (Wilkes Co) on 6 DEC. Other than this flyover, not a single unusual goose showed up in our area this winter, the first year in several for that to occur.

**American Black Duck**, a pair of birds was at Ashe Lake in Ashe Co. on 15 DEC during the Mt. Jeff CBC. A group of 4 were seen at KERRSCOTT during the Upper Yadkin CBC on 5 JAN; a single visited CHETOLA on 25 FEB, and there were a couple reports from Mountain View Rd. pond in Alleghany Co, a single bird on 27 JAN, and a big flock of 12 on 29 FEB.

**Blue-winged Teal**, apparently for only the second time ever in winter, a bird was reported in the high country, at Chetola from 19-25FEB, and at BASSLAKE on 25 FEB.

**American Wigeon**, 4 birds were reported at MULBERRYFIELDS on 17 FEB.

**Lesser Scaup**, a single bird which stayed the previous summer overwintered at Church Hollow Rd. pond, Watauga Co.

**Redhead**, a flock of up to 13 birds was at KERRSCOTT from 10-13 FEB.



**Black Duck, 25 February 2020, Chetola Resort, Watauga County. Photo by G. McGrane**

**Common Merganser**, a flock of 6 females was at KERRSCOTT during the Upper Yadkin CBC on 5 JAN.

**Ruddy Duck**, a single was reported at BASSLAKE on ebird without comment on 6 JAN. The species is rare enough in our area that comments, even if just to confirm that the report was not a typo, would be very valuable in any future reports.

**Bufflehead**, a fairly large flock of up to 35 birds was at BASSLAKE in the latter half of FEB.

**Bonaparte's Gull**, there were 2 reports this winter, both from KERRSCOTT, the first on 5 DEC and the second a month later during the CBC.

**Golden Eagle**, one flew over at Echo Valley on 16 DEC.

**Bald Eagle**, the nesting pair at Riverpointe, Watauga Co., apparently returned again this year, detected at the nest site as early as 26 DEC.

**Gull sp.**, A POSSIBLE Laughing Gull was reported at the Boone Mall on 31 JAN. Because this species would be rather unprecedented for the season and area, it's probably best to stick to the generic ID for this bird. ANY GULL ANYTIME IN THE HIGH COUNTRY IS VERY UNUSUAL, and

should be documented thoroughly by photos and multiple observers, so report it immediately!

**Ruffed Grouse**, a single bird was at Sugar Grove in Watauga on 19 JAN, and another was at TODD on 29 FEB.

**American Woodcock**, probably not rare, but only difficult to find, birds were reported at ECHOVALLEY on 17 FEB, NRSP-221ACCESS on 22 FEB, and PRICELAKE on 25 FEB.

**Merlin**, a single bird again, apparently, overwintered this year at KERRSCOTT, seen and photographed during the CBC on 5 JAN. This makes 5 straight years in which it is strongly suspected that the species has overwintered at this location, usually being seen on the south side of the lake, especially at Bandits Roost campground.

**Northern Saw-whet Owl**, a single individual was heard at ECHOVALLEY on 13 Dec. One was heard during the Grandfather Mountain CBC near Pilot Ridge Overlook on the BRP (Caldwell County).

**Red-headed Woodpecker**, one was reported near Pine Run Rd. in Watauga Co. on 9 FEB.



**Merlin, 5 January 2020, Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane**

**White-eyed Vireo**, First ever winter report for our region, one was seen and heard singing at MULBERRYFIELDS on 28 FEB.

**Fish Crow (NOT A RECORD)**, There was a report of a fish crow from LEESMCRAE on 24 FEB.



However, any report of this species in the high country must be suspect, in light of the difficulty separating them from American Crows,



**House Wren, 22 December, Traphill, Wilkes County.**  
*Photo by G. McGrane*

which are very common in the High Country. American Crows are known to be quite variable in size due to gender and age, and the young and females are well known to make sounds very similar to Fish Crows. Moreover, almost all existing reports are for birds associating with American Crows, which is very unusual for true Fish Crows. Thorough documentation including sound recordings and other birds present should be provided for any report.

**Brown Thrasher**, a pair overwintered near the Boone wastewater treatment plant at the end of the Greenway, and in the surrounding neighborhood. 2 birds were found during the Stone Mountain CBC on 22 Dec., one near Traphill and another near Lomax. One was reported from Alleghany Co., at Temple Lake, also on 22 DEC.

**House Wren**, perhaps more commonly wintering than might be thought for the area, another was found during the Stone Mtn CBC at Traphill, in Wilkes Co, on 22 Dec., making the third time in the last 9 years the species was found on that count. Another was found on 5 JAN during the Upper Yadkin CBC, at KERRSCOTT.

**Purple Finch**, Very few showed up in our area this winter, with a pair of females on the Mt. Jeff CBC on 15 DEC at Ashe Lake in Ashe Co., a

single on feeders near TODD on 30 JAN, and a single female at MULBERRYFIELDS on 28 FEB.



**Red Crossbill, 28 December, Valle Cay Community, Watauga County.** *Photo by M. Ramey*

**Red Crossbill**, there were 3 public reports in the area this winter, one of 7 birds at VALLECAY on 28 DEC, another of 3 birds at GRANDFATHER on 20 DEC, and two reports from LEESMCR AE, of a flyover on 3 FEB and a pair on 12 FEB.

**Dark-eyed Junco**, a funny-plumaged bird that could possibly have been of the Oregon subspecies was at VALLECAY on 3 DEC.



**Rusty Blackbird, 28 January 2020, Todd, Watauga/Ashe County.** *Photo by G. McGrane*

**White-crowned Sparrow**, consistent with a general trend of very few sparrows overwintering in the high country this year, there were only a few sightings of White-crowns. All were in December, one at Lees McRae college in Avery on the third, another single on 14 DEC at Sparta, Alleghany Co, one on 15 DEC at Low Gap Rd. in Ashe Co, and a pair during the Grandfather Mountain CBC near

Boone on the twentieth. Even in Wilkes Co., where they can be much more abundant in the agricultural lands, there were only three reports, all on 22 DEC, 6 birds near Austin, 8 near Roaring River, and another 8 near Lomax.

**Fox Sparrow**, these were also hard to come by this winter, with only 6 reports for the region, 2 each in Wilkes (Austin on 22 DEC and Wilkesboro on 28 FEB), and Ashe (both near Todd in late winter, and singles in Watauga (Foscoe area on 4 FEB) and Avery (Lees-McRae on 3 DEC.)

**Savannah Sparrow**, probably the largest flock ever reported in our area was of at least 25 birds during the Upper Yadkin Valley CBC, at the Mourne Rouge corn fields on 5 JAN. Others in our area this winter were 2 at VALLECRUCIS on 14 DEC, a flock of 7 near Lomax in Wilkes Co., during the Stone Mtn CBC on 22 DEC, and 2 at MULBERRYFIELDS on 28 FEB.

**Rusty Blackbird**, 8 at RIVERSEDGE on 27 DEC were not terribly unexpected for that low elevation site, but a single bird that spent about a month at a feeder complex near TODD, was a first record of the species in wintertime in the high country.

**Red-winged Blackbird**, 6 birds at ASUFARM on 8 FEB were very early for the high country.

**Common Grackle**, 2 reports near Boone on 15 and 16 FEB were somewhat early for this

species which is not all that common in winter in the high country.

**Yellow-throated Warbler**, a single bird overwintered at feeders in Wilkes Co. near Pores Knob starting in mid December and staying through the winter period. This appears to be the first record of overwintering for the species in our region.

**Pine Warbler**, a single bird showed up fairly early at Powderhorn on 14 FEB, and stayed thru the end of the period.



***Orange-crowned Warbler, 27 February 2020, Mulberry Fields, Wilkes County. Photo by G. McGrane***

**Orange-crowned Warbler**, only the second wintertime report for our area, one was photographed on 28 FEB at MULBERRYFIELDS, the same place the species was reported in winter 2016.

***Location Key for this reporting period:***

ASUFARM=Appalachian State University Farm, Watauga; BASSLAKE =Bass Lake, Watauga; BROOKSHIRE =Brookshire Park, Watauga; BRP=Blue Ridge Parkway, all counties; CHETOLA=Chetola development, Watauga; ECHOVALLEY=Echo Valley Farm, Watauga; GREENWAY=Boone Greenway, Watauga; KERRSCOTT =Kerr Scott Reservoir, Wilkes; LEESMCRAE=Lees McRae College, Avery; LINVILLECREEK=Linville Creek Overlook near Vilas, Watauga; MULBERRYFIELDS=Yadkin River Greenway at Mulberry Fields, Wilkes; 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 Mose Cone Park, Watauga; VALLECAY=Valle Cay community, Watauga; VALLECRUCIS=Valle Crucis Community Park, Watauga

# High Country Hoots Submission Guidelines

**For the next issue (August-September-October), please have all material to the editor by July 15, 2020. 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 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](mailto:Owlhooter@aol.com)**  
**Your feedback is welcome too!**

*Steve Dowlan, Editor, High Country Hoots*





# High Country Audubon Society

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

Newsletter Editor: Steve Dowlan  
Newsletter submissions: [Owlhooter@aol.com](mailto:Owlhooter@aol.com)

E-mail: [contactus@highcountryaudubon.org](mailto: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.

[www.highcountryaudubon.org](http://www.highcountryaudubon.org)

## High Country Audubon Society Board of Directors

Debbie Shetterly - President  
Bob Cherry - Vice President  
Mary Olson - Secretary  
Doris Ratchford - Treasurer  
Janet Paulette - Membership Chair  
Martha Cutler - Programs & Field Trips Chair  
Guy McGrane - Conservation Chair  
Steve Dowlan - Education & Outreach Chair  
Cindy Darling - Webmaster  
Paige Fulk  
Sheryl McNair  
Tyler Pyle  
Judi Sawyer

## Support Our Birds and High Country Audubon Society!

Individual Membership: \$20 / year (July 1 to June 30)  
Family Membership: \$35 / year (July 1 to June 30)  
Student Membership: \$10/year (July 1 to June 30)  
Please renew your support by July 31st of each year.

HCAS appreciates any additional contributions you make to support our local efforts related to protection of birds, their habitats, and our environment.

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

For sponsorship information, please email  
[contactus@highcountryaudubon.org](mailto:contactus@highcountryaudubon.org)  
Make your donation online at  
[www.HighCountryAudubon.org](http://www.HighCountryAudubon.org)

or

Mail your check, name, address, telephone number,  
and email address to:  
High Country Audubon Society  
Attention: Membership  
PO Box 3746, Boone, NC 28607

## Donate with PayPal

You can now pay membership dues and make donations to HCAS through PayPal on our website,  
[www.HighCountryAudubon.org](http://www.HighCountryAudubon.org),

You do not need a PayPal account to take advantage of this convenient way to donate.  
Just go to the **Join/Renew** tab or **Donate** tab on the website.

Either tab will take you to a page where you can pay by mail or pay by PayPal/Credit Card/Debit Card.

## Support Our Sponsors

Please support our sponsors and let them know of your support!! For example, if you have dinner at Vidalia's, tell them you're from HCAS and that you appreciate Vidalia's sponsorship of HCAS!

