



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – December 2011

Cashiers – Franklin – Highlands – Scaly Mountain

www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org

The mission of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society is to provide opportunities to enjoy and learn about birds and other wildlife and to promote conservation and restoration of the habitats that support them.

Notes from the President

Around the beginning of October I wrote to the Audubon North Carolina (ANC) office on behalf of the HPAS and the Conservation Committee and requested their input and suggestions for investigating alternatives to using non-selective herbicide applications to kill all green plant life on utility company right-of-ways (ROW's), as is frequently done. As many of you noticed, this summer seemed to have been an especially 'bad' year for plants of all kinds, and the animals that depend on a plant habitat, that live under many of our local power lines.

Our Western North Carolina ANC Program Coordinator, Curtis Smalling, forwarded our HPAS request for information and assistance on herbicide use on ROW's to other Audubon Program Managers in the "network", including National Audubon's biologists. Many return emails have ensued! There turns out to be considerable, previously existing, interest in this issue from both the Audubon community (from as far away as Illinois and Canada), the various native plant conservation communities, as well as certain state agencies (e.g., the DNR in Georgia which is actively working to protect endangered species of plants, e.g., pitcher plants, and birds, e.g., Henslow's sparrows, on utilities ROW's), and universities (e.g., NC State).

When the 'dust begins to settle' this winter with regards to the continuing incoming email responses, I will make a more detailed report of some of the partnerships, protocols, and available resources for ROW management that are already being utilized in other areas and states. With this 'homework' as a foundation, we will hopefully be able to better understand and discuss with ANC and National Audubon what steps are reasonable for us to take to try to make our utility ROW's more consistently safe habitats for birds such as indigo buntings, chestnut-sided and hooded warblers, towhees, thrashers, catbirds, etc. This will be an ambitious project; however, the potential positive impact on our environment will hopefully be significant (there are reported to be 75,000 miles of ROW's in North Carolina alone)! If you are interested in participating in such an initiative, or know someone else in our community who might be so motivated, please get in touch with a member of the HPAS Board of Directors or the HPAS Conservation Committee.

Russ

Christmas Bird Count - December 16, 2011

(Or just for lunch. Either way come have fun!!!)

We are getting organized for our annual Christmas Bird Count and hope you will join us. You don't have to be an "expert" birder to participate! We will split into teams and each team will be led by an "expert", so you can tag along, contribute what you can, and have fun in the process.

We will have a chili and cornbread lunch (\$5.00) around 12:30 or so. If you can't participate in the actual count, we would love to have you join us for lunch while we tally the results.

If you plan on being there, please contact Edwin Poole (526-2775 or kaywick@nctv.com) by **Tuesday, December 13** so we will know how much chili to prepare!! We will meet at the Highlands Library at 7:00 a.m. on Friday, December 16. Please park behind the Hudson Library and enter through the back door.

(by Tuesday, December 13) Edwin Poole 526-2775 or kaywick@nctv.com

Winter Scouting Outing, 1 December

It wasn't a dark & stormy night, but it sure WAS a cold and frosty morning... After snowy weather did in our plans to visit Lake Junaluska on the 29th of Nov., five hardy souls decided to give it a try two days later, starting December off with some birds! Actually, Dec. 1st turned out to be even colder, but the sun burned through the beautiful snow frost and we had a crystal clear day for water-fowling, in sub-freezing temperatures.

The mists were rising off the lake when we arrived at 9AM (having left Cashiers at 7:30). Starting right at the Junaluska Welcome Center, Russ Regnery, Ted & Mary Lou Waas, Edwin Poole and Romney Bathurst immediately spotted tons of American Coots and Mallards. But then we also found some Gadwall, about 4 males and one or two females, Bufflehead, and Pied-bill Grebes, plus one brief look at a Hooded Merganser. We had to hop back into the car to warm up again, as we drove around the lake a bit farther. Better views of the Buffleheads, plus tons of Ruddy Ducks in winter plumage (sadly no bright blue bills) were the reward. We also had some fun with a grebe, which motored over to us in response to hearing his call played – he certainly wanted to find that other noisy grebe!

As we drove on, we picked up a female Wood Duck, a large flock of Ring-necked Ducks (remember, the ring is far easier to see on the bill than the neck!), a lovely pair of Hooded Merganser with both showing maximum crests, and a few more dapper Bufflehead. Edwin spotted 3 gulls, which, thanks to his scope, we identified as Ring-billed Gulls (any other gull would have been highly unlikely, which also helped clinch the ID). Edwin also spotted a single Common Loon, again, in winter plumage, but still fun to see.

Folks around the lake were out walking and quite friendly, so we managed to get a photo of all 5 of us by the lake. Passerines (song-birds) were the “usual suspects” – Jay, Song Sparrow, N. Cardinal, Junco, Starlings, N. Mockingbird. There were E. Bluebirds too, looking a bit like ornaments atop tall evergreens.

All in all, including a single Turkey Vulture and an un-identified Hawk species, we counted 22 species, not bad at all for a winter's day in a single site. You see, winter birding CAN be fun, and productive too!

Travel the Greenway This Winter

Last month Romney Bathurst, Edwin Poole, & Russ Regnery spent a couple of hours cleaning up Highlands Plateau Audubon's adopted part of the Highlands Plateau Greenway. We are responsible for helping maintain the part of the Trail from the Highlands Rec Center down to the Mirror Lake Road Bridge. The many stone steps were cleared of the wet leaves, bridges were

swept, some bush trimming done, and part of the Trail was widened by removing dog hobble. A good time was had by all!

For those of you who aren't familiar with it, the Highlands Greenway is a trail being constructed mostly by volunteers. It stretches from Sunset Rock to Mirror Lake with other parts through the Biological Station, Big Bear Pen Mountain, and will eventually link with the old Kelsey Trail. It's a great place for short walks (or even longer walks) close to town. Free maps of the Greenway can be obtained at the Highlands Visitor Center, the Rec Park, the Highlands Bird Barn, and the Highland Hiker. Check out the Greenway website for additional contact information, history, future plans and the most up to date maps at: www.highlandsgreenway.com

And for those of you who haven't seen it yet, the new Mirror Lake Road Bridge is open, has a paved walkway on each side and looks great! Now it allows hikers to go safely to the north side of the bridge to the current end of this branch of the Greenway at a Scenic Site and Area of Interest. Normally there are plenty of birds to see at this beautiful small park! A couple of Flat Mountain area folks who walk to work in town this way, along with a lot of Mirror Lake area folks, had to take a construction break until the bridge was finished. It was well worth the wait!

www.highlandsgreenway.com

Mark Your Calendars!

Highlands Audubon is heading to Huntington Beach State Park, South Carolina next spring. After four years of traveling to Dauphin Island we decided to make a change. Trip dates will be April 22-24, 2012. We will have two days of birding (23rd and 24th) in Huntington Beach State Park and nearby Myrtle Beach State Park. We should find many resident and migrating warblers and shorebirds. There are several other natural attractions including Brookfield Gardens so you may want to extend your stay. We plan to stay at the Murrells Inlet Hampton Inn. Everyone should make their own reservations beginning Sunday night the 22nd. Murrells Inlet is an attractive resort town and "the seafood capital of South Carolina". Please call or contact Brock Hutchins if you are interested.

Brock Hutchins brockhutchins@bellsouth.com

Thank You, Edwin! Welcome, John!

With this issue the Mountain Warbler has a new Editor, John Gross. After many years of service as newsletter editor, Edwin Poole has stepped down. Thank you, Edwin, for your faithful work during these years. Edwin will still serve on the Board of Directors and the Communications Committee and will help John during the transition. John and Cindy joined HPAS in August. John has experience with newsletters and other aspects of communications. We welcome his enthusiasm and look forward to his service on the Communications Committee.

New On the Web

Several new features are available on the HPAS web site. In addition to the December update, including this newsletter, there are links to Audubon NC E-Newsletters, the beautifully produced Audubon NC Annual Report, National Audubon Alerts, and Members Photos. The newest photos are by Helen Moore, taken at her bird feeder, and by Ed Boos, taken here and there. If you would like to share some of your birding photography, please contact Jean McCormick via the link on the web site. And remember: www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org is always your source for the most up-to-date information about your Audubon Chapter!

www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org

Your “Favorites” in your web browser are part of a two way street!

As we mentioned above new sources of information are being added to the HPAS web site regularly. A good habit to establish or consider is to check the high priority web sites, like HPAS, from your “Favorites” as part of your early morning routine. Also, you can be a great help to your fellow members by sharing YOUR diverse and interesting conservation, environmental and birding favorite links. Email them to Jean, our Webmaster, at MJeanMcCormick@cs.com so she can add them to the Links group on the web site.

MJeanMcCormick@cs.com

Has Your Email Address Changed?

Please keep your email updated with Pat Strickland akabebe1@yahoo.com Membership and Development Committee.

Pat Strickland akabebe1@yahoo.com

Highlands Plateau Audubon Society

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