



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – December 2013

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.

From the President

As I have mentioned previously in this column, just before I became involved with HPAS 3-4 years ago, a new set of carefully crafted HPAS bylaws was adopted. One of the central themes for the reorganization was to spread the organizational responsibilities among a larger number of Directors, Committee persons, and volunteers. Part of the logic was that by more evenly sharing the responsibilities among those of us who value our local Audubon chapter, the new structure would offer more opportunities for community involvement and help to provide a more consistent pool of people who could serve to help back-fill leadership roles whenever necessary. Term limits for Directors and Chairpersons were established to both help guarantee that there would be a healthy turnover in leadership and that anyone who accepted responsibility for a leadership position would understand that their contributions would not be expected to last forever; an important consideration since many of us share various organizational volunteer responsibilities and even full-time jobs, along with our other personal priorities.

I think it fair to say this reorganization logic has proved largely successful up to now. In the last couple of years, the HPAS Board of Directors and various Committees have done a laudable job of sharing the responsibilities for making the chapter work successfully. HPAS can be justly proud of the last couple of very active years which have included expanded outings schedules, excellent evening programs, an expanded Newsletter and Website, and greater interaction with local schools and other service groups. We have succeeded in achieving greater community involvement that in turn has resulted in greater recognition of our organization as an active force for environmental awareness.

However, HPAS faces some very serious, imminent challenges too. The first series of staggered term limits for Directors will begin to take effect within the next year and a half, meaning that approximately one third of our directors must cycle off of the Board of Directors. New Directors must be found if our chapter is going to continue to function as we know it. And as the staggered cycle of term limits takes effect, we need to look forward to having a minimum of 3-4 new persons each and every year step into Director and Committee Chairperson, as well as committee support roles.

We are a relatively small, if enthusiastic, Audubon chapter and we draw our membership from relatively small mountain communities. We must accept the challenge of beginning to successfully identify additional persons who value our chapter and who might be willing to consider stepping in and actively contributing to the organization. If we cannot begin to identify these people, it seems to me inevitable that HPAS will soon need to reconsider our future and organizational goals. If you might be interested in participating, please call either Avary Doubleday, Vice President (828-342-7580), Don Shure, Chairperson of Leadership Development (770-939-9417), or me (828-526-4690) and chat about what opportunities exist and how you might want to participate. Birding expertise is not a requirement!

Russ Regnery

Make History at the Christmas Bird Count

Join us for the Christmas Bird Count in Highlands on December 19th. We will meet at the home of Kay and Edwin Poole at 7:30 in the morning, divide into teams and search for birds in the area until about noon or 1 PM. We will meet again at the Pooles' for lunch to share stories and total the number of birds we found. This count is part of a national effort which has a 100 year history. The data about birds we collect will be added to a National data base which can help scientists learn more about birds. If you are interested in participating, please contact Brock Hutchins at 828-787-1387 or 404-285-0663 (cell).

Audubon North Carolina Chapters Share

Audubon North Carolina Chapter Day is scheduled for Saturday, February 15, at Hawe River State Park, near Greensboro. Annually, chapter leaders and interested members gather with Audubon NC staff to learn, share, and discuss. Included are an update from the State Director and a time for chapters to share successes and struggles from the past year. The 10 Chapters are involved in a variety of interesting projects and have hosted a range of interesting programs. If you are interested in learning more about this event and attending, you may contact me at avaryd@juno.com. Information will be available soon on the Audubon NC web site.

Membership

In October, we publish a roll call of all our members in the Mountain Warbler newsletter. The following members did not make the cut-off for this listing and we'd like to recognize them now:

Gayle & Kathy Hamrick – Family membership
Walker & Elvy Harris – Family membership
Michael & Suzanne Magalis – Family membership
Carroll & Astrid Peacock – Friend membership

In addition we have two new memberships since the last newsletter and we'd like to welcome them:

Griffin & Glenda Bell of Highlands – Family membership
Frank & Ruthie Oliver of Highlands – Family membership

These additional memberships have allowed us to reach a new high for members. Although we have one less membership than last year at this time, our total number of members is higher. For the first time, we have a total of 165 individual members, as more of our memberships are at the level of Family or higher. We can be very proud of the continued growth we are experiencing.

Program Committee - 2013

The major goal of the Program Committee involved developing a successful series of programs for the education and enjoyment of our Chapter's membership and the general public. The final Program schedule in 2013 (see Chapter website) consisted of eleven events that attracted a total audience of 473. Ten events consisted of regular Chapter offerings, including seven presentations, two showings of the film "Birders: The Central Park Effect" and our Annual Chapter picnic. The attendance at these ten events totaled 343 persons, thus averaging 34.3 per program. As usual, the greatest attendance (130) included the many children and parents that regularly come to the jointly sponsored "Owl Prowl".

The seven Monday night presentations all centered on avian projects. Two of the talks dealt with landscape-level assessments of bird community structure in western North Carolina and a third considered an important new approach to the ongoing bird feeding/bear problem in our mountains. We also enjoyed a novel presentation on the possible link between the unique stream-bank songbird (American Dipper) and fishing restoration in our western states. The remaining presentation on nest site competition between suburban Brown-headed Nuthatches and other bird species has since spawned an HPAS research effort expanding the scope of the original project. Once again we sponsored two highly enjoyable presentations by our own members – one on birding in Cuba today and the second

offering photographic observations of avian courtship and breeding behavior in Florida wetlands. All of these presentations attracted sizable audiences that posed a number of excellent questions following each talk. The overall attendance this year was very gratifying, suggesting our efforts in developing the 2013 Program were highly successful. We greatly appreciate the support of our members in making this possible!

We plan to continue maintaining records of Members and Non-members attending Chapter functions. About 20% of those in attendance are from the general public, those who are not yet Audubon members. Reaching this broader audience is one of our goals.

The most pressing goal for 2014 is to find a replacement for the outgoing Program Committee Chair. If possible, this search should be completed by early January to facilitate the timely completion of next year's Program Schedule. A prompt addition of a new Chair also provides time for building the size of the Program Committee. Attaining a larger committee size will make it possible to divide the many committee responsibilities more effectively.

Consider Audubon Camp at Hog Island

It has been on my "bucket list" for over fifty years to return to the Audubon Camp on Hog Island in Muscongus Bay, Maine. As a college student in 1958, I landed a summer job as a nature counselor at a camp in Maine, and my "job training" was to attend a session at the Audubon camp. It turned out to be a life-changing experience, but I never got to see Puffins because they had been extirpated from Eastern Egg Rock by people collecting seabird eggs for food.

When the opportunity arose to attend the Field Ornithology course, I literally jumped at the chance. For several years I have been watching the progress of the Seabird Restoration Project. I visited the outreach facility in Rockland and watched the Puffin cam every summer. And, yes, I finally got to see those cute li'l buggers.

I learned so much from interacting and birding with some of the present icons of ornithology, Kenn Kaufman, Scott Weidensaul, Sarah Morris, Kohn Kricher and also Benjamin Clock of the Cornell sound laboratory.

We set up mist nets and banded warblers on Hog Island. Except for spruce and fir, the vegetation and climate were similar to ours, so many of the terrestrial birds were familiar Highlands Plateau species: Black-throated Green and Black-throated Blue, Parula and Blackburnian warblers, Veerys, and Hermit instead of Wood Thrushes. We had a session on observing behavior of Redwing Blackbirds, and an excellent workshop on identification of fall and female warblers.

But for me, the trips out into Muscongus Bay in the *Snow Goose* were the most exciting. We visited a Great Blue Heron rookery on Wreck Island, where the herons were nesting in the tops of spruce trees. On another day, we circled Eastern Egg Rock, where a hardy and dedicated group of students lived in tents and monitored and protected the nesting Puffins, Arctic Terns and Roseate Terns. What an amazing bunch of kids they were!

We learned that last year, many Puffin chicks starved to death because the abnormally early spring and warmer water temperature caused the fish to grow too large before the chicks hatched. Many chicks starved, surrounded by fish that were too large to ingest. Hopefully, this year the timing is back to normal.

The thirty course participants were from all walks of life: students, housewives, vacationers, teachers and experienced birders and other Audubon Board members. John Kricher and I were the two "geezers" of the group, who returned after 50+ years. We agreed that the experience was every bit as great as the first time. I, for one, am planning to make a donation to the Friends of Hog Island and return next year as a volunteer.

I encourage you to investigate the courses available and sign up this year! For information about the programs and registration, check <http://hogisland.audubon.org/registration> .

Glenda Zahner

Highlands Plateau Audubon Society

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