



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – October 2014

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 . . .

Climate change putting many birds at risk

Note: The content of this message is similar to a “letter to the editor” that was recently sent to local newspapers.

As many of you know, on September 9th the National Audubon Society released the results of several years’ worth of studies that predict the future ranges of 588 North American bird species taking into account measurable levels of accelerated global warming (<http://climate.audubon.org>). The bird census data that was used in these studies came from citizen derived Christmas Bird Counts as well as Breeding Bird Surveys. Both of these bird survey methods have been frequently carried out on the Highlands Plateau, around our state, and across North America. The weather data for the studies came from the National Weather Data Center and from leading climatologists.

Very briefly, distribution maps of the various bird species were generated and associated with existing climatic characteristics. Then, subtle predicted changes in precipitation, season onset, and temperature were added to the computerized models and new future bird distributions were predicted.

The forecasts are remarkable. Some bird species, especially those currently associated with warmer climates, are expected to expand their ranges further north and to what we currently think of as higher, cooler elevations. For example, in Highlands, NC, Mockingbirds, a bird that is common at slightly lower elevations, are beginning to appear in recent Christmas Bird Counts for the first time. Other bird species are predicted to simply shift distributions further north but without net increases or decreases in total area of distribution. And then there are those species that may not have adequate places to ‘escape’ to where climate and accompanying ecologic conditions are favorable for their survival; of the 588 species studied, 126 species are predicted to suffer severe declines by 2050 and another 188 species by 2080; 314 of the 588 species studied are considered at risk!

This analysis shows that, unless we can reverse or significantly slow the trend in accelerated global warming, our grandchildren will probably not recognize many of the birds that we think of as avian talisman of the Southern Appalachians (e.g., Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, many of our warbler species, and perhaps even our currently plentiful Juncos).

The Audubon study is the most comprehensive analysis that I know of that has specifically addressed the future of large numbers of vertebrate species on our continent in the face of unprecedented rates of global warming. While I doubt anyone would claim these to be perfect forecasts, they are the best information we currently have to help focus our attention on the challenges ahead. And clearly, if accelerated climate change continues, other dramatic ecologic changes, in addition to bird species distribution, will follow suite; at least most birds have the ability to fly to possible new habitat, many of our other fellow creatures and plants are not as mobile.

National Audubon has provided us with some thought provoking projections that involve familiar bird species. Presumably these projections will be further refined and evaluated. Meanwhile, it is our responsibility to vigorously protect our existing environmental strongholds for bird habitat (starting with our own gardens) and, like it or not, to take action to help slow or reverse the accelerated pace of long-term global warming (see also <http://nc.audubon.org>).

Russell Regnery

Birds, Beer and Wine carries on

While some may be migrating south for the winter, those of us who are here for the duration will continue the Birds and Beer tradition, meeting on the third Tuesday of each month throughout. You will be sent a reminder as our flock dwindles down, so please do join us if you're here for the usual fun evening of wings, wine and words! We may choose to try a new perch or two during the off-season, so watch your email and www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org for details. Hope to see you there!

Romney Bathurst

Early Spring Field Trips

Speaking of migration, planning has begun for a 4-night trip to Dauphin Island, AL to catch early spring migration along the Gulf Coast, March 29th to April 2nd. If you might be interested in a trip at the very beginning of April, please let us know – contact Romney Bathurst at croftess@frontier.com or 828-526-1939. Weather is totally unpredictable, but we were lucky last year and had a super time with great birding! Costs are minimal thanks to the kind generosity of our members, John and Jennie Stowers, who allow us the use of their Bay-front home, so don't let that concern stop you – plan to come on down for fun birding and great fellowship! We will limit total number of participants to 16, so if you do plan to come, let us know as soon as possible. A non-refundable deposit of \$50 per person will hold a space for you. Checks should be made out to Highlands Plateau Audubon and mailed to PO Box 833, Highlands.

A second spring trip under consideration is a one night outing to Kennesaw Mountain near Atlanta. It is a migrant trap and spring hot spot, so would provide another opportunity to bone up on and enjoy our neotropical migrants. Stay tuned for more details on this possibility!

Bird Box Update

The Big Bird Box experiment is on track! HPAS has received a small truck-load of very well made bird boxes that have either 1 ½” diameter entrance holes (for larger birds such as Blue Birds) or 1 1/8” diameter holes which we are hoping will be especially attractive to some of our smaller species of mountain, cavity-nesting birds. Please refer to the previous newsletter for a more complete explanation of our chapter's very own experiment, however and briefly, the plan is to distribute the boxes in pairs (one with each sized entrance hole), install the boxes this October or no later than January, and then follow-up next spring and summer to keep track of which boxes are utilized by what species. In this manner we hope to determine whether the boxes with smaller entrance holes add to the overall productivity of our mountain cavity nesting species, e.g., Chickadees, and perhaps Red-breasted nuthatches. Pairs of bird boxes will be installed free of charge to local schools (who plan to monitor the boxes) and to public spaces by virtue of a special grant from the Mountain Garden Club.

The at-cost price of a pair of boxes, including poles and hardware for installation, is \$35; some people have ordered as many as 4 pairs. We plan to have a traveling volunteer bird box installation party the week of October 20 to help with installation if so desired. If you want to participate but you haven't already let us know, please contact Michelle Styring soon at msty30005@aol.com or give her a call...time is running out to order and prepare any additional boxes for installation for the coming season. The price of the additional boxes is expected to increase by a few more dollars since we won't plan to purchase boxes in bulk, at a decreased price, again until next year.

HPAS Education Report

Russ and I toured Blue Ridge School and Summit Charter School on September 9th to search for possible locations for our bird boxes and found multiple excellent possibilities. Each school has agreed to two pairs of boxes. Highlands School will have a pair of boxes near their new garden courtyard. Excitement is building!

We presented a program “What makes a bird a bird” to Marsha LaFontaine’s Summit Charter School’s third grade class on Monday, September 15 and had a good time.

On Wednesday, October 8, Russ and I will present an overview of HPAS to the Rotary Club of Cashiers Valley.

Ann Campbell

Summit Teacher visits Hog Island, Maine

Marsha LaFontaine, teacher at Summit Charter School in Cashiers, was the recipient of scholarships from National Audubon Society and Highlands Plateau Audubon Society for Educator's Week at Audubon's Hog Island Camp in Maine. She wrote the following note to thank HPAS for the trip.



Hog Island, Maine owned by the National Audubon society is a magical place. The instructors and staff are highly knowledgeable, hardworking, and quality people. I want to thank HPAS and especially Russ and Ann for making the time at 'Educators Week' a possibility for me.

The week filled me with new teaching strategies, available resources, time to network with other educators, and many wonderful memories. Of course, seeing real puffins fly, preen, swim, fish, dive, and bathe was fabulous! Along with many bird sightings, we also explored the salt marshes, geological landforms, boggy wetlands, the

night sky, and the intertidal zone.

I look forward to continued communication with educators across our country, implementing these new ideas and resources into my classroom plans, and sharing with my fellow teachers.

Marsha LaFontaine

Christmas Bird Count

It’s not too early to mark your calendar for our Christmas Bird Count, which will take place this year on December 18th. All participants are welcome as we search for and count as many species as possible in order to add our report to that of Audubon chapters all over the country. Over the years this data has been important in detecting population trends and movements.

It’s a really fun morning topped off with a warming chili and cornbread lunch hosted by Kay and Edwin Poole (186 Cullasaja Drive, Highlands) while the teams gather to list their successes. We will meet behind the Hudson Library at 7:30 a.m. and split into teams. You don’t have to be a super birder, so do plan to join us! Questions? Call Brock Hutchins 770-486-3715.

Romney Bathurst

HPAS Blue Ridge Parkway field trip

Members of HPAS took a field trip on the Blue Ridge Parkway on Saturday, September 20th. Participants took a picture in front of the Charlie Davis Memorial BRP sign. It was a gorgeous day up there, and while we only had one



mixed flock (lots of Blue-headed Vireos, Tennessee Warblers, American Goldfinches and a few others), we did see something quite unusual. A group of six Red-headed Woodpeckers flew over, one after the other, including a couple of juveniles! Not a common sight at that altitude and clearly migrating.

There were also three Broad-winged Hawks, a Cooper’s, and ones and twos

Page 3

of warblers: Bay-breasted, Black-throated Green, etc. Our lunch stop, which featured Devil's Courthouse in the background, was warm and sunny and offered groups of Gray Catbirds and Brown Thrashers chowing down on ripe berries. Great entertainment on a perfect day! Botanizing was also enjoyed by all, such delights as Sundews and Grass of Parnassus in full bloom, Closed Gentians too. I think all 18 participants would agree it was a memorable day in a very special place! No wonder Charlie loved it so.

Romney Bathurst

2014 Members of HPAS

Special thanks to all our Local Chapter members. Your generous support of our growing organization has provided funding for expanded activities in our mountain community.

The list reflects payments received through September 15, 2014.

Patron (\$500 - \$999)

Jenna Dial

Friends (\$100 - \$249)

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Corporate (\$50)

Fire Mountain Inn

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Joanne Lindquist
Candy Olson
Joe Riva
Ruby Sanders
Louis Schweizer
John Speer, Jr.
Jeri Wexelbaum

Chapter Benefactor (\$1000)

Mountain Garden Club

Membership News

We'd like to welcome our latest new members to the chapter:

Dick & Janet Chitty – Highlands & Ocala, FL
Dick & Linda Dickinson – Sarasota, FL
Mary Lane Johnson – Sapphire & Ponte Vedra Beach, FL
Candy Olson – Tampa, FL

Your participation in this chapter and support of Audubon in general is greatly appreciated. We look forward to getting to know you as this year moves forward. A letter will be going out soon to remind those who were members last year and have not renewed their membership for the current year to JOIN UP. We want and need renewed memberships in order to make it possible for the Chapter to grow, as well as to accomplish pertinent projects, research, etc. in our area.

Officers

President -- Russ Regnery, 404-558-1085
Vice - President – Avary Doubleday, 526-8414

Secretary – Michelle Ruigrok 919-621-0844
Treasurer – Brock Hutchins, 770-486-3715

Directors and Committee Chairs

Communications – Avary Doubleday
Conservation – Kyle Pursel
Education – Ann Campbell
Field Trips – Romney Bathurst
Finance – Brock Hutchins
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Program – Don Shure
At Large – George Kaye, Conservation
Michelle Styring, Publicity
Glenda Zahner, Education

Newsletter Editor: Jessica Webb
Audubon NC Board, Chapter Liaison – Avary Doubleday

Web Master: Jean McCormick



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