



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – December 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 . . .

Christmas Bird Count offers fun, fellowship

On clear fall and winter mornings I often smile to myself when I leave the house and am greeted by our modest but stalwart assemblage of bird species that spend the cooler months in our area. The wintertime woods at our place seem to belong to the ever energetic Golden-crowned Kinglets and Carolina Chickadees. Of course we also have our Juncos, Tufted Titmice, a Nuthatch species or two, and the local family of Crows that call our valley their home all year. Welcome avian appearances may be made by one or two Ravens (always first heard before being seen) flying high over ridges of the valley, a visiting Phoebe, woodpeckers, and any of those 40 or so species that traditionally are seen during our HPAS Christmas Bird Count. The stillness and clarity of a winter's day, along with the leafless trees, accentuates the presence of our winter companions. These birds somehow seem to me more like friends on a winter day than during the warmer times of the year when they are frequently concealed amid a forest of green. The many neo-tropical migrant species are no longer around to constantly challenge our identification skills; we are left to enjoy our old friends.

The attention directed towards the recent National Audubon climate change study (discussed in more detail in our last Newsletter) helped to remind us of the importance, in addition to the fun and fellowship, of the hundreds of Christmas Bird Counts that happen this time of year across North America and beyond. Data from these CBC counts was essential for plotting the current winter distribution and "climate space" of the hundreds of bird species analyzed in the Audubon study. Will we see Mockingbirds again this year on the Highlands Plateau? The HPAS CBC will take place on December 18th and, Mockingbird or not, there is once again the promise of good chili and Kaye Poole's famous corn bread!

We have succeeded in installing over 100 new nest boxes this fall as part of our nest box study (see article by Michelle Styring elsewhere in this Newsletter). Our own locally conceived "citizen science" nest box project seems to be off to a good start and the well-built boxes are up in time for winter and for nesting season in the spring. The primary goal of course is to try to evaluate the potential value of offering nesting cavities with either of two sized entrance holes. This is something no one has evaluated, to my knowledge, in our area. However, during the process of installing these boxes and recording their GPS coordinates, it occurred to us that there might be other questions we might be able to answer using the data from this uniform set of well-mapped nest boxes. For example, does the direction the box faces *really* make a significant difference in nesting success? If flying squirrels or mice use the boxes in winter, how might this impact the chance the box is used by birds in the spring? Is the distance from the pole and nest box to the nearest tree important? What are some of the significant habitat preferences for some of our forest species (e.g., Nuthatches, Chickadees) with regards to placement of the boxes and poles (e.g., forest edge vs. cove forest)? Are there better ways to install boxes in the future that will better help ensure nesting success?

I'd like to challenge all of us to think of possible questions that we may be able to try to answer next year, after we finish monitoring the nesting activity and compile the resulting data. If we can ask appropriate,

important questions early on in the study, we stand to learn a great deal regarding what is truly required to achieve enhanced avian nesting success in the future...and what we may learn will be relevant to our very own local habitats! In the future, instead of simply putting up boxes where we hope they might be useful, wouldn't it be great to begin to really recognize some of the parameters that are important to the nesting success of our local bird species? Please lend a hand, 'put on your thinking caps', and share your suggestions.

Russell Regnery

Audubon Convention Coming in July

Prepare to join Audubon's amazing network of dedicated chapter, centers, state and national leaders to celebrate One Audubon! The second biennial Audubon Convention will take place at the Lansdowne Resort on the banks of the Potomac River, near historic Leesburg, Virginia, on July 10-13, 2015. Enjoy four full days of exciting field trips, inspiring speakers, in-depth hands-on workshops, and the camaraderie only Audubon can provide. Registration and lodging details will be available soon.

Gerry and I attended the 2013 convention in Oregon. Gerry's favorite field trip was Birding and Wine Tasting. Yes, that really was an option. Next year's convention will be a lot closer and I'm sure just as much fun. So mark your calendars and be on the lookout for more information.

Avary Doubleday

HPAS Education Report



Students at Highlands School and the Boys and Girls Club of the Plateau in Cashiers were treated on October 17 to separate presentations by well-known raptor champion Doris Mager. Mager, known as The Eagle Lady, has rescued many owls, hawks and eagles in her lifetime and takes her message of wildlife conservation all over the U.S. In these presentations she delighted the children with ET, a Great Horned Owl, which they watched on his perch and flying from one end of the room to the other. Students marveled at the size of ET's wings ("ET" stands not for Extra Terrestrial, but Extra Terrific!) and the way owls can turn their heads over half way around their bodies. Doris also brought a full-sized but much smaller Screech Owl for comparison.

Perhaps the greatest things the 89-year-old Mager imparted to the children were life lessons, like how we should never hurt animals, and how this relates with the way we should treat others in our lives. She talked about how her father always told her to "use common sense," which she has never forgotten. Mager once used this advice when she came across a very ill Red-tailed Hawk with a terrible infection in its claw, and she helped it the only way she knew, by soaking the claw daily in Epsom Salts.

These presentations, which generated many questions by the students, were sponsored by the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society. Ask any student: What do owls eat? How many bones are in an owl's neck? How do owls fly without making a sound?

Ann Campbell

Nest Box Project Gets Underway

If you are still in our lovely mountains, you might come upon many of the Cavity Nesting Bird Research Project boxes that Club members have been putting up all around the area. From Pilot Knob Road, to Country Squire Lane, to Walnut Gap, to Cullasaja Drive, to Arbor Green in Trillium, our friends and members have agreed to become participants in this scientific project to gather data, and, hopefully, help our smaller birds have more places to nest in the spring.

In addition to home sites, several schools, namely Blue Ridge, Highlands, and Summit Charter, will have students monitoring the boxes placed around the school yards. But the list doesn't stop there. Public areas also wanted to participate. You might want to investigate the Sapphire Valley community facilities, Hudson Library, Highlands Biological Station, the Village Green, and Jackson County's new Recreational Center, McKinney Meadow, and The Bascom to find where their boxes have been placed. The total count of boxes being monitored is 100! Yes, 50 pairs of nest boxes were distributed and installed by Russ Regnery (our president), George Kayes, William McReynolds, Ann Campbell, Pat Strickland, with me tagging along to take individual GPS readings!

The main viewing time will come next spring when our birds search out places to nest. Our participants will be busy watching their boxes for any signs of activity, what birds are using the boxes, checking for materials used in nests, number of eggs, number of hatchlings, and, hopefully getting to be there for the “send off” as the fledglings make their first flights.

Your Nest Box Project Committee thanks all who are involved in this project. Stay tuned next fall for results to start coming in. Remember, the goal of this project is to determine if providing different sized entrance holes in nest boxes will increase the population of our smaller birds, namely, Red-breasted Nuthatches, White-breasted Nuthatches, Brown-headed Nuthatches, Carolina Wrens, and other smaller song birds.

Michelle Styring

Winter Birding Anyone?



It need not be quite so snowy as this photo, and can be lots of fun, plus a great way to keep your birding skills fresh! Romney has said she will be happy to lead a winter trip in January or February, for any of you hardy year-rounders still in the mountains. Please drop her a line with your interest and druthers at croftess@frontier.com. If there is enough interest, a trip will be scheduled with an alternate date in case of truly frigid temperatures. Possibilities would be Lake Junaluska, Beaver Lake Bird Sanctuary in Asheville, the Franklin Greenway and Gorges State Park. Layers, a warm hat and gloves are the answer to staying warm – you can do it! And don't forget our Christmas Bird Count on Dec. 18th – let Brock Hutchins know if you plan to help, brockhutchins@bellsouth.net or 404-295-0663.

Christmas Bird Count



This year's Christmas Bird Count will take place 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 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

Kennesaw Mountain Field Trip



The Atlanta Audubon Society says: "Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park has excellent birding habitat, but is best known as a rich migrant stopover. It is the best Atlanta location for observing fall raptor migration movements. Additionally, the tree lines up and down the paved road to the summit can yield an exciting passerine display, especially during migration. This is one of the best spots east of the Mississippi to see a migrating Cerulean Warbler."

Join HPAS for an overnight trip to the Atlanta area to bird this spring migrant trap and get an early fix on our returning Highlands birds. We plan to rendezvous on Saturday, April 18th, arriving by 5 p.m. to stay at the Hampton Inn Atlanta Town Center – Kennesaw. We will have a fun dinner together that evening at a nearby restaurant, and get up early the next morning for a quick (free) breakfast at our lodgings before heading to the park. The park gates open at 7:30 a.m., but we will try to arrive at the overflow parking area (outside the park gates) no later than 6:45 a.m. in order to get organized and maximize the best birding time by birding outside the gates (or walking in) until the park opens. (Hampton Inn starts serving breakfast at 6 a.m.) We hope to have an experienced Atlanta Audubon member join us to help us locate all possible migrants arriving at this time, and after birding slowly to the top (a moderate incline on a paved road at a birding pace, i.e., slow!), we will retreat for lunch and head back home. Those wishing to stay on to bird in the afternoon will surely find plenty to see even then.

Please contact Romney Bathurst at 828-526-1939 as soon as possible, preferably by Jan. 15th, or email her at croftess@frontier.com. Please include your email address and phone number (in case of inclement weather). Rates at the Hampton Inn run from \$101 up, and possibly less if you qualify for any of their special rates (Military friends and family, AARP, Senior, etc.) You may book online at: <http://hamptoninn3.hilton.com/en/hotels/georgia/hampton-inn-atlanta-town-center-kennesaw-ATLTCHX/index.html>

As soon as I have an idea about numbers, I will call to reserve space for our dinner on the 18th. For those in the Atlanta area not needing overnight accommodations, please let me know if you plan to come, for birding alone, on the 19th, or for dinner on the 18th too, so that I can make appropriate reservations. Questions? Feel free to call or drop me an email!

Romney Bathurst

Board Elections at the 2014 Annual Meeting

At the Chapter Annual Meeting on September 22, five Directors were elected to second terms on the Board. Russell Regnery and Ann Campbell were elected to three-year terms. Pat Strickland, Michelle Styring, and Glenda Zahner were elected to two-year terms.

Russ thanked Mick Kaiser for his years of service on the Board and as Treasurer. Brock Hutchins has been elected to serve as Treasurer. Romney Bathurst will chair the Field Trip Committee as Brock assumes his new position.

Heather Hahn, Executive Director of Audubon NC, presented the evening's program: Save the Song. Her presentation highlighted National Audubon's recently released Report on Climate Change and Birds.

Officers

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

Secretary – Michelle, 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
Hospitality – Dee Andry
Membership & Development – Pat Strickland

Nominating & Leadership Development – Don Shure
Program – Don Shure

At Large – George Kaye, Conservation
Michelle Styring, Nest Box Project
Glenda Zahner, Education

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

Web Master: Jean McCormick



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