



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – August 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.

Annual Picnic planned for August 10

Please join us on Sunday, August 10 at 5:00 p.m. for your chapter's Annual Picnic, which will be held at the Highlands Civic Center/ Rec Park picnic shelter. A meat and soft drinks will be provided. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. There is a \$5.00 fee per person. For reservations, contact Dee Andry at 828-787-1586, so we will know how many to provide for. Members and their guests are invited.

From the President . . .

A Dedicated Follower of the Band

On one of our recent Saturday HPAS outings I had the pleasure of revisiting the bird-banding program, led by Mark Hopey, along the Little Tennessee River (see www.bigbaldbanding.org). I was reminded how almost transformational the experience can be for someone to momentarily hold a wild bird in their hands before releasing it again into the wild. And it was also inspiring to see the group of dedicated young ornithologists who help with the banding projects. Of course the nationwide MAPS (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship) banding program is about much more than personal human experiences. Ultimately, the data abstracted from the banding records provides the best information available to help grasp different bird species' parameters for survival. However, on an individual scale, the significance of an individual recaptured (and banded) bird is often hard to grasp while you are still in the field and prior to that bird's history being recovered from tens of thousands of computerized records of other banded birds.

I spend time occasionally on Little Cumberland Island, off the coast of Georgia. And when I am there I am always struck by the obvious ecologic contrasts with the mountains, especially in terms of the very limited geographic scope of shorebird habitat; often a mere fragmented ribbon of interface, only a few yards wide, between ocean and land. This very limited coastline habitat, replete with habitat degradation, novel predator species, summer tourists, etc. often leaves me pessimistic about the continued and fragile link these shorebird species have with a secure future. The occasional stories of how individual birds do survive warm my heart, and I'd like to share two such stories which both concern banded birds.

Two weeks ago, an avid birder on Amelia Island, Florida, posted a nice photograph of a banded Wilson's Plover on the Georgia Shorebird Alliance's Facebook website. Someone else who visits this website recognized that the combinations of color-coded bands on the bird was part of a Wilson's Plover study that has been coordinated by a UGA graduate student friend of mine, Abby Sterling. Within a few hours, Abby (who this summer is banding birds in Barrow, Alaska, while keeping an eye out for hungry polar bears) confirmed on the Facebook page that it was indeed one of the birds in her study and in fact had been banded as a chick by Nathan Cross (a technician with Abby's project) on Little Cumberland Island last year. Nathan (who this season is banding Sand Hill Cranes in Minnesota) then chimed in with a photograph of the very same bird (with the same bands of course) as a one-day-old chick. This bird happened to be the first Wilson's Plover Nathan ever banded. From this electronic exchange of information we know that at least one Wilson's Plover, out of 27 nests on Little Cumberland Island last year, that fledged perhaps fewer than 6 young birds, has survived to adulthood. This banded bird may well have overwintered in Central or South America. And our little hero (it is a male) has returned to within a few miles of his hatching place on the Georgia-Florida coast. In addition to this story

of survival, this is also an interesting testimonial to the power of Internet and how Facebook made it possible to take a photograph and subsequently ‘connect the dots’ in ‘real time.’

While I was on Little Cumberland Island a few days ago, a friend of mine and I tentatively identified four Semi-palmated Sandpipers on a sand spit. For those of us who aren’t yet deeply into sandpipers, this species is a difficult to identify, non-descript, small shorebird that most of us might readily overlook. As far as grabbing your attention, these confusing sandpipers are not anywhere in the same league with the iconic, flashy, large American Oystercatchers, or the tiny but very cute Piping Plovers (both threatened species), which many of us can readily identify and appreciate. These Semi-palmated Sandpipers are ‘just’ some of those little birds, often referred to generically as “peeps” (even by sympathetic birders), which you might scare up as you walk by along the beach.

What made our viewing of these semi-palmated sandpipers on the beach especially poignant and exciting for me was that on the very same day there was a post on the Center for Conservation Biology’s Shorebird Science website that referenced a Semi-palmated Sandpiper, which had been originally banded far north of Hudson Bay last year and fitted with a tiny geolocator, and which had been recaptured within the last few days, once again on the same island north of Hudson Bay. The information had been downloaded from the recovered geolocator and revealed (for the first time for this species) a precise yearlong migratory history for a member of the species. Most spectacularly, this peep’s history included a 6-day, non-stop, 3,300 mile flight, mostly over open ocean, from Canada to his wintering grounds in South America! And on his way back to northern Canada this spring, the bird had ‘hop-scotched’ up the east coast of North America, including stopping near or on Little Cumberland Island (perhaps the same sand spit with which I am familiar). What were the sandpipers doing that I saw recently on Little Cumberland Island this summer, while their buddy was on the breeding grounds north of Hudson Bay delivering a geolocator to the persons who had banded him last year...possibly they were first year, non-breeding birds? Many questions obviously remain to be answered. Once again I was reminded how the Internet had helped make this bird’s story an almost real time experience for me. At the very least, I now have an greatly heightened sense of awe and respect for this little, otherwise nondescript, sandpiper and was thrilled that where I was standing on the Georgia coast is a potential rest stop for part of this pilgrim’s 10,000 mile round trip odyssey. I’m sure it will continue to be a challenge for me to identify some of the ‘peep’ sandpipers down to species level, however, I know from now on I will certainly give them a wide berth on their ribbon of beach, even (especially?) if they are just passing through.

Russ

HPAS Annual Meeting and Program, September 22

Save the Songs

Heather Hahn, Executive Director of Audubon North Carolina, will be the speaker on Monday, September 22 at the Highlands Civic Center/Rec Park. The topic is “Save the Songs: Climate Change and Birds.” Heather will present Audubon’s new science that quantifies the specific risk to North America’s birds in a greater level of detail and clarity than has been available so far: which birds are most threatened by climate change and where. She will discuss what we will do together in North Carolina to protect our birds today and tomorrow as our climate changes. Heather says, “This new information about the threat global warming poses to birds will add urgency and clarity to our work in a way that few things have before.”

Prior to the program, there will be a brief Annual Membership Meeting for the election of six members as directors whose terms will begin in January 2015. You will be notified of the nominees by email and on the web site several weeks prior to the meeting.

Take advantage of this chance to meet our State Office Director and to learn more about the work of Audubon in our state. Refreshments will be served at 7:00 p.m., followed by the meeting and program at 7:30 p.m.

Upcoming Field Trips

You don’t have to be an expert to enjoy these outings. Bring your houseguests; we have binoculars to loan, field guides to share, and leaders to help you find the common and uncommon species in our area. Saturday walks will carpool from the parking area behind Highlands Town Hall, unless otherwise noted. All walks will start at 7:30 a.m. unless otherwise noted. Walks will be cancelled in the case of rain or heavy fog, but a light bit of drizzle is often ideal for birding (they do

need to eat, regardless!), so don't let that stop you. If you have questions, please call Brock Hutchins at 404-295-0663 or 770-486-3715.

Saturday, August 2: This event will be our last Beginners' Walk of this year, and will be led by Highlands Plateau Audubon President Russ Regnery, assisted by David Thorne. The walk will meet in the parking area behind Highlands Town Hall at 7:30 a.m. We hope to see such birds as Cedar Waxwings, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and other colorful species. If you know someone who might be interested in learning a bit more about our area birds, this is an ideal opportunity to help them get involved in the joy of birding!

Saturday, September 6: This will be a joint outing with the Franklin Bird Club along Turtle Pond Road. Highlands and Cashiers participants will meet as usual at 7:30 a.m. behind Highlands Town Hall to carpool along Turtle Pond for some excellent roadside birding. Species that may be seen include Eastern Bluebirds, Canada and other Wood Warblers, and possibly even a Barred Owl, which was seen on a past trip. Brock Hutchins will lead.



Tuesday, September 15- Wednesday, September 30: Between these dates, we will attempt to offer Hawk-watching opportunities atop Whiteside Mountain. Last year we had 4 outings up the mountain and enjoyed the spectacle of as many as 300 Broad-winged Hawks in kettles as they sought to catch the thermals on their long trip south for the winter. There are also migrating American Eagles, Black and Turkey Vultures, Sharp-shinned and Coopers Hawks, as well as Peregrine Falcons and resident Ravens. These outings are very weather dependent, however, and require last minute notification to participants, so we ask that you send us your email addresses if you are interested so that we can let you know the night before we determine that the following day will be favorable. There are no guarantees, of course, but this can be a

truly exciting and rewarding experience! Please send your indication of interest with best email address to brockhutchins@bellsouth.net. For questions, please call Brock at 770-486-3715 or Romney Bathurst at 526-1939.

Saturday, September 20: We will head out for our annual Charlie Davis Memorial Blue Ridge Parkway Field Trip, a perennially popular outing to search for Fall migrants such as Broad-winged Hawks, Scarlet Tanagers, Tennessee Warblers and many others which use the Blue Ridge to guide their journeys southward. The group will meet at 7:00 a.m. at the Highlands Town Hall Parking lot to carpool to the Parkway. Please note the earlier time, which is necessary in order to reach our destination before the traffic gets too hectic and while the birds are still active. Participants should bring a packed lunch and drink which we will stop to enjoy at one of the scenic overlooks. Birding should be relatively easy, roadside for the most part though there will be one or two optional, short walks. Loaner binoculars will be available. Brock Hutchins and Romney Bathurst will lead, with various board members assisting. For questions, please contact Brock at 770-486-3715 or Romney at 526-1939.

Changes in the schedule may occur, so be sure to watch the newspapers and web site for the latest.

Birds, Beer and Wine!

On Tuesday evening July 15, nine HPAS members and guests met at the Ugly Dog Pub on Fourth Street in Highlands for an informal get-together. We talked birds, travel, upcoming activities, and whatever came to mind.

Make plans to join us for the next Birds & Beer gatherings on Tuesday nights, August 19 and September 16. It's BYOB (bring your own bucks – and body), plus spouse, friends, and a designated driver. The Ugly Dog also serves some great food should you decide to stay for a bite to eat. Hope to see you there!

Summer Programs

Please note the location of each program as some are held at the Hudson Library and some at the Highlands Rec Park

Monday, August 4: Ed Boos, John Sill, and Bill Cochran. "Feathers, Fins and Fur:" Artistic Reflections on the Hudson Library Summer Exhibit. Refreshments at 7:00 p.m., Program at 7:30 p.m. Hudson Library in Highlands. See details on page 5.

Sunday, August 10: Annual picnic, 5:00 p.m. Highlands Civic Center Shelter. See details on page 1.

Monday, August 25: Clay Bolt, Nature Photographer: “Natural History Photography: Revealing the Unseen World Around Us,” refreshments at 7:00 p.m., program at 7:30 p.m. Hudson Library in Highlands. Enter by the rear entrance.

Monday, September 8: Dr. Barbara Ballentine, Western Carolina University. “Animal Communication: Tales of Sex and Violence from the Swamp.” Refreshments at 7:00 p.m., Program at 7:30 p.m. Hudson Library in Highlands. Enter by the rear entrance.

Monday, September 22: HPAS Annual Meeting. Heather Starck Hahn, Executive Director, Audubon North Carolina. “Save the Songs: Climate Change and Birds.” Highlands Civic Center/Rec Park. See details on page 2.

HPAS Outreach at Mountains in Bloom

HPAS saw a promising opportunity to reach a receptive audience by participating in the recent Mountains in Bloom event, which benefits The Bascom Arts Center in Highlands. Romney Bathurst, Ann Campbell, Michelle Styring and Glenda Zahner set up and manned a table full of informative handouts at the first house and garden stop on the tour.

During the two full days of the tour, we talked with 150+ enthusiastic gardeners about the importance of native plants for native birds.

The beautifully designed home featured lovely landscaped gardens, and extensive grounds filled with Rhodos, Fraser Magnolias and oaks, as well as some lovely dead snags and an extensive waterfall feature. The landscaped gardens employed some native plants such as Anise Hissop, Helenium, Hydrangias and many more. Birds seen and heard while we were there included Broad-winged Hawk, Red-eyed Vireo, Chestnut-sided Warbler and our native Carolina subspecies Dark-eyed Junco. This was a wonderful opportunity for education and outreach to the community. Glenda provided the loaner plants from Chattooga Gardens in Cashiers, which were a great visual aid in talking about our native plants.

Romney Bathurst

HPAS Bird Box Project

The HPAS Cavity-nesting Bird Project, mentioned previously in HPAS newsletters, will begin this fall. Briefly, the purpose of the project is to determine if providing nest boxes with smaller entrance holes than the traditional bluebird nest box, along with separate boxes with larger entrance holes, will increase the nesting success of some of our smaller mountain cavity nesting bird species. Current data suggest that at least some smaller bird species may not compete successfully for nesting cavities with larger, potentially aggressive birds, such as Bluebirds, Starlings, and House Sparrows. Boxes with smaller diameter holes may be more attractive and function as more successful ‘homes’ for smaller native birds such as Carolina Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, possibly Brown-headed Nuthatch, Titmice, Tree Swallows, and various species of wrens. Alternatively, nest box entrance hole size may not make any difference at all to the nesting success of our smaller bird species...we hope to find out.

We are asking HPAS members to consider becoming a part of this study and place a pair (or multiple pairs!) of nesting boxes near their North Carolina homes and properties this fall and subsequently monitor possible nesting success next year. One box will have a 1-1/2 inch hole, ideal for bluebird-sized birds, and the otherwise identical box will have an opening of 1-1/8 inch, sized to exclude larger birds. Please refer to more specific project information on our HPAS website, www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org



The HPAS nesting box project committee will order pairs of two bird boxes, each with a different sized entrance hole, for interested members. Cost of an assembled pair is \$34.00, which includes 2 poles, 2 boxes, and pipe clamps for mounting the box to a short pole). The boxes will be labeled as an HPAS Research Project. The boxes will be ready to install on your property upon arrival! If you wish to purchase the 2 boxes only (without poles), they will be \$20.00 per pair. Boxes are well made by the Eastern Bluebird Rescue Group. HPAS plans to provide boxes and related materials to members at close to ‘cost;’ this initial project is intended to be more of a true ‘study,’ not a money making project.

We hope that participants will install boxes this fall and monitor which bird species nest in which boxes during the nesting season of 2015 (directions will arrive with the boxes). After next year's nesting season, HPAS will summarize the community-wide results. Hopefully both the larger and smaller bird species will benefit from installation of these boxes.

Thanks to a generous grant by The Mountain Garden Club in Highlands, some of our community parks, green areas and local area schools will be provided with mounted pair of boxes at no cost. Hopefully this community-wide project will help determine whether or not nest box hole size is an important factor for the success of our smaller cavity-nesting, mountain bird species. Think about being a part of this exciting endeavor to learn if we can "make a difference."

The more participation we have in this study, the more meaningful the results should be. To place your order, call 828-743-9670 or talk with one of the committee members, Kyle Pursel, Russ Regnery, George Kaye, or Michelle Styring. Boxes are scheduled to arrive in September.

Michelle Styring

Feathers, Fins and Fur Exhibit at the Hudson Library



The Highlands Plateau Audubon Society and the Hudson Library will host the wildlife exhibit, "Feathers, Fins and Fur," during the month of August at the library. The subjects of the display are birds, fish, and mammals. The exhibit comprises the art of John Sill, the photography of Ed Boos, and the carvings of Bill Cochran. The three artists will speak during an opening reception on August 4th beginning at 7:00 p.m. at the library located at 554 Main Street in Highlands. The entrance for the reception will be at the rear of the building.

This Is YOUR Chapter – and YOU Need Volunteers

The HPAS Board of Directors knows that you like what your chapter is doing, because you participate in field trips and programs, and pay dues faithfully and generously. Perhaps you don't realize that this is a totally volunteer organization, led by a working board of directors. Some of these folks have led field trips, maintained membership records, published the newsletter, prepared articles for the newspapers, arranged informative programs, and performed other duties for years.

Please consider sharing your talents, vision, and imagination with your Audubon chapter. There are immediate needs in Membership, Publicity, Programs, and Finance. If you have skills in any of these areas – and a little bit of time – you can help you chapter continue to be a real presence for Conservation in the mountain area.

Contact any Board member to discuss your interests. Telephone numbers for officers are shown on the final page of this newsletter. You can contact any director by email through links at www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org.

Avary Doubleday

Welcome New Members

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

John & Willa Almlöf – Highlands and Tallahassee, FL

Bob & Anne Byrd – Glenville and Merritt Island, FL

Marsha LaFontaine – Sapphire

Jeri Wexelbaun – Cashiers and Boca Raton, FL

Chris & Karen Weihs – Cashiers

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.

Officers

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

Secretary – Michelle Ruigrok 919-621-0844
Treasurer – Mike Kaiser, 526-5071

Directors and Committee Chairs

Communications – Avary Doubleday
Conservation – Kyle Pursel
Education – Ann Campbell
Field Trips – Brock Hutchins
Finance – Mike Kaiser
Hospitality – Dee Andry
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Nominating & Leadership Development – Don Shure
Program – Don Shure
At Large – Romney Bathurst, Field Trips
George Kaye, Conservation
Michelle Styring, Publicity
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