



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – April 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

The Board of Directors of the HPAS is excited to announce a project for the upcoming spring and summer season. HPAS will help sponsor Ms. Jamie Harrelson, a graduate student at Western Carolina University, to study Golden-winged Warblers (GWWA) in our part of the state. Jamie is a student of Dr. Jeremy Hyman. Ms. Harrelson's studies will also be partly supported by the Highlands Biological Foundation and Western Carolina University, with assistance from the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust and Audubon North Carolina.

As many of you know, GWWA are a beautiful neo-tropical migratory warbler that nest only within specialized habitat at higher elevations and are rarely seen by casual observers. Currently, GWWA are being studied to determine if the warbler's status warrants protection under the Endangered Species Act. The birds' specialized nesting habitat appears to be diminishing within the southern breeding range of the species (i.e., Western North Carolina) and this diminished nesting habitat is likely one reason for the species' diminishing numbers. Jamie's work will focus on behavioral studies and will also necessarily require locating and characterizing local breeding bird populations, including in our area.

There are several reasons to be excited about this project. Foremost is the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to understanding parameters necessary for the survival of one of the iconic eastern warbler species. Although in recent years we know of a handful of local sites where breeding GWWA can (or used to) be located, few of them have been well documented. Jamie's studies should fill in data from the southern region of the Blue Ridge and supplement information that is being gathered further north as part of an Audubon North Carolina sponsored project that is being led by Curtis Smalling. Jamie's work will be truly unique in terms of studying aspects of breeding bird behavior for this species.

GWWA are known for a relatively short period when males sing over their territories and hence when breeding birds can be most readily detected. Although Jamie's studies are still in the planning process, it is quite likely that she will welcome/request participation from local birders, including HPAS members, and private land owners, who can help verify nesting habitat that will first be predicted by studying detailed habitat maps. So, there should be opportunities for interested persons to personally participate and contribute to this project.

This is an opportunity for HPAS to meaningfully connect with other important conservation, educational, and bird oriented entities within our community. Hopefully these connections will lead to additional programs and cooperation in the future, and perhaps serve to reach out to persons not already affiliated with Audubon.

Many of us think a lot about how best to contribute to the future of ornithology and avian conservation. What could be more meaningful than helping to provide an opportunity for a dedicated, well-informed young person, to embark on a graduate student project that will hopefully lead towards a career as a professional ornithologist? And with a bird of special interest in our very neighborhood that we desperately need to know more about!

Finally, this is the kind of endeavor by which a local Audubon chapter, of rather modest means, can hopefully make a real difference, not only to one person's career in ornithology, but also to our community and to bird conservation. Jamie Harrelson's project will be made possible in part by contributions that you have made to HPAS, and for that we can all be genuinely proud.

Russ

Coming to Your Neighborhood This Spring: HPAS Field Trips!

The Field Trips Committee, ably chaired by Brock Hutchins, has just listed walks available to both HPAS members and the public, free of charge, beginning this May. Be sure to check out the schedule below and mark your calendars to participate in several of our varied walks – you don't have to be an expert. Bring your house guests; we have binoculars to loan, field guides to share, and leaders to help you find the common and uncommon species in our area. As before, the first Saturday of each month, through August, will be geared specifically for beginners, with help in using binoculars and field guides, as well as identifying some of our more common birds by sight and sound. Saturday walks will carpool from the parking area behind Highlands Town Hall, unless otherwise noted. All walks will start at 7:30 AM unless otherwise noted. Bring binoculars if you have them, good walking shoes, a water bottle, and wet weather gear if necessary. 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 the schedule should change, due to unforeseen circumstances, the latest information will be posted on our HPAS web site: www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org Be sure to check it out – there are lots of other informative articles there and our newsletter can be found there too.

May 3, Saturday: Beginners' Walk to Edwin and Kay Poole's home and lovely native garden, Russ Regnery (HPAS President) will lead

May 10, Saturday: Trip down the mountain to Horse Cove and Chattooga River area to try to find the rarely seen Swainson's Warbler. Brock Hutchins will be your leader.

May 17, Saturday: Guest leader Rob Bierregaard will be joined by Russ Regnery and Avary Doubleday for a trip to Flat Mountain Road and the area near the Ranger Falls trailhead. Rob is a well-known Ornithologist and lecturer whom we are delighted to have available to lead this special walk.

May 24, Saturday: Joint trip with the Franklin Bird Club to the neighborhood of Ellen and Jim Shelton, where last year the group saw a Red-headed Woodpecker, not a common bird in Western NC, along with numerous Scarlet Tanagers, many warblers and lots of other goodies. Ellen and Jim will lead.

May 31, Saturday: Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust Eco Tour to High Hampton Resort in Cashiers. Highlands's participants will carpool as usual while Cashiers residents and others may gather in the parking area of the New Cashiers Rec Center where the Highlands group will rendezvous with them.

NOTE: HCLT members are free of charge; others may either join HCLT (highly recommended!) or pay a minimal fee for this one walk. Watch the web site or call Julie, at 526-1111 for specifics. All participants must register in advance with HCLT so that lunches can be properly planned, so be sure to call Julie if you want to go! Romney Bathurst and Kyle Pursel will lead.

Saturday, June 7: Beginners' Walk to the Highlands Biological Station with Brock Hutchins leading.

Thursday, June 12: Our annual Owl Prowl in cooperation with the Highlands Nature Center. Donations to the Carolina Raptor Rehab Center will be appreciated but not required. Bring a flashlight and plan to stay after dark as we hunt for owls in the area!

June 14, Saturday: Back by popular demand, an outing to Lonesome Valley in Sapphire, with Romney Bathurst leading. This is a beautiful wooded canyon being sensitively developed by the Jennings family with conservation interests high on the priority list. The result is some fine habitat for migrant wood warblers which breed in our area, including the stunning Blackburnian Warbler – you won't want to miss it! Carpool from the parking area of the new Cashiers Rec. Center at 7:30 sharp.

June 21, Saturday: We will drive to the Jones Gap access to the Bartram Trail looking for breeding warblers and tanagers in this high elevation location. Be prepared to do some hiking on the trail to find the birds. Brock Hutchins will lead this trip.

June 28, Saturday: Romney will lead a trip along Rich Gap Road, an excellent spot for tanagers and warblers, such as Black-and-White, Black-throated Green, Worm-eating, and Hooded.

There will be Beginners' Walk on both July 5th and August 2nd. See the June newsletter and our web site for details.

Additionally, there will be a bird walk in conjunction with Mountain Wildlife Days on **Friday, July 18**, with Romney Bathurst leading. Stay tuned for meeting place and time.

Walks for September will be announced in the June issue of this newsletter!



WE WANT YOU!

Volunteers are needed to assist with weekly bird walks. Experience is not necessary. Only qualifications are enthusiasm, desire to learn, and enjoyment of people and birds. Members are encouraged to stretch their wings and join our leaders in the fun of helping others find and see our huge variety of birds. You would help by circulating our HPAS sign-up/waiver sheet among participants, carrying a field guide and showing the illustrations of various birds being spotted, and just generally learning a bit more about these special mountains of ours. Call Brock Hutchins if you are interested and can help: 404-295-0663 or 770-486-3715. Or email him at brockhutchins@bellsouth.net We really do need your help, so come on along!

Golden-winged Warbler project

As a graduate student in the Biology department at Western Carolina University, I will be undertaking research this spring and summer on Golden-winged Warblers in western North Carolina. This species has undergone substantial population declines over the past several decades; one of the primary culprits on the breeding grounds has been the natural transformation, over time, of early successional habitats into forest. The birds are somewhat particular regarding the habitats they utilize; they generally breed in brushy, patchy habitats edged

with deciduous forest. The current breeding range of the species is divided into two relatively disjunct areas: the Appalachian Mountains and the Great Lakes region, extending into Canada.

My thesis project will combine ecological work with a behavioral study. The research will be conducted at sites in Macon, Jackson, Clay, Graham, and Haywood counties. While many of the study sites are located in National Forest, some sites are on private lands. I plan to characterize the distribution of and vegetation structure within territories held by male Golden-winged Warblers. I'll study the behavior of males to determine whether male aggression varies across different population densities and/or across habitats that differ in vegetation characteristics. The project will include surveying of areas that have not been extensively surveyed in the past. I hope to engage private landowners in discussions about habitat management techniques that increase availability of suitable breeding habitat for the species. Conservation of Golden-winged Warblers across their breeding range depends on appropriate habitat management on both public and private lands.

Previous research on the behavior of Golden-winged Warblers has been limited; I am not aware of any published studies on male aggression. Thus, results of the study will contribute to a greater understanding of the behavior and ecology of this species of conservation concern.

I wish to thank the Board of Directors of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society for their pledge of financial support for this project.

Jamie Harrelson

Audubon NC Chapter News

Audubon NC has invited chapters to participate in its blog, <http://ncaudubonblog.org> . The plan is to feature one chapter each month. Highlands Plateau Audubon will be featured in the near future. So be sure to check it out! If you are a blogger with something to share, please send it to Avary soon at avaryd@juno.com.

Audubon NC Chapter Day, originally scheduled in February, was cancelled because of the winter weather. It has been rescheduled for Sunday, July 20, at Haw River State Park. Registration information is available at <http://nc.audubon.org/events/canceled-will-reschedule-2014-chapter-day> . Agenda information will be available soon on the HPAS web site as well as the Audubon NC site.

Wings to Soar at Sapphire Valley

HPAS and Mountain Wildlife will be co-sponsoring a "Wings to Soar" presentation at the Sapphire Valley Community Building at 7:00 PM, **Tuesday, May 20**. Wings to Soar is a non-profit birds of prey environmental education organization founded in 2012 by husband and wife team John Stokes and Dale Kernahan. Their mission is to educate people about the magnificent birds of prey (raptors), primarily through live presentations. From May to September Dale and John conduct the Rock City Raptors Birds of Prey Show at Rock City, near Chattanooga, TN. You won't want to miss this program. For information, contact Ann Campbell, anncampbell48@hotmail.com .

Membership Committee

We have several members that were not on our last membership posting in the newsletter and we'd like to share their names with you.

The following have renewed their membership:

Hillrie & Beverly Quin and James & Diane Riddle

In addition, we have several new members:

Susie Day of Orlando, FL & Highlands

Cathy Ritch of Dahlonga, GA

List Underwood of Birmingham, AL and Highlands

It will soon be time to send out renewal forms for the 2014 year which starts May 1st. This year, Fred Gehrisch will be working on this project as he will become the new membership chairman for this coming year. You should receive your form by mail in April.

We are larger and stronger in membership than we have ever been and it is due to your continued support and the interest of our new members in birding. Because of this interest and support we are able to offer more to our membership each year. Thank you for being a part of this.

Highlands Plateau Audubon Society Officers

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