



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – August 2012

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.

Highlands Plateau: The July Important Birding Area of the Month

Each month Audubon North Carolina features one of the 97 IBAs (Important Bird Area) in the State. This month our team from the mountains is showcasing the Highlands Plateau IBA's amazing bird diversity.

The Highlands Plateau has long been known as a unique place for birds. The southern terminus of the higher elevation parts of the Appalachians, the Highlands Plateau hosts a wide variety of high elevation and northern species that reach their southern limit of distribution here. In the cool hemlock and white pine stands of the plateau, birds normally found up in the spruce fir forest find their homes here. Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Red Crossbill all call the Plateau home. Mixed with them are a variety of wood warblers like Blackburnian, Black-throated Blue, and Canada Warblers. Veery, Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanager, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak help round out the list of 90 or so breeding species on the Highlands Plateau.

Another interesting characteristic of the Plateau is that it has also been a tourist and second home destination for more than a century. The small towns of Highlands and Cashiers are embedded in this IBA, making it one of the few IBAs with whole towns within its boundary. While visiting Highlands it is easy to see and hear Red Crossbills and Pine Siskins flying over Main Street, or to see Rose-breasted Grosbeaks in a church parking lot downtown, or to have Black-Throated Blue Warblers in the parking lot of The Bascom, the fine art museum in Highlands.

Because of this, Audubon North Carolina has launched a special communication and partner program called Treasure Highlands. Through strong partnerships with a half dozen other environmental and conservation groups, we are seeking to raise the profile of conservation efforts and easy things residents and visitors can do to make their land and decisions better for birds and the whole Plateau. Visit www.treasurehighlands.org for more info.

The Plateau has also been hit hard by the effects of the invasive hemlock wooly adelgid and is beginning to see the impacts of other invasive species. These changes will no doubt have impacts for birds, as do development and other factors. But individual landowners can make a difference. Thanks to an Urban Forestry grant in 2011, we produced a guide to land owners to help birds in the Plateau. The full booklet is available on the Treasure Highlands web site.

- Audubon NC

Annual Picnic, Sunday August 12

Please join us on Sunday, August 12 at 5:00PM for our chapter's Annual Picnic, which will be held at the Highlands Civic Center picnic shelter. Barbecue 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 787-1586, so we will know how many to provide for.**

President's Message

“Hope is a Thing with Feathers” was the theme of Curtis Smalling’s thought-provoking presentation at this year’s HPAS annual meeting. Emily Dickinson’s poem relates to human “hope.” I’ve been thinking about what might pass for hope from an avian perspective.

This season I have been involved with facilitating the efforts of two young researchers who are documenting the nesting parameters of endangered Wilson’s Plovers on three of Georgia’s barrier islands. Coincidentally, Wilson’s Plovers have just been named as one of nine avian species that Audubon and the US Fish and Wildlife Service hope to focus national conservation efforts in the near future. There are only an estimated 300 Wilson’s Plovers along the Atlantic coast, with more birds occurring along Gulf shores.

Wilson’s Plovers typically nest in a narrow ribbon of habitat, not far above the high tide line on sandy beaches, as do many nesting shorebirds (e.g., Oystercatchers, Willets, Terns, Stilts). It had been my expectation and goal that, if we could succeed in educating people who use the beaches for “recreation,” we should see an increase in the fledging success of the Plovers and other shorebirds. And my research friends are exactly the right sort of personable ‘ambassadors’ to gently increase human awareness and understanding to the needs of nesting shorebirds, while at the same time documenting nesting parameters.

However, reviewing this year’s Wilson’s Plover nesting data to this point has been sobering. Tropical storm Beryl and another cycle of extreme high tides washed away approximately one third of Wilson’s Plover and other shorebird nests on Little Cumberland Island and the north end of Cumberland Island National Seashore (Big Cumberland Island). Predation by raccoons, feral pigs, ghost crabs, and feral horse damage to nests was expected, however, no one anticipated the degree of predation by recently arrived coyotes. Coyotes are helping to finish off Plover, Stilt, and Oystercatcher nests, and two least tern colonies on Little Cumberland and Big Cumberland Island. Of the approximately 100 Wilson’s Plover nests on the two adjacent areas of the two Cumberland Islands, there are only 6-7 nest that have so far hatched chicks, with an additional six nests (with eggs) still incubating; however, it is already late in the season and getting to the chick stage is no guarantee of survival to fledging in a world of predators. The odds that Little and Big Cumberland Islands, which host perhaps two thirds of the Atlantic nesting population of Wilson’s Plovers, will be home to *any* fully-fledged young this year are beginning to look perilously slim.

Ironically perhaps, none of the Wilson Plover losses (at least those that are part of these studies) have had anything to do with human recreational activities; at this stage one can only hope there will be a few chicks that can be defended from possible ATV traffic! A small bit of good news is that the most serious challenges to fledgling success are now beginning to be better understood, thanks to the focused research efforts.

Adult Wilson’s Plovers’ often brave attempts to protect their nests and chicks, amid a myriad of dangers, underscore the birds’ impulses to try to survive another generation and must be considered expressions of their commitment to the species’ tenuous future. Hope can indeed be a thing with feathers.

Cheers, Russ

Field Trips

Sat., August 4: This is another Beginners’ Walk, intended to give you an up close look at some of our resident birds **in hand**, at the Tessentee Farms banding station in Otto, NC. Director Mark Hopey will explain the techniques, whys and wherefores of bird banding. Participants will have a chance to assist in transporting birds from the mist nets to the recording area and back. Please bring good walking shoes (waterproof would be good as the grasses can be quite dewy), water, sunhat, binoculars and a folding stool, if desired. There is a short, downhill walk to the banding station. George Kaye will be leading the group, assisted by Avary Doubleday. The

group will assemble behind Highlands Town Hall near the public restrooms at 7:30AM to carpool down to Otto. Please call 526-8414 for further information.

Sat., August 11: This trip will be to local spots like the Nature Center and Sunset Rocks. Brock Hutchins will lead the group starting at 7:30AM behind Highlands Town Hall, near the public restrooms. The trip will require some walking and a moderate grade uphill to Sunset Rocks. Please call Brock at 787-1387 for additional information.

Wed., August 15: Paula Gorgoglione of the Franklin Bird Club has agreed to include us in her regular Wednesday morning bird walk on the Franklin Greenway at 8:00AM. We will meet her at the Salali parking lot on the Greenway. The group should meet with leader, Brock Hutchins, in the Highlands Town Hall parking lot near the public restrooms at 7:30AM sharp to carpool down to Franklin. Call 787-1387 for further information.

NOTE: **There will be no Saturday walk on Aug. 18.**

Sat., August 25: Fairfield Lake in Sapphire will be the destination this time. Brock Hutchins and Ann Campbell will guide you on a three-mile walk around the lake and to adjacent areas. The walk is on a good path and fairly level for easy walking. We will assemble at the public parking area behind Highlands Town Hall near the public restrooms at 7:30AM to carpool down to Sapphire. Please call Brock at 787-1387 for additional information.

Sat., September 1: As usual our first walk of the month will be focused on assisting beginning birders with binocular use and spotting birds, though all birders are welcome, of course! Russ Regnery will lead, with Avary Doubleday assisting. The trip will head out Flat Mountain Road to the abandoned Forest Service Christmas tree farm that some of us explored earlier this year. This should be good for resident birds as well as whatever migrants may be moving through by then (an open area that should connect Yellow, Shortoff, and Cole Mountains with open areas further south, e.g. Scaly and Kings Mountains). Meet in Highlands at 7:30 as usual, behind Town Hall near the public restrooms. Bring binoculars if you have them, but we will also furnish loaners if needed. For more information, call 526-8414.

Sat., September 8: Walk on a different section of the Franklin Greenway with Paula Gorgoglione, of the Franklin Bird Club. After carpooling as usual at 7:30AM sharp, behind Highlands Town Hall (near the restrooms), we will meet with Paula and any of the Franklin group at end of the Greenway at 8:00AM at the Franklin library parking lot. The library is on Siler Road, which is off the Georgia Road (441). There are signs on Georgia Road for the library. This end of the Greenway is a different environment from the Salali site which we visited last month, and even more beautiful. Romney Bathurst will meet the group in Highlands and lead them down. Questions? Call Brock Hutchins, 787-1387.

Sat., September 15: The Charlie Davis Memorial Blue Ridge Parkway trip should find migrating raptors and warblers, as well as Wild Turkeys and fall-plumaged Scarlet Tanagers and migrant warblers. Car-pooling is very important for this trip! Both Cashiers area and Highlands folks should meet behind Highlands Town Hall, near the public restrooms **at 7:00AM**. Bring a packed lunch, water, and binoculars. Almost all the birding will be from the vehicles parked in the designated areas, so walking should be easy. Even non-birding spouses will enjoy this beautiful drive and are always welcome. For further information, contact the leader, Brock Hutchins, at 787-1387, or assistant Romney Bathurst, 526-1939. In case of rain, this trip will take place next week, Sat., September 22.

Sat., September 22: This will be the alternate date for The Charlie Davis Memorial Blue Ridge Parkway outing. If that trip has occurred the prior week, this week's walk will be to the Flat Mountain Road area. Some moderate uphill walking will be involved. Fall migrants are the focus once again. Brock Hutchins will lead, assisted by Romney Bathurst. For further information, call Brock at 787-1387.

Sat., September 29: By now things will be slowing down a bit, but we should find some action along Whiteside Cove Road and in Horse Cove. “Confusing Fall Warblers,” a phrase coined by Roger Tory Peterson, will be targets, along with confusing fall other birds! Romney Bathurst will lead, with Pat Strickland and Ann Campbell assisting. Meet behind Highlands Town Hall near the public restrooms at 7:30AM for car-pooling. Parking is limited along this route, but most birding will be done from roadside or on flat trails, so the walking should be easy. For more information, call Ann at 743-9942.

A word about rain!

**If rain is pouring down with no promise of improvement, the trip/walk will be cancelled. If it’s just “misting” and conditions are due to get better, the trips will meet as planned, bring rain gear, umbrellas and a good sense of humor! If you are uncertain, please call the number listed for the trip. Note also that schedule changes may occur. Check the web site for the latest information.

Upcoming Programs

The highly entertaining movie, “The Big Year,” will be shown in both Cashiers and Highlands, cosponsored by their respective public libraries:

Friday, July 27 at The Albert Carlton-Cashiers Community Library at 4:00PM and

Wednesday, August 8 at The Hudson Library in Highlands, at 4:00PM.

On January 1, 1998, three especially talented birders from disparate backgrounds embarked independently on a year-long quest to achieve a record setting goal of exceeding 732 bird species sightings in North America. This 2011 film, based on Mark Obmascik’s book, stars Steve Martin, Jack Black, and Owen Wilson. Light comedy is used effectively as the three birders crisscross the continent in response to birding alerts signaling the presence of rare species. Along the way the audience is treated to a panorama of beautiful scenery and the special birds that occupy these landscapes. Gerry Doubleday says, “This movie is a hoot!” Popcorn will be provided; you may bring your own soft drink!

Sunday, August 12: HPAS Annual Picnic at the Civic Center – see page 1 for details.

Monday, August 27: Dr. Jeremy Hyman, faculty member at Western Carolina University, will give a presentation at HPAS' monthly meeting. He will speak on “Aggression, Personality, and Urbanization in Song Sparrows.” These amazing little birds give us a joyful song for many months during the year. Come find out more about them. Refreshments will be offered at 7:00 pm, with the program beginning at 7:30PM.

Monday, September 10: “Wildlife and Special Places” is the title of a slide presentation by our members, at the Civic Center at 7:30PM. We hope to make this type of presentation an annual opportunity for our resident photographers to show us the best of their recent work in the areas of nature and wildlife photography or to share highlights from recent birding trips to special locations. Light refreshments will precede the program. **Contact Don Shure (770-939-9417 or djshure@bellsouth.net) if you would like to be part of this presentation.**

Tuesday, September 25: “Hummingbirds: Delicate Gems or Sky Kings,” a slide talk presented by Romney Bathurst as part of the Village Nature Series in Cashiers, 7:00PM, Cashiers Commons. For further information call Romney, 526-1939.

Membership

We want to welcome and recognize our new members whose memberships were received since the last printing of the newsletter through July 12:

Gayle and Kathy Hamrick – Cashiers & Augusta, GA
Jack and Robyn McCulloch – Woodstock, GA
Phil and Lynn Miller – Highlands & Houston, TX
Rosemary Plane – Cashiers & Deland, FL
Marleen Salo – Highlands & Lutz, FL
Jim and Ellen Shelton, III – Cullowhee
Guy and Mary Silva – Lanesville, IN
Rick and Carolyn Waghorne – Cashiers & Dallas, TX

If you have not yet renewed your membership, call Pat Strickland at 743-7421 or print an application from our Web page, www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org.

Annual Meeting Report

The Annual Members Meeting of Highlands Plateau Audubon Society was held on Monday, June 11. The primary business was the election of directors for the class of 2015. Three current directors were elected for second terms: Brock Hutchins, George Kaye, and Don Shure. Kyle Pursel was elected as a new Director. He is a herpetologist, employed by the Highlands-Cashiers Land Trust. Edwin Poole, who has been a director since our Chapter was organized, finished his final term as Director. He will continue to serve on the Communications and the Education Committees. So we are not saying “Goodbye!”

Highlands Plateau Audubon Society Officers

President - Russ Regnery, 404-558-1085

Vice - President – Avary Doubleday, 526-8414

Secretary – Cathi Overton, 787-1387

Treasurer – Mike Kaiser, 526-5071

Directors and Committee Chairs

Communications – Avary Doubleday

Conservation – Russ Regnery

Education – Ann Campbell

Field Trips – Brock Hutchins

Finance – Mike Kaiser

Hospitality – Mary Lou Waas

Membership & Development – Pat Strickland

Nominating & Leadership Development – Don Shure

Program – Open

At Large – Romney Bathurst

George Kaye

Kyle Pursel

Michelle Styring

Glenda Zahner

Newsletter Editor: John Gross

Web Master: Jean McCormick



Highlands Plateau Audubon Society

P. O. Box 833

Highlands, NC 28741