



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – December 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.

President's Message

It seems like 'migration' is on lots of peoples' minds recently as winter begins to settle into the mountains. Migration and migratory flyways are also central to the first new conservation-focused strategic plan for National Audubon Society (NAS) in more than 20 years. NA's new strategic plan will attempt to prioritize various programmatic activities within units of "flyways" that roughly correspond to the classical pathways of many migratory birds. For example, our local and North Carolina State organizations fall within the so-called "Atlantic Flyway."

While most of us will recognize that not all of our local birds are migratory, and that not all birds that do migrate long distances stay strictly within the somewhat arbitrary Pacific, Central, Mississippi, and Atlantic flyways (i.e., many neo-tropical migrants fly north by one path and may go south by another), NAS's novel flyway approach constitutes multiple steps in the right direction for organizing Audubon resources and addressing important issues of bird conservation that clearly bridge state and even international boundaries. Two of Audubon North Carolina's top ornithologists, Curtis Smalling and Walker Golder, are assuming important new roles in documenting and facilitating conservation efforts with birds that spend their spring and summer in NC but winter in the Caribbean or Central America (see the cover-story for the most recent issue of the Audubon Magazine). Clearly, successful conservation of long-range migrants requires understanding the challenges that these birds face not only as they spend their spring and summers 'closer to home' here in the US, but also where they winter, and how well they survive the perilous processes of migration through intermediate environments that may also be under ecologic assault. I am reminded that I'm glad I don't have to migrate thousands of miles, twice a year!

And on a more regional level, the important challenges to US continental bird conservation are rarely limited to only one state. While it is always worth considering various approaches to resolving a conservation problem, when resources are limited (as conservation resources always will be!), it is probably not efficient to try to 're-invent the wheel' in terms of bird conservation strategies, state-by-state. For example, I think of some the common challenges facing nesting shorebirds up and down the Atlantic coast (e.g., human disturbance of nesting sites, reduced potential nesting sites, habitat degradation, predation from newly introduced or peridomestic species, etc.) and how the essence of many of these issues are similar, whether one is dealing with nesting Piping Plovers on the coast of Massachusetts or nesting Wilson's Plovers along the coast of Georgia and Florida. And how successfully we address these kinds of conservation challenges is what ultimately counts.

Under the umbrella of the new flyway-based initiative, NA has designated five subheadings of "conservation strategies": Putting Working Lands to Work for Birds and People, Sharing Our Seas and Shores, Saving Important Bird Areas, Shaping a Healthy Climate and Clean Energy Future, and Creating Bird-friendly Communities. Highlands Plateau Audubon Society (HPAS) is still waiting to fully appreciate how we can best integrate our local activities into the over-reaching strategic plan and the five conservation strategies; however, I think it is reasonably easy to see how HPAS can readily find ways to chip in. Please keep an eye out for discussions of the various conservation strategies as applied to the Highlands Plateau in upcoming newsletters and programs.

NAS is also taking a pragmatic, business-like approach to assessing “metrics for success,” identifying “priority species” of special concern, as well as “what we’re not doing.” This approach is a rather obvious effort to focus on return on bird conservation investment. Fortunately, focusing on conservation on a priority species of special concern typically should be beneficial for multiple, perhaps less “iconic,” species that share the same environment. For more details I encourage you to Google “Audubon strategic plan” or go directly to: http://www.audubon.org/sites/default/files/documents/audubon_strategic_plan_-_web_2012.pdf

Upcoming issues of the Audubon North Carolina newsletter will discuss the five conservation strategies and how they are playing out in North Carolina. If you are not already receiving this newsletter and would like to do so, please contact Avary Doubleday (avaryd@juno.com or 828-526-8414) to have your name added to the ANC mailing list. The Fall/Winter edition has just been mailed, but there are some extra copies.

Time will tell how successful the new Audubon strategic plan will be in making a significant difference to bird conservation. I’m optimistic. It will be interesting to see how the historically state-based Audubon organizations redefine their roles within the new flyway-defined strategic plan. And I look forward to working not only with our friends at Audubon North Carolina, but our various North American and international Audubon flyway partners as well!

Russ

Christmas Bird Count is Counting on You!!!

As we have done for many years now, Highlands Plateau Audubon Society will once again participate in the Christmas Bird Count which takes place nationwide each year, collecting data on species which aids in following trends that indicate "the state of our birds", their increases and declines. Our date is **Friday, December 14th**, and all are welcome, from beginners to experienced birders, we need your help! Participants can aid in recording species and numbers, driving, looking and listening, as we try to cover our usual territories in and around the Highlands Plateau that day. This is a really fun morning (starting at 7:00 am), with a noon gathering for a warming chili lunch and comparison of successes, failures, and star birds for the day. If interested, and we hope you are, please call Brock Hutchins, 828-787-1387 or 404-295-0663, or email him at brockhutchins@bellsouth.net. Loaner binoculars are available if needed. Come join us and participate in one of Audubon's oldest and most fun events!

Membership

In October, we publish a roll call of all our members in the Mountain Warbler newsletter. The following members did not make the cut-off for this listing and we’d like to recognize them now:

Ned and Linda New – Family membership
Jim and Ester Stokes – Friends membership
Boyd and Mary Vaughan – Friends membership
Mountain Garden Club – Benefactor

In addition we have a new membership since the last newsletter and we’d like to welcome them:
Jack and Jane Shalhoop of Highlands and Montgomery, AL – Friends membership

These additional memberships have allowed us to reach a new high for memberships. For the first time, we have a total of over 100 memberships which consist of 157 individual members. Way to go HPAS!

Winter Birding for Waterfowl and Whatever!

Just because it's winter doesn't mean that there aren't birds to be seen, and fun to be had while searching for them. Monday, January 21 has been selected for our first Field Trip of the New Year, to seek out wintering waterfowl and other species at Lake Junaluska. The Lake seems to be a magnet for wintering birds and sits in a scenic bowl which also serves as a sun-trap. We will meet behind Wendy's in Cashiers to carpool over to the Lake, which usually offers a fine selection of ducks which are not often seen on our plateau, and plenty of them too! We will have at least one scope to aid in identifying species, and will circle the lake by car, with stops to scan and spot such specialties as Ruddy Ducks, Gadwalls, American Widgeon, Osprey and others. We will leave from Wendy's in Cashiers, meeting there no later than 7:30 sharp. Dress warmly, including gloves, bring binoculars, scopes (if you have them), cameras and a good sense of humor, please! In case of rain/snow/ice, we will try the following Monday, Jan. 28. We will find a good, warm place for lunch following our birding before heading back to Cashiers. Questions? Please call Romney at 526-1939 or email her at croftess@brmemc.net

Field Trips Committee Plans a Super Spring Trip

Dauphin Island, Alabama, will once again be the destination for our annual spring outing. Those who have been before will tell you what a great experience this is, with spring migrants and waterfowl on show at several different sites on the island. These include Audubon and local Sanctuaries, beach, marshes and tidal pool sites, and even a fine show from the balcony where we will be based. John and Jenny Stowers have once again generously offered the use of their bay-front home, which sleeps 8-10 and has a wonderful kitchen which we will use for evening meals as well as lunchtime sandwich buffets. The house is also located within an easy walk of the beach, as are the very comfortable condominiums which we will rent not far from the Stowers' HQ. All participants will split the costs of lodging, lunches & dinners. This usually results in a very affordable trip with great birding and fellowship too, as we will have teams set up in advance to be responsible for hors d'oeuvres, dinners and lunches. Brock and Romney will lead groups each day, though anyone is welcome to "do their own thing", and hanging out on the covered deck at the Stowers' is a favorite of many too. Our dates for 2013 will be April 1-5, arriving on the afternoon of Monday, the 1st, and departing any time on Friday, the 5th. Feel free to call Brock (828-787-1387, 404-295-0663) or Romney (828-526-1939) with any questions.

Join the Cardinal Club

Audubon NC, our state office of National Audubon, is responsible for funding its own operating budget, including ornithological and administrative staff as well as projects around the state. You can help meet this financial responsibility by becoming a member of The Cardinal Club, a new monthly giving club. If you join **before December 31**, you will receive your own "singing" Cardinal and the Audubon NC newsletters referenced in Russ' article above – **and help meet the required match for a federal grant!** Sign up at <http://nc.audubon.org> – be sure to choose North Carolina in the drop-down menu.

Your gift **before December 31** will count toward the \$25,000 match for a grant submitted to a federal agency to fund an additional staff person to help Curtis Smalling, Director of Land Bird Conservation, in his work with landowners in western North Carolina. There is more information in the ANC Fall/Winter newsletter.

Other Dates to Remember

November 10 – April 5: Project FeederWatch, www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw

February 15-18: Great Backyard Bird Count, www.birdsource.org/gbbc

February 23: Audubon NC Chapter Day, Haw River State Park

May 31-June 2: Audubon NC Annual Meeting, Raleigh

July 12-13: National Audubon Convention, Skamania Lodge, Stevenson, WA

Highlands Plateau Audubon Society

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