



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – February 2017

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 . . .

What does it mean to advocate?

Recently, Helen and I attended a conference on Jekyll Island, Georgia, entitled “Choosing to Lead: Putting Advocacy Into Action” (sponsored by the One Hundred Miles coastal Georgia conservation group). The meeting organizers had included cultural ‘conservation’ as well the preservation of the environment as part of the program so there were, for example, sessions focused on local art and historic preservation as well as the natural world. The meeting was a welcome rendezvous for many of the interesting and frequently colorful conservation figures from along the one hundred miles of Georgia coast; as I have noted previously in this column, it is interesting how well connected the Georgia coastal conservation community is, and this meeting certainly helped to foster that sense of a broad-based coalition.

One of my primary goals, based originally on the conference’s title, was to try to learn how to be a better advocate for conservation. I now realize that expectation was somewhat naïve, at least in terms of guidance. The two sessions that I attended that dealt specifically with ‘advocacy’ and ‘leadership’ were based on eliciting thoughtful introspection from among the participants, instead of providing specific direction, such as I had originally been expecting. In any case, self-reflection and being open to other people’s ideas are good approaches towards developing one’s own understanding. One of the relatively simple questions that some of us were challenged with, and that I continue to consider, was “what does it mean to advocate?” My initial response is below.

I believe most of us spend the largest part of our lives as informed concerned citizens. There can be, however, notable tipping points when a concerned citizen transitions to being an occasional advocate. An advocate takes a step beyond being a concerned citizen to try to influence the outcome of something about which they care deeply. Standing up and being counted may, for example, consist of writing letters to the editor of a paper, helping to educate others, trying to influence public decision makers, or perhaps helping organize to continue to support a worthy cause. Advocacy can be many things to many people. Advocacy may occasionally and importantly involve “speaking truth to power.”

One of the signatures of advocacy is a level of passion for a cause. And one of the fundamental responsibilities of a good advocate is being as well educated as possible, both with regard to factual issues as well as both sides of opinion. An agitator, by contrast, doesn’t need to be overly concerned with factual content or others’ opinions. Advocacy may challenge personal comfort zones. I don’t look forward to challenging other persons’ perceptions, I don’t normally go out of my way to meet with politicians, or to participate in public hearings, and I don’t always feel comfortable making phone calls, even to people I already know. And yet to advocate may be an occasional, significant, and carefully considered responsibility. When you care about something intensely, and/or you are privileged to understand something that others may not, it may become your obligation to summon your convictions, ‘step up to the plate’, and contribute. I’m learning that it is important to embrace those instances when you are compelled to advocate, and consider those opportunities as infrequent, lifetime blessings.

Russell Regnery

Christmas Bird Count 2016

On Friday, December 16th, HPAS participated in Audubon's 117th Christmas Bird Count (CBC). Twenty-five eager birders—bundled up against the pre-dawn, 20-degree weather—formed six teams under the leadership of Brock



Early morning CBC gathering. Participants were B. Ballentine, S. Britton, S. Carpenter, A. Cecil, J. Costa, J. Evans, L. Ezell, B. Hutchins, J. Hyman, H. Irwin, J. Johnston, M. Kaiser, B. Martin, P. McKinley, W. McReynolds, B. Peavey, K. Pursel, S. Pursel, R. Regnery, M. Ruigrok, C. Strain, P. Strickland, M. Styring, S. Workman and C. Worley.



Winter wren were seen on the Christmas Bird Count.

species of wren migrates to warmer climates for the winter. Other conclusions can be drawn from studying this year's numbers and comparing across recent and remote years. We identified more birds this year than last (1,961 versus 1,139) but that is probably the result of having had more birders this year (25 versus 22).

Our participation in this longitudinal citizen science initiative was led by Brock Hutchins. Sheila Peavey and Patty Hutchins served the returning six teams a hot chili lunch arranged in part by Michelle Styring. Russ Regnery brought a now traditional platter of tasty corn bread following the Poole recipe from years past. Several photographs from the day appear in this newsletter.

Hutchins, Jack Johnson, Kyle Pursel, Russ Regnery, Cynthia Strain, and Romney Bathurst. The teams fanned out from Founders Park in Highlands to: Cheney Lane, Cold Springs and Buck Creek Road; Turtle Pond Road; Dillard Road to Scaly Mountain, Overflow Creek and Bald Mountain Road; Flat Mountain Road, tree farm and old ranger station; Horse Cove and Highlands township; and Highlands Falls including Highway 64 toward Cashiers Lake. The conditions were cold but mostly clear and this plus the leafless trees made for good birding.

A total of 1,961 birds were identified, amounting to 46 species. By far the most common species, again this year, was the Dark-eyed Junco, sighted 565 times. Other species sighted many times included: the Carolina Chickadee (159), American

Goldfinch (117), American Crow (106), Mallard (95), Song Sparrow (87), Tufted Titmouse (81), Pine Siskin (80), Blue Jay (71), Wild Turkey (63), American Robin

(59), Northern Cardinal (58), Mourning Dove (56) and White-breasted Nuthatch (52). Some notable low count birds included the Sharp-shinned Hawk, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Fox Sparrow, Winter Wren and Hermit Thrush. All species totals appear on the accompanying table.

We saw several species of wren but no House Wrens, after having seen

many House Wrens in our nest boxes during the summer, prompting Russ Regnery to conclude that this particular



Above, a Carolina Wren. Below, a Golden-crowned Kinglet. Both were seen on the Christmas Bird Count.



William McReynolds

Exciting new field trips planned for 2017

We will kick off our birding season on Saturday, May 6th at the Highlands Nature Center with a walk that is open to all but especially geared towards beginners. Ellen and Jim Shelton will be back to lead an outing for us this year, birding along Flat Mountain Road on Saturday, May 13th. Through the rest of the schedule this year, HPAS is featuring new leaders and destinations. Drs. Jeremy Hyman and Barbara Ballentine, of Western Carolina University, will lead a spring field trip to the Blue Ridge Parkway, which should be full of colorful migrants on Saturday, May 27th. Both of these trips provide easy access to great birding!

The committee is working on a possible birding hike up Satulah Mt. too, with Curtis Smalling, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon NC. Curtis is a veritable pied piper of bird walks, so be sure to mark your calendar for June 24th. We hope to offer at least one weekday outing in addition to our usual Saturday morning walks.

A full schedule of all Audubon events will be mailed in April, and will also be available on our website, www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org, which is the best place to look for last minute updates, though we hope to send a regular e-blast to all members with email addresses on file. You may also find listings in your local paper, or call Romney Bathurst at 828-526-1939 for further information or to add your email to our list. All trips will meet at 7:30 a.m. at Founders Park, Highlands, unless otherwise noted. Full details will be available in our April newsletter.

Romney Bathurst

Board of Directors welcomes new members and says goodbye to others

The The HPAS Board of Directors is excited to welcome three new members who are willing to volunteer their time for the chapter, and enrich our programs and outings: Jeremy Hyman, Olya Milenkaya, and Mary Palmer Dargan. At the same time, we are sad to say good bye to Director Ms. Gail Lemiec.

Dr. Jeremy Hyman is an Associate Professor of Biology at Western Carolina University where he teaches ornithology, animal behavior, ecology and evolution, and biology. His research interests are in the evolution of communication and social interactions in territorial animals. Dr. Hyman is currently exploring the interplay of cooperative and competitive interactions in territorial communication, and the causes and consequences of behavioral variation in territorial aggression in birds.

Olya Milenkaya is an Assistant Professor of Biology at Young Harris College in Young Harris, Georgia. She supervises undergraduate research with cavity nesting birds and teaches courses in animal behavior, conservation biology, ornithology, among others. Olya studied crimson finches in Australia for her doctoral research and earned her Ph.D. in 2013 from Virginia Tech. She is from Novosibirsk, Russia but spent most of her early life in California before moving to Asheville, NC to earn a bachelor's degree in environmental studies from Warren Wilson College. She enjoys observing wild animals in their natural habitats, traveling, and eating chocolate.

Mary Palmer Dargan is a well-known Cashiers and Atlanta landscape architect, speaker, author, Internet personality, and birder. Her best-selling design book, *Timeless Landscape Design: The Four Part Master Plan* was co-written with her design partner and husband, Hugh Graham Dargan. Together they run Dargan Landscape Architects, Inc. They live at Highcote, at High Hampton in Cashiers, NC as well as have their main office in Buckhead, Atlanta, GA and a farm in South Carolina. Mary Palmer is interested in all things connected with the web of life. She is one of The Climate Program's footsoldiers and was a founding board member of the Garden Conservancy of America.

Gail Lemiec graciously agreed to serve as an HPAS Director shortly after coming to the Highlands Plateau and joining the staff of the Highlands Biological Station's Nature Center in 2015. Gail's previous experience included having been involved with a variety of natural history educational activities, including the Charlotte Nature Museum/Discovery Place as well as the Carolina Raptor Center.

Gail's husband, Mike, was unable to follow Gail to the Highlands Plateau, and Gail's current move to Wilmington, NC, where employment opportunities are more numerous, will make it possible for Gail and Mike to be together after two years spent largely apart. Gail will begin at the NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher ... she said something about coordinating a mermaid program...unfortunately, mermaids are critically endangered and need our support too!

Those of us who have had the pleasure to get to know Gail are sad to see her leave HPAS and our community so soon. Her quiet, thoughtful, cheerful ways have been an inspiration for us all. We wish Gail every success and happiness in her future and hope that our paths cross again.

Russell Regnery and Michelle Ruigrok

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