



# The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – April 2016

Cashiers – Franklin – Highlands – Scaly Mountain

[www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org](http://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 . . .*

## Early spring anxieties

Less than two weeks ago, I left the mountains shortly after another snowfall event (minor but sufficient to close local schools). When I returned today, the daytime temperature was 70 degrees Fahrenheit. The Oconee Bells are in full bloom, leading the way for our native, flowering plants. It is hard to imagine a more beautiful spring day, however, it is still only mid-March (as this is written) and for some of us there is an element of anxiety that accompanies an early spring.

Our native flora seemingly copes well with even our coldest winter temperatures; what seems to be much more of a threat to the well-being of much of our deciduous and herbaceous vegetation is a late, heavy-duty frost that may be delayed (in my limited experience) as late as the first week of May and which can cause dieback of all freshly minted blossoms and foliage. I suspect that the distribution of certain native Southeast plant species is determined more by susceptibility to late frosts than by any other single climatic factor.

Many of you will recall a severe, late frost several years ago that occurred on a May 5. Even the late emerging oak trees had their tender new foliage frozen and killed; the recently green mountainsides went temporarily brown. Thankfully, many plants and trees mobilized secondary, quiescent buds (those inconspicuous bumps, often found further down twigs), to produce new, secondary set of leaves that took the place of the dead leaflets, and ‘saved the day,’ and the season, for most of the forest (albeit presumably stretching limited plant resources that had been stored overwinter). The further along with the leafing out process a tree or plant was at the time of that frost, typically the more severe was the damage. Years later, I can still see dead wood in a deciduous Camellia that barely survived that event.

It is expected that trees like our local, non-native but naturalized apple trees will frequently lose many of their blooms to a spring frost and hence will produce variable amounts of subsequent mature fruit later in the year. But when, for example, all the oaks in the forest lose their reproductive potential for a year, the entire ecosystem will go without acorns, a significant food stuff (‘mast’) for birds and bears alike. The American chestnut had a reputation for having reliable harvests of chestnuts almost every year, largely because the chestnut trees bloom later than almost any other nut-bearing tree and thus hedge their bets against a late frost; however, unfortunately chestnuts have other, modern-era pathogenic issues with which to contend.

My ‘worst case springtime nightmare’ includes an unusual, hypothetical weather pattern that might begin with an ‘early spring’ (such as we now are experiencing and which encourages early bud break), combined with not one but *two* late killing frosts separated by a week or more. Which of our native flora would have the capability and stored resources to withstand a combination ‘one-two punch’ that would potentially defeat both primary *and* secondary bud emergence?

Such a dire climate scenario for destruction of mature Southern Appalachian deciduous forests by an unusual set of multiple killing frosts, set up by an early warm spring, could take place in the course of a single season; our forests could perhaps be changed dramatically in the ‘blink of an eye.’ Ironically, such large-scale environmental change wouldn’t necessarily result from long-term periods of drought, increased rainfall, warmer or colder average temperatures, or many of the other factors commonly associated with climate change.

As many of our winter resident birds begin to pair up and nest, and as our migrant species return, keep your fingers crossed for a spring without repeated severe, late frosts. And while you’re at it, think kind thoughts for those often overlooked secondary buds that remain quiescent for most of their entire existence but which wait patiently as critical backup in case of late killing frosts.

*Russell Regnery*

## **Audubon North Carolina Annual Meeting**

The 2016 Audubon North Carolina Annual Meeting hosted by Audubon North Carolina and Forsyth Audubon celebrates “The Art of Birding” Friday, May 14-Sunday, May 15 in Winston-Salem.

The annual meeting is scheduled at a great time for Piedmont birding. You’ll enjoy a wealth of spring migrants in Winston-Salem and the surrounding area through a variety of exciting field trips and local tours. Additionally, enjoy special workshops to learn how you can get involved in one of our many conservation initiatives to help protect North Carolina birds.

Open to all Audubon members, birdwatchers and nature enthusiasts; this is one event you won’t want to miss.

*Early bird registration* is \$80 through April 15 at <http://nc.audubon.org/landing/about-us/landing/annual-meeting-2016>. Don’t miss this incredible weekend of birding, bird conservation and connecting with fellow bird enthusiasts from across the state!

### **Birds are looking**

Hooray! Our Audubon bird boxes are starting to be sought out by various birds looking for a good place in which to start a family! Volunteer participants engaged in this HPAS adventure have recently been tasked with monitoring their designated pair of boxes for first signs of any attraction. This includes noting any bird that inspects or starts staking a claim to a particular box by bringing possible nesting material into it.

You may remember that the project now involves 150 boxes, 75 pairs, compared with the 50 pairs monitored last year. With a Western Carolina professor and her graduate student becoming involved in our scientific study, this nesting year should prove to be even more exciting and enlightening than before. Stay tuned!

*Michelle Styring*

### **Golden-winged Warbler Workshop**

Audubon N.C. will offer training for those who wish to volunteer to be a part of a Landbird Steward Team. Opportunities exist for everyone, whether you prefer to talk to landowners, conduct surveys or work on a database in your home! The workshop will be held 9 a.m.-5 p.m. on Saturday, April 9 at Highlands Nature Center, located at 930 Horse Cove Road. Registration is required. Lunch will be provided. Call 828-526-2623 to register.

### **Spring and Summer HPAS outings/activities**

For the latest details, please follow our web site at [www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org](http://www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org)

April 9 – Golden-winged Warbler Workshop at the Nature Center (see above notice)

April 20 – Audubon NC’s Kimberly Brand will lead volunteers to recruit local nurseries to support ANC’s important native plant initiative. Contact Kyle Pursel for details at [kkppursel1@gmail.com](mailto:kkppursel1@gmail.com) or call 908-283-4546.

April 23 – Earth Day event at the Nature Center for local environmental organizations. Go to support the groups and/or to represent HPAS.

May 5—HPAS sponsored birding trip Overflow Wilderness Study Area (Blue Valley) forest interior birding with Brent Martin, Southern Appalachian Regional Director of the Wilderness Society\*

May 17 – Birds & Beer at the Ugly Dog in Highlands\*\*

June 4—HPAS Birding at the Highlands Biological Station with WCU’s Dr. Barbara Ballentine\*

June 21 – Birds & Beer at the Ugly Dog in Cashiers\*\*

June 24 – Outing with Jack Johnston into Fires Creek (huge roadless area near Hayesville, beautiful watershed, and one of our top priority areas for wilderness designation in WNC). Trip sponsored by the Wilderness Society

July 2—HPAS Birding at the Cashier’s Village Green with Russ Regnery\*

August 6—HPAS Birding at Flat Mountain “ranger station” and beyond with Russ Regnery\*

September –Migratory Birds on the Blue Ridge Parkway, HPAS Annual Charlie Davis Memorial Outing with Brock Hutchins (details TBA)

\*Meet at Founders’ Park in Highlands at 7:30 A.M. Loner binoculars are available to participants.

\*\* Birds and Beer (or wine) events start at 5:00 P.M. These outings continue on the third Tuesday of each month.

## **Franklin Bird Club Trips**

The Franklin Bird Club will begin offering weekly Wednesday walks on April 6 and they have encouraged HPAS members to join them whenever possible. The first walk will meet at the Macon County Library in Franklin, and the following Wednesday, April 13, will meet at the Franklin Greenway Salali Lane entrance. The walks will alternate between those two locations through the summer, so there is plenty of opportunity to enjoy their great leaders and bird diversity too. No need to call, just hop in the car and meet them at 8 a.m. – it’s not really that far for a fun morning of birding! In addition to those walks, there will be three special ones, beginning with John and Cathy Sill leading their walk west of Franklin in the Standing Indian area on April 29. There are tons of warblers to be seen, and a good possibility of Golden-winged Warblers too. On May 14, Don Hendershott will lead a walk at Tessentee Farm Reserve, and on May 27, Jim and Ellen Shelton will lead near their home in the Walnut Gap area. For all of these, please be sure to check the FBC web site for directions and meeting times: [www.franklinbirdclub.com](http://www.franklinbirdclub.com) — all these leaders are great and you will be in varying habitats with many birds that may be new to you!

## **HPAS programs**

May 23-“Jungle Eagle” film to be presented at 7 p.m. at Hudson Library. The film, a PBS production, is a study of the elusive Harpy Eagle of South America that lives a reclusive life in the high jungle tree canopy chasing down monkeys. It’s the largest eagle in the western hemisphere.

June 6-HPAS Potluck Dinner at 6 p.m. at Highlands Civic Center, with a presentation called “Avian Communication” by Young Harris College’s Dr. Olga Melinkaya. We all appreciate birds’ vocalizations but auditory communication is just the beginning. Birds communicate in a variety of ways including visual signaling, body language and touch. Join us to learn about the multi-sensory world of avian communication.

June 9-“Owl Prowl” at 7 p.m. at the Highlands Nature Center

July 11- “Bird of the Gods” film to be presented at 7 p.m. at Hudson Library

July 15-June 16 Mountain Wildlife Days at Sapphire Valley Community Center

July 25- “Golden Winged Warblers in Costa Rica” presented by Dr. John Gerwin at 7 p.m. at Hudson Library

August 1- “Animal Adventures along the Equator” presented by Ed and Cindy Boos at 7 p.m. at Hudson Library

August 7- Annual HPAS picnic at Rec Center Pavilion

August 15- “A Murder of Crows” film to be presented at 7 p.m. at Hudson Library

August 29- “Turtle Conservation” presented by Russ Regnery at 7 p.m. at Hudson Library

September 12- “Winged Migration” film to be presented at 7 p.m. at Hudson Library

September 26- Annual Meeting “The Golden Eagle Project” presented by Christine Kelly at the Highlands Civic Center

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