



# The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – August 2015

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 . . .*

## Betting on Planet Earth and Seasonal Naturalists

Recently I've had the good fortune to spend some time with several seasonal natural history technicians and graduate students who are studying endangered bird species and sea turtles on a barrier island off the coast of Georgia. Last summer HPAS helped support the research activities of a very capable WCU ornithologist graduate student studying Golden-Winged Warblers in our area. The Highlands Biological Station has a long history of being a venue for seasonal natural history projects. I am becoming more acutely aware that this rather specialized human demographic, who participate in seasonal field experiences early in their careers, represent a most important asset for the future of conservation science and leadership.



A nest of a threatened Wilson's Plover on a Georgia barrier island.  
*Natalie Folsom*

The sort of people I'm thinking of are typically willing and even eager to spend extensive time in the field, often under challenging circumstances, becoming experts at making field observations that often may be unseen by most of us but are, however, critical for understanding the organisms and ecosystems they study. Careful documentation of observations is typically a critical element of such jobs. However, data manipulation alone, in the absence of original field experience, is not the total experience to which I refer.

Of course not all seasonal naturalists and students are fortunate enough to be associated with inspiring projects (or inspiring mentors) and some young naturalists are much more capable than others. Not all of those persons who start seasonal projects will even complete their experience for one reason or another. Not all will go on to graduate schools, become instructors at universities, or become major conservation leaders. But some of them will!

And many of the rest will continue to make significant contributions at regional, state, and local levels over the courses of their lives! And all of them will carry with them the background experience that is simply not replicated in any classroom or computer workstation. I believe that seasonal naturalists are important components for the future of meaningful conservation.



A day-old Wilson's Plover in the hands of a seasonal naturalist.  
*Russell Regnery*

To digress briefly, one of my 'soap boxes' relates to resource-intensive programs that are justified by the ultimate goal of human colonization of some other Earth-like planet that "potentially might support some form of life." If we can't learn to live well on the planet on which we, and everything around us, has evolved for millions of years, it is imprudent to consider that a few humans will ever find another, more welcoming environment in which to live. As we appreciate how interdependent are the components of the 'web of life' on Earth, it should become ever more obvious how unlikely it would be to expect that an analogous, hospitable environment exists elsewhere (just waiting for humans to appear). I believe that trying to understand the

cosmos is a very worthy goal. However, using human space exploration as a sci-fi inspired, escapist excuse to side-step essential environmental challenges on Planet Earth is a waste of valuable time and resources.

My heroes and heroines (young or older) are not those people lining up to leave Earth behind. The people I respect are much more likely to be those persons who are willing to work hard on our own planet to better appreciate and protect that which we have inherited and hopefully will pass on to generations to come. As our local Audubon chapter considers how to try to contribute towards a meaningful, long-term conservation legacy, helping to support worthy graduate students and seasonal naturalists ranks very high on my list.

*Russell Regnery*

## **Audubon Annual Picnic Aug. 9**

The Highlands Plateau Audubon Society Picnic will be held at the Highlands Civic Center/Recreation Park pavilions on Sunday, August 9 at 5:00 p.m. The club will provide the meat course and drinks. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share. There is a \$5 fee per person. For reservations, contact Dee Andry at 828-787-1586, so we will know how many to provide for. Handicap / vehicle access is available behind the pool.

## **Local Students Go Birding**

Marsha La Fontaine has a passion for her students at Summit Charter School in Cashiers. She also has a passion for birds and nature. Combine these with the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society (HPAS) and you have a recipe for an unforgettable student experience in the great outdoors.



Summit Charter School students are birding with Marsha La Fontaine and Brock Hutchins. *William McReynolds*

That is exactly what happened one Wednesday in May, when Mrs. La Fontaine took a group of her students to the Cashiers Commons, binoculars in eager hands, to spot, identify and record local birds and other native wildlife. The outing was led by Brock Hutchins and Ann Campbell, both members of HPAS. The students were agog.

Marsha La Fontaine is making a reputation for herself as a naturalist and birder on the Highlands Plateau. Last summer she attended a program entitled “Sharing Nature: An Educator’s Week” at the prestigious Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine. She received scholarships to do so from both the National Audubon Society and the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society. She describes the experience as “life changing.”

The students were 3rd, 4th and 5th graders who were members of the Heritage Club at Summit Charter School. The Heritage Club is involved in social studies. They are currently studying the Cherokee Indians. Having named themselves the Bird Clan of the Cherokee tribe, they have made studying local birds a focus.

They were attentive and adroit birders. Among the 20 avian species they saw and heard were: American Robins, Carolina Chickadees, Brown Thrashers, Cowbirds, Cardinals, Common Grackles, Crows, American Goldfinch, Pileated Woodpeckers and Barn Swallows. The students were familiar with many of the birds and several did some unaided sightings on their own. As part of the outing, the students checked on two of the bird houses put out by HPAS in a citizen science project on cavity dwellers such as Bluebirds, Nuthatches and Chickadees. They saw both “baby” Chickadees and Bluebirds. The Pileated Woodpeckers were the favorite. “My dad hates Crows,” one 3rd grader offered.



Students check nest boxes. *William McReynolds*

*William McReynolds*

## HPAS Annual Meeting and Program, September 28

William McReynolds, a member of our Chapter responsible for our publicity, will present the program: "Social Behavior in Birds: Murder, Dissimulation and Exaltation in the Avian World." William is a retired professor and still practicing clinical psychologist, who is sure to offer us unusual insights. This program is scheduled at the Highlands Civic Center on Monday, September 28.

Prior to the program, there will be a brief Annual Membership Meeting for the election of directors. You will be notified of the nominees and their terms by email and on the web site several weeks prior to the meeting. Refreshments will be served at 7:00 p.m., followed by the meeting and program at 7:30 p.m.

### Nest Box Project to Continue for Second Year

While results of the 2014-2015 nest box program will not be available until probably October, the committee has decided to continue monitoring old and adding new participant nest boxes for another year.



Highlands Falls Country Club employees set up a nest box this past winter.

During the past winter, golf course employees of Highlands Falls Country Club volunteered their time making 50 additional nest boxes for HPAS's bird box project. This means we will be adding 25 pairs of boxes in the Highlands/Cashiers area to continue our Citizen Science Project for a second year.

Many of the boxes will be placed in highly forested locations this time to see if we can accommodate more Nuthatches with nesting cavities. If you would like to take part in this important and fun project, and will be mostly in the mountains from May through September in 2016, please email or call Michelle Styring to have your name and property added to the waiting list (msty30005@aol.com, 828-743-9670). Sign up early, as boxes get committed quite quickly!

*Michelle Styring*

### HPAS field trips

Greetings! Our HPAS field trips calendar is complete for the rest of this year, and offers several opportunities for some fun birding! See the listings below and plan to join us if you can – fall birding can be a challenge, but migration is also a part of the cycle and we can help you unravel some of the mysterious plumages you may be starting to see. Our Birds & Beer gatherings are always fun, the Blue Ridge Parkway never fails to be great, and we never turn down help with our Christmas Bird Count. If you have questions, please feel free to call or email any time.

*Romney Bathurst*

The Highlands Plateau Audubon Society (HPAS) will offer several outings during the remainder of this season. HPAS provides binoculars, field guides and leaders to help find the common and uncommon species in our area. Walks are free and open to the public. The first Saturday of August and September will be geared for beginners, with help in using binoculars and field guides, as well as identifying some of our more common birds by sight and sound. Beginners' walks will start at 8:30 a.m. unless otherwise noted. Saturday walks will carpool from the Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park in Highlands (please park at the 5th Street end of the park), unless otherwise noted. Note that this is a change from previous walks, as the restrooms are no longer available behind Town Hall, whereas those at the park are top notch!

Most walks will start at 7:30 a.m., but be sure to check if in doubt. 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 drizzle is often ideal for birding. If the schedule should change due to unforeseen circumstances, updates will be posted on the HPAS web site: [www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org](http://www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org). For questions, call Romney Bathurst at 526-1939



or 828-200-0288, or Brock Hutchins at 787-1387.

**Saturday, August 1:** Beginners' Walk, starting at 8:30 a.m., Cashiers Commons, Russ Regnery to lead. This is your chance to learn more about the birds that can be seen right in the midst of town! Binoculars and field guides will be provided. Easy walking and birding!

**Tuesday, August 18:** Birds & Beer, Ugly Dog Pub in Highlands, 5:30 p.m. This is an informal gathering to discuss birds and critters and most anything except religion and politics. Get to know some of the Audubon members and stay for a bite to eat if you care to.

**Saturday, September 5:** Beginners' Walk, meet at 8:30 a.m. Meet at the 5<sup>th</sup> Street side of Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park in Highlands, to check out the Old Ranger Station and vicinity on Flat Mountain Road. No experience necessary, Russ Regnery to lead.



HPAS members take a trip on the Blue Ridge Parkway to see migrating birds. *Romney Bathurst*

are sure, we'll make this tentative. Watch the web site for any changes – we will meet at the Highlands Pub if Cashiers isn't open yet.

**Saturday, September 12:** Charlie Davis Memorial Blue Ridge Parkway outing. Join us for a trip on the Blue Ridge Parkway as we look for migrating warblers, vireos, thrushes and raptors. This trip is made in honor of Charlie Davis, a long time member and supporter of Audubon, and a man who loved the mountains and the BRP. We will leave earlier than usual **at 7:00 a.m.** from Kelsey-Hutchinson Founders Park in Highlands. Please pack a light lunch as we will stop at a scenic spot for a picnic before returning around mid-afternoon. Bring water and your camera. The Parkway in Autumn provides spectacular views along with interesting birds! Romney and Brock to lead. Please contact Romney Bathurst at 828-526-1939 to sign up. We need to know who is planning to join us so that we don't leave without you!

**Tuesday, September 15:** Birds & Beer, Ugly Dog Pub, Cashiers? 5:30 p.m. An informal social gathering. You may note the question mark here – The Dog is expecting to open their Cashiers location sometime in August, but until we

**Saturday, September 19:** Rain date for Charlie Davis Memorial BRP trip, Brock Hutchins will lead if this alternate date is needed.

**September 19 – 25:** Possible Hawk Watch, Brock leads. The hike up Whiteside is worth the views alone, but if the winds are in our favor, the sight of hundreds of Broad-winged Hawks soaring and kettling overhead is a stunning spectacle! These outing are obviously highly weather dependent, so those interested must contact Brock so that last minute plans can be conveyed at 828-787-1387.

### **Don't forget!**

Christmas Bird Count is Friday, December 18.

Watch our HPAS web site and the next edition of the newsletter for further details. Your help with this count is very much needed, and you need not be an expert to record sightings, drive, or help in many other ways. Please plan to join us for this unique yearly count. Our contribution may be only one of thousands across the country, but our addition to the data is just as important as any of the others! Call Romney Bathurst at 526-1939 or 828-200-0288 or Brock Hutchins at 404-295-0663 to join in the fun.

## HPAS Program Schedule 2015

Additional details about these programs will be available on the website as the dates approach.

**Monday, August 3:** The PBS film *Owl Power* will be shown at the Hudson Library in Highlands at 7:30 p.m. Light refreshments will be served at 7:00 p.m. The program explores owl sight and flight and follows the lives of two barn owl chicks from the moment they hatch to show their development into super-powered birds. Please enter through the rear door of the library.

**Sunday, August 9:** Highlands Civic Center Pavilion, 5:00 p.m. Annual Picnic. See details on page 2.

**Monday, August 24:** Noted photographers and videographers Ed and Cindy Boos will present “Wild Critter Adventures” in photos and commentary at the Hudson Library in Highlands. Ed and Cindy are Highlands Plateau Audubon Society members who accomplish truly extraordinary, professional-level avian photography. This group of photos was taken in Bosque del Apache in New Mexico, Bear River in Utah, Yellowstone, Kenya as well as Highlands. The program begins at 7:30 p.m. with light refreshments at 7:00 p.m. Please enter through the rear door.

**Monday, September 14:** Jamie Harrelson, our current grant recipient for her Master’s research underway at Western Carolina University, will present information on her study of Golden-Winged Warbler populations, and will present the results of her research on this threatened bird. Hudson Library in Highlands. Program at 7:30 p.m., preceded by refreshments. Please enter through the rear door of the library.

**Monday, September 28.** Highlands Civic Center. Annual meeting followed by William McReynolds giving a presentation titled, “Social Behavior in Birds: Murder, Dissimulation and Exaltation in the Avian World.” William, a member of our chapter, is a retired professor and still practicing clinical psychologist who is sure to offer us unusual insights. Program at 7:30 p.m., preceded by refreshments.

### Membership report

Thank you to all who have renewed this year! If you have not yet renewed, please take a moment to fill out a membership form and send it to: HPAS, P.O. Box 833, Highlands, NC 28741. Forms are available on the website: [www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org](http://www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org).

We have had six new memberships. Please welcome our newest members!

Harold and Jean Brewer

Pam Brown

Matt and Helen Calvert

Thornton Jordan

Jack Olson and Virginia Willard

Bill and Wendy Ric

## Officers

**President** -- Russ Regnery, 404-558-1085  
**Vice - President** – Avary Doubleday, 828-526-8414

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**Communications** – Avary Doubleday  
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**Education** – Ann Campbell  
**Field Trips** – Romney Bathurst  
**Finance** – Brock Hutchins  
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**Membership & Development** – Mary Jo Askew and Sarah Pursel

**Nominating & Leadership Development** – Don Shure  
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**At Large** – George Kaye, Conservation  
Michelle Styring, Nest Box Project  
Glenda Zahner, Education  
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**Web Master:** Jean McCormick



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