



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – October 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 . . .

Late Summer Mountain Contrasts

The remnants of Hurricane Irma have reminded us how deeply into our Southern Appalachian Mountains such climatic events can reach, while also providing a small taste of the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental disasters that have unfolded to our south. I hope you in the mountains weathered the impacts from Irma with aplomb and that those of you with families and/or properties in Florida and beyond managed without severe losses. One violent late summer storm is more than enough for a season, or even a decade!

Now that Irma has passed, here in the mountains we can again appreciate late-blooming native flowers (e.g., species of sunflowers, golden rod, purple asters, and diminutive ladies' tresses orchids) that are final floral harbingers of late summer and early fall.

The blooms of the touch-me-nots are finishing their flowering that began as the migrating hummingbirds arrived to stop over and 'tank up.' And the fruit (technically "drupes" I am told) of the dogwoods, sassafras, and sweet shrubs are ripening hopefully on time for the benefit of migratory thrushes that, like the hummingbirds, must 'fuel-up' for successful long-distance flights to Central America.

The muted murmurings of unseen migrating thrushes in our woods, late in the evening and early in the mornings, is a subtle but special woodland auditory experience. Shadow-like, silent warbler(s) in non-breeding plumage contribute to the birding 'mystery' of the season...it's OK not to be able to identify every bird!

Late summer and early fall in the mountains can be wonderfully peaceful, perhaps with a hint of nostalgia mixed in, as the end of the growing season is approaching and soon our native birds will be condensed to a collection of perhaps less-traveled but well-loved winter stalwarts (e.g., chickadees, titmice, juncos, cardinals, woodpeckers, jays, crows, etc.).

Perhaps a violent storm helps to accentuate the subsequent tranquility of the late summer-early fall. I especially love this time of year in the mountains. One outstanding wish would be that at some time in our futures we won't have to witness the occasional brutal chaos that marks the beginning of legalized hunting of bears with packs of dogs, an activity which, in my opinion, continues to taint the early fall through mid-winter months.

Russell Regnery

Romney Bathurst



Romney Bathurst has inspired many HPAS members with her passion for birding.

In September, Romney Bathurst moved to Virginia to be closer to her family. While we will miss her immensely as a former board member, dedicated field trips organizer and outing leader, we are excited that she is settling in well and very happy. As a token of our appreciation, here are a few words for and about Romney:

George Kaye: “Romney was not only a world traveler, but also was a regular traveler to many bird events in Franklin. We all appreciated her company and will miss her.”

Brock Hutchins: “I will miss hearing about her travels to see birds. A couple years ago, she told me she was going the Indonesia. I was impressed, a once in a lifetime trip for me. I then learned it was her second trip for the year.”

Michelle Styring: “Romney named our very popular ‘Birds and Beer’ event, and was instrumental in getting it started. I wonder if she knows how many times she quietly

and cheerily told me that I was hearing a Tufted Titmouse?! Such patience!”

Ann Campbell: “Romney has been so patient and gracious to our beginning birders! She will leave a hole in our chapter but has left us with a wonderful role model of dedication. Best wishes always!”

Michelle Ruigrok: “Romney, you have been such a kind, sweet, energetic inspiration for years. I don't know if I will ever forgive myself for not making more time to go birding with you. You are incredibly knowledgeable, experienced, passionate, and non-judgmental ... key qualities in a great teacher. Best of luck! You will be missed.”

Mary Palmer Dargan: “India, Ecuador, Indonesia, China ...if ever there was an ambassador and steward of the world's bird and beast treasures, it is Romney Bathurst. She and Bill Bathurst shared many an armchair moment preparing travelog slide shows of stunning and fragile places that awed and inspired us to conserve our treasures. Why, they even adopted a baby elephant!”

Michelle Ruigrok

Christmas Bird Count in Highlands is December 15

Join HPAS for the 118th National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count. Your participation is welcome to make this the best count ever. Last year we had 26 participants and recorded 46 species of birds. We meet at the Founder's Park in Highlands at 7:30 a.m., divide into groups, and survey bird populations within a 7.5-mile radius of Highlands. This includes Cashiers and south to the Georgia border.

After the count, we will meet for lunch for a countdown and share experiences.

If you want to participate, please contact Brock Hutchins at brockhutchins@bellsouth.net or call 404-295-0663.

Brock Hutchins

Whiteside Mountain Hawk Watch Begins

The annual HPAS hawk watch at Whiteside Mountain has begun. Recently, Audubon members Brock Hutchins, and Wayne and Becky Watkins climbed Whiteside to watch for hawks. In two and a half hours, the team counted 464 Broad-winged hawks on their migration to the tropics. They also observed four other raptor species in addition to the resident Peregrine Falcons. This natural migration spectacle occurs every year near the end of September. Whiteside Mountain provides a geologic feature that concentrates raptor migration activity along with a gorgeous view.

Brock Hutchins



Pictured is Brock Hutchins and HPAS members Wayne and Becky Watkins on top of Whiteside Mountain on September 19.

Nest Box News

The 2017 HPAS nest box season has ended. A maintenance committee has been set up to visually inspect and repair, clean or do whatever still needs to be done to the boxes. These volunteers are Robert Smith, Pat Strickland, Brock Hutchins, Bill Peavey, William Mc Reynolds, George Kaye, Russ Regnery, Hugh Dargan, and Michelle Styring. They will be meeting in October to get their box assignments and will then start visiting their boxes. After this, the boxes will be ready for winter use, if there are takers.

The committee will meet and disperse again in early Spring. Nest box owners will be sent an email soon letting them know who will be looking in on their boxes. As many of the owners are part timers, we felt this would be helpful. Results will be tallied and hopefully sent to all volunteers before the end of the year. Many thanks to all who have participated again this year!

Michelle Styring



A painted lady butterfly at Highlands Biological Station.
Photo by Peter Hall



A water lily at the pond at Highlands Biological Station.
Photo by Peter Hall

Butterfly walk with Franklin Bird Club

On the afternoon of September 8 the Franklin Bird Club invited HPAS to join them at the Highlands Biological Station for a walk with the director, Dr. Jim Costa, for a "Wings Walk" to look for butterflies. The weather was fabulous and we spotted numerous butterflies, moths, caterpillars, and host plants. Other curious finds were the leaf miners, a snout-nosed moth, and a crab spider. Lots of bird food! Thanks to Renee Rubin from the Franklin Bird Club for organizing this event.

Ann Campbell



Dr. Olga Milenkaya

‘Dead as a Dodo’

Dr. Olga Milenkaya, assistant biology professor at Young Harris College and valuable Audubon board member, presented a fabulous CLE course entitled "Dead as a Dodo" on September 8 in Highlands. It was our pleasure to have the sophomore biology class from Highlands High School as guests for the presentation and everyone was thoroughly engaged and asked good questions. It was considered their first college lecture! Our collaboration with community organizations and schools enhances experiences for everyone involved. Thanks again, Olga!

Ann Campbell

Changes in HPAS administration

You will be pleased to learn that Brock Hutchins, one of our chapter's ace birders and a past HPAS President and a current Director, has volunteered to serve as chapter President beginning January 2018! Brock is as committed to the success of the HPAS as anyone I know and his future leadership will help ensure the continued successes of the chapter. Soon, at our annual HPAS Directors' retreat (September 27), we will begin to plan for next year and what the HPAS will look like in the future.

Hugh Dargan and Brent Martin have graciously agreed to join the ranks of the HPAS Board of Directors, subject to the approval of the membership at our upcoming annual members meeting and program (September 26). The rotating nature of term-limits for Directors and officers within the HPAS ensures a yearly influx of new people and new ideas but also necessitates that new people step forward, as well as for previous chapter supporters to consider reenlisting in chapter activities. Ann Campbell (Chairperson of our Education Committee), Glenda Zahner (member of the chapter's Conservation Committee), and I rotate off the HPAS Board of Directors January 1, 2018.

Although January still seems like a long ways off, most of our chapter activities will soon wind down until next spring (with the exception of our Christmas Bird Count, December 15), so I'm taking this occasion to thank the membership and especially the leadership of HPAS for a rewarding six-year term as President (actually three, two-year terms). The Directors' meetings have been enjoyable occasions that elicit good, constructive ideas and have been anything but dull. And I like to think we can all be proud of what HPAS has accomplished over the duration.

I've learned a lot about our native birds since I joined HPAS (my original goal), however, HPAS has for me also been part of an important shared community experience. My heart-felt thanks to all of you who have helped make both the birding experiences and the HPAS 'family' so enjoyable! I look forward to a bright HPAS future.

Russell Regnery

Volunteer with HPAS

Without volunteers there would be no 'grass roots' to most community organizations and, in the example of a local Audubon chapter, there would be no organization at all. HPAS has a healthy organizational structure that encourages turnover of leadership of directors and committee chairpersons after completion of several years of service. The 'price we pay' for healthy leadership turnover is that the organization must routinely find new volunteer leaders. We must cultivate our own homegrown leadership.

HPAS directors and committees have a good time working together. If you aren't already, please consider volunteering to the long-term viability of HPAS. Let us know if you are interested.

We are recruiting for the following leadership positions: Vice President, Chairs for the Field Trips Committee, the Nominating & Leadership Development Committee, the Hospitality Committee, the Programs Committee, and additional active Directors.

Russell Regnery

Officers

President -- Russ Regnery, 404-558-1085
Vice - President – Bill Peavey, 828-399-1553

Secretary – vacant
Treasurer – Brock Hutchins, 770-486-3715

Directors and Committee Chairs

Communications – Michelle Ruigrok

Conservation – Kyle Pursel

Education – Ann Campbell

Field Trips – vacant

Finance – Brock Hutchins

Hospitality – Sheila Peavey

Membership & Development – Mary Jo Askew and Sarah Pursel

Nest Boxes – Michelle Styring

Newsletter Editor: Jessica Webb

Nominating & Leadership Development – vacant
Program – Bill Peavey

At Large – Romney Bathurst Glenda Zahner

Pat Strickland Jeremy Hyman

Mary Palmer Dargan

Olga Milenkaya

George Kaye

Web Master: Jean McCormick



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