



# The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – June 2014

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.*

## Annual Potluck and Program

### *How Your Yard Can Help Birds*

The annual potluck supper and first program of the season are scheduled Monday, June 9 at the Highlands Civic Center. The supper will begin at 6:00 PM followed by the program at 7:00. Please bring a dish to share – and a utensil with which to serve it. Drinks will be provided.



Kim Brand, Audubon North Carolina Bird-friendly Communities Project Coordinator, will share a presentation on “Bird-gardening: How Your Yard Can Help Birds.” Your yard can make a big difference to birds, whether they live in your yard year-round or migrate through North Carolina along the Atlantic Flyway. Kim will share how you can choose native plants for your garden to meet birds’ changing needs throughout the year, including insect food for young, fuel for migration, and food that lasts all winter long. Not only will you help birds, your yard list is guaranteed to increase!

### *From the President . . .*

#### **What Do Most Traffic Accidents and Birding Have In Common?**

On the first local Highlands Plateau Audubon Society (HPAS) Saturday “outing” of the year we visited Edwin and Kay Poole’s house to watch the birds in their backyard; a yard that has been beautifully planted in native plants and where the Pooles carefully maintain several bird feeders (taking them in at night to minimize unwanted bear encounters, etc.). Our small group sat on the patio in the cool morning air and had extremely good looks at least 26 species of birds that came to the feeders or passed through or over the garden, including Red Crossbills and spectacular Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, no more than 20 feet away. Pine Siskins were bathing in the water feature within a few feet of where we sat. One couldn’t help but appreciate the diversity and presence of native birds around us, as well as the beauty and interest of the springtime native plants.

Two weeks later Dr. Rob Bierregaard’s sesqui-annual ornithology course, sponsored by the Highlands Biological Station (HBS), was looking for a venue to let the novice birders in the class try out their binoculars on some of the locally available bird species (note that some of these students are far from novice!). The Pooles were away on this occasion so their feeders were down. So, as a substitute, the HBS class used the feeders at Helen’s and my home as a warm-up locale. Interestingly, Dr. Bierregaard and students logged in the same number of bird species, 26, right around our home as we had previously experienced at the Pooles’ on our earlier HPAS outing; however, many of the bird species were different. Dr. Bierregaard was excited that he

was able to get a very good audio recording of a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak signing at close range. The hummingbirds buzzed overhead. The Carolina Wrens are nesting on the porch; a pair of Towhees is nesting 15 feet away from the porch; and the Carolina Chickadees are nesting in the box over the back gate (and I suspect there are many other nests I'm not privy to nearby!).

On Saturday, May 17, several of us went on a birding hike with the HBS students all the way from the "old ranger station" parking lot, on Flat Mountain Road, down to Cliffside Lake in the Callasaja Gorge, and back up again to Flat Mountain Road. It was a nice walk through some lovely second or third growth forest and man-made meadows; however, I will be the first to admit that it was a bit more of a hike than many of us older folks were prepared for. And despite the nice hike, and very nice company of young people, I'm pretty confident that overall we experienced more relaxed "good looks" at native birds on the two previous outings around residences than we did on our much more adventuresome hike down into the Gorge and back.

I am quick to recognize that some of the most exciting aspects of birding involve experiencing bird species with which we aren't already familiar, in different, even exotic habitats; and perhaps experiencing new places, even when the birds may be hard to find. And it is important to recognize the importance of large tracts of relatively undisturbed habitat for many bird species' survival. However, the contrasts between the past three local birding experiences, mentioned above, reminded me how many of our best birding experiences can happily occur quite close to home, especially when our gardens are managed with birds and other native species in mind.

I'm sure we have all heard the insurance statistic that 70% of all automobile accidents occur within 10 miles of home. I suspect that a similar statistic applies to good birding experiences, but within a much smaller radius.

*Russ*

### **Thank You to the Mountain Garden Club**

The Mountain Garden Club has made a generous grant to HPAS to support our Cavity-nesting Birds Project. Plans are underway to install nest boxes with entry holes of various sizes to determine which of our mountain species benefit from having nest boxes with holes smaller than the generic 1½ - inch holes in bluebird boxes. This project will be undertaken in partnership with other community groups, including schools, conservation organizations, and parks. Species expected to benefit include Carolina Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches (which are of conservation interest in the region), White-breasted Nuthatches, Titmice, Tree Swallows, various species of wren, and, of course, Eastern Bluebirds.

### **Upcoming Field Trips**

You don't have to be an expert to enjoy these outings. Bring your house guests; we have binoculars to loan, field guides to share, and leaders to help you find the common and uncommon species in our area. Saturday walks will carpool from the parking area behind Highlands Town Hall, unless otherwise noted. All walks will start at 7:30 am unless otherwise noted. Walks will be cancelled in the case of rain or heavy fog, but a light bit of drizzle is often ideal for birding (they do need to eat, regardless!), so don't let that stop you. If you have questions, please call Brock Hutchins at 404-295-0663 or 770-486-3715.

**Saturday, June 7:** Beginners' Walk to the Highlands Biological Station with Brock Hutchins leading.

**Thursday, June 12:** Our annual Owl Prowl in cooperation with the Highlands Nature Center, 7:00 pm at the Nature Center. Donations to the Carolina Raptor Rehab Center will be appreciated but not required. Bring a flashlight and plan to stay after dark as we hunt for owls in the area!

**June 14, Saturday:** Back by popular demand, an outing to Lonesome Valley in Sapphire, with Romney Bathurst leading. This is a beautiful wooded canyon being sensitively developed by the Jennings family with conservation interests high on the priority list. The result is some fine habitat for migrant wood warblers which breed in our area, including the stunning Blackburnian Warbler – you won't want to miss it! Carpool from the parking area of the new Cashiers Recreation Building at 7:30 am sharp.

**June 21, Saturday:** We will drive to the Jones Gap access to the Bartram Trail looking for breeding warblers and tanagers in this high elevation location. Be prepared to do some hiking on the trail to find the birds. Brock Hutchins will lead this trip.

**June 28, Saturday:** Romney will lead a trip along Rich Gap Road, an excellent spot for tanagers and warblers, such as Black-and-White, Black-throated Green, Worm-eating, and Hooded.

**July 5, Saturday:** Beginners Trip, to Tessentee Preserve to witness Bird Banding. Leader TBA



**July 18, Friday:** Romney Bathurst will lead a field trip in conjunction with Mountain Wildlife Days at Sapphire Valley.

August and September field trips are posted on the web site and will be listed in the August newsletter. Changes in the schedule may occur, so be sure to watch the newspapers and web site for the latest.

Black-throated Blue  
Warbler

### **Spring and Summer Programs**

**Monday, June 9:** Potluck Supper and Program. See page 1 for details.

**Thursday, June 12:** Owl Prowl - see details in Field Trips above..

**Monday, June 23:** “My Life as a Turkey,” a film, 7:00 pm, Hudson Library in Highlands. Enter by the rear entrance.

**Monday, July 7:** Dr. Chris Mowry, Berry College: “Coyote Population Dynamics and Behavior in Urban-suburban Habitats,” 7:00 pm, Highlands Civic Center.

**Monday, July 21:** Jim and Ellen Shelton, world traveled birders and HPAS members: “A Safari Trip to South Africa”, 7:00 pm, Hudson Library in Highlands. Enter by the rear entrance.

**Sunday, August 10:** Annual picnic, 5:00 pm. Highlands Civic Center Shelter. Details to follow.

**Monday, August 25:** Clay Bolt, Nature Photographer: “Natural History Photography: Revealing the Unseen World Around Us”, 7:00 pm, Hudson Library in Highlands. Enter by the rear entrance.

Other programs will be announced later, including the Annual Membership Meeting, September 22.

## **Greetings to National Audubon Society Members**

Those of you who have not joined this local Chapter receive one newsletter each year. And this is it! We invite you to participate in all our activities outlined above and to consider becoming members of HPAS.

### **Are You One of These?**

May was the beginning of our new membership year. The renewal forms went out in April and we have had a wonderful response. A total of 64 memberships have already been renewed. ARE YOU ONE OF THESE? This count makes a total of 111 members who are current in their membership. If you did not receive an application in the mail, please let Pat Strickland (828-743-7421) know and she will see that you get one.

In addition we have one new member, Jamie Harrelson. Jamie is the University of Western Carolina graduate student that we are helping to sponsor in her research on the Golden-winged Warblers in our area.

Fred Gehrisch was being groomed to become the new Membership Chairman, but unexpected personal responsibilities have prevented him from following through with this. He was however, responsible for getting out the membership renewals for this year and we thank him for a wonderful job.

There is still a need for an individual willing to take over the Membership Committee. If you are interested, or you know someone else who would be interested in this position, please contact one of the board members. It is a wonderful way to be involved in the organization and the perfect way to meet the members.

### **Members and Friends Enjoyed a Trip to Dauphin Island, AL**

A small group of Highlands Auduboners made their annual trip to Dauphin Island, Alabama, on April 6. We were able to stay at John and Jennie Stowers' house again taking advantage of their generous hospitality. The weather was ominous the first night with the approach of storms from the Northwest. Once the rain stopped, we ventured out to Shell Mound Park and were treated to a fallout of many birds and species. For birders, a fallout is where an unusually large number of birds can be seen due to bad weather conditions forcing them to temporarily stop their migration and accumulate in one location. In this case, the first place they can stop is the coast of Alabama after crossing the Gulf of Mexico from Yucatan the previous day and night.

It rained again Monday night which made for good birding again on Tuesday. For the four days we were able to record 141 species on our trip list. Many of us were treated to multiple sightings of species not seen very often such as the Kentucky Warbler, Blue-winged Warbler, Painted Bunting, and Louisiana Waterthrush. Indigo Buntings were present in large numbers with 50 or more seen at one time. We recorded 28 species of warblers which is by far the most we have ever had on our numerous trips to Dauphin Island.

We also took the ferry across Mobile Bay to Fort Morgan to bird and visit Bob Sargent and his Hummer Bird Study Group bird banding operation. Several of us were treated to a close up view of the rarely seen Black-billed Cuckoo captured while we were there.

The combination of great accommodations, good food (we did our own cooking), good friends and bad weather (good for birding) made for a great trip to this special place.

Brock Hutchins, Field Trips

### **Audubon NC Chapter News**

Audubon NC Chapter Day is scheduled for Sunday, July 20, at Haw River State Park. Registration information is available at [nc.audubon.org/events/new-date-2014-chapter-day](http://nc.audubon.org/events/new-date-2014-chapter-day). The agenda includes instruction on how to teach Bird Friendly Gardening and information on Chapter use of Google Docs.

Highlands Plateau Audubon Society provided several posts for the Audubon NC Blog ([ncaudubonblog.org](http://ncaudubonblog.org)) during the month of May. Visit the blog and check them out. Follow the blog to see more posts from HPAS, other chapters, Audubon NC staff, and others.

### **A Wild Success**

April 26 was a WILD DAY indeed at the Highlands School Courtyard Classroom as Stephanie Smathers, Middle School Science Coordinator, hosted 20 K-12 educators for the wildlife-focused conservation education Project Wild Workshop that is used nationwide. Local sponsors included Highlands Plateau Audubon Society and the Mountain Garden Club.

The educators from Macon and Jackson counties received a guidebook with over 100 activities that make it easy to incorporate environmental education in their core curriculum, whether they are teaching science, math, language arts, or social studies.

From 8:30-3:00, the teachers practiced some of the activities and spent time networking and planning with teachers from other schools. What might have looked like a simple game of “Red Rover” was actually teaching concepts such as producers, consumers, decomposers, limiting factors, and the interrelationships of living things.

Ann Campbell, Education Committee

### **Kelsey-Hutchinson Park**

The coalition has been meeting regularly at the Hudson Library, and working hard in two areas: fund raising, and getting the Town of Highlands on board with our park development plan. We have received a very substantial gift from Art and Angela Williams, which caused us all to breathe a collective sigh of relief. This should enable us to initiate and complete most of the project in one season. However, one hitch lies in the funding of the public restrooms, which are an integral part of the plan and for which the plumbing has to be installed in conjunction with that for the public fountain. We hope to secure financial assistance from the Town on that portion, remembering that this entire project will lie in the Town’s hands when complete.

In the meantime, we are actively seeking tax-deductible contributions which can include donor naming rights to certain of the amenities. In May, Mary Guy Gunn and Diane McPhail hosted a “Hat’s a Blooming” luncheon and Caroline Cook coordinated a fundraiser with J. McLaughlin’s, with a portion of sales benefitting the Park fund.

I remain on the landscaping sub-committee, but we have not begun to specify plantings at this time.

Bill Peavey, HPAS Representative

### **Wings to Soar**

The dynamic team, Dale Kernahan and John Stokes, thrilled the capacity crowd at Sapphire Valley Community Building on the evening of May 20 with the opportunity to view and interact with a variety of birds of prey, including American Kestrel, Eastern Screech Owl, Barred Owl, Red-tailed Hawk, Black Vulture, and Bald Eagle. The multi-media “Wings to Soar” presentation was exciting as well as educational and hopes to help people form a new connection to the natural world. This incredible event was funded by Wild South and co-sponsored by HPAS and Mountain Wildlife Days.

Ann Campbell, Education Committee

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