



The Mountain Warbler

Newsletter of The Highlands Plateau Audubon Society – October 2011

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.

Notes from the President

Within the last month, members of the HPAS have attended a pair of interesting and diverse Audubon Society gatherings. The first one-day meeting was a small get-together for representatives of the four Western North Carolina Audubon chapters held at the Cataloochee Ranch near Maggie Valley. This was hosted by the Great Smokey Mountains Audubon Society (based primarily in the Maggie Valley and Lake Junaluska areas). The second, more formal, two-day meeting in Greensboro was hosted by Audubon North Carolina for the Pearson Society. Although this meeting was also rather small (~30 participants), it was attended by representatives of the National and State branches of the Audubon Society.

The Mountain Chapters

The first mountain Audubon Chapters meeting was the inauguration of a regional coalition of local Audubon societies that share many of the same challenges and perspectives of our own HPAS. The invitation to the meeting requested “at least two” members of each chapter to attend and Brock Hutchins generously agreed to help represent HPAS. Part of the morning was taken up by essentially ‘introducing’ the chapters to each other. And the afternoon was occupied with discussing issues of greatest interest that had been mentioned during the morning session. Two of the four societies are relatively ‘young’ (Great Smoky Mountain and Grandfather Mountain chapters), while HPAS and the Elisha Mitchell Society (Asheville area) have longer histories. The Asheville group even owns a small urban sanctuary, the only NC chapter-owned sanctuary. The various chapters were clearly welcoming in terms of practical support for other chapters within our geographic area and offered interesting perspectives and expertise on everything from Internet technology, education, conservation, outings, and funding. Brock and I agreed afterwards that as the various chapters better identify issues of possible regional relevance, this informal association of local mountain chapters should develop into a natural, easily accessed extension of the local Audubon chapter concept and will be a pleasant way for Audubon chapters to ‘build bridges’ within our mountain region. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled to be hosted in Asheville next year.

National Audubon Perspective

The Pearson Society event in Greensboro was an opportunity to learn more about new perspectives of the recently reorganized Audubon North Carolina (ANC) and National Audubon Society (NAS). Avary Doubleday was our other HPAS representative. David Yarnold, the recently appointed (and Pulitzer Prize winning) President of the NAS unfortunately had to cancel his participation due to a family medical emergency. In his stead Dr. Gary Langham, National Audubon’s “Chief Scientist,” gave an interesting talk which emphasized several of the new ‘themes’ for focusing NAS energies to improve conditions for bird survival by safeguarding entire migratory flyways. NAS plans to renew their advocacy for birds, while recognizing that healthy, safe bird populations/habitats are talismans for healthier environments in general.

(Notes from the President, continued)

An important new internal NAS mandate is to focus most of their resources on relatively few programs that have the best chance for meaningful success. Specific programmatic details are still being formulated; it will be interesting to watch for clues for NAS program priorities and which of these might impact our chapter's activities.

Dr. Langham made several digressions during his talk to illustrate recent Audubon Society successes and approaches. One such 'side-bar' concerned the newly formed Tejon Ranch Preserve in Central California for which the Audubon Society has recently been a key partner for preserving critical condor and other bird habitat. By negotiating environmental easements and outright purchases, the land area of the new reserve was said to approach the area of Rhode Island! Clearly, this example illustrated the classic Audubon Society role of sanctuary establishment and management which apparently is still alive and well within the NAS.

Dr. Langham also discussed the use of high-tech "ecologic niche modeling" to identify suitable habitat for specific species of birds. This technology involves characterizing specific habitat parameters from locations from where a bird species is well known to occur, and then uses those environmental parameters (e.g., rain fall, min and max temperatures, canopy cover, vegetation type, soil types, etc.) to help 'predict' and map where else the same species might be found to thrive (obviously such predictions can be validated by traditional observation methods). Many of these environmental parameters are actually obtained from sophisticated satellite imagery. Despite the fact that such analysis may require weeks of high-speed computer time to analyze, and seem perhaps 'hypothetical,' the practical results from this sort of analysis can be significant. Dr. Langham used as an example a map of 'core' areas of sage grouse habitat that may deserve special attention for safeguarding the existence of the species in the western US and Canada; this kind of information clearly is of interest to Audubon when planning where to focus limited resources for habitat preservation. In addition, it is also possible to use the ecologic niche models to predict how habitats may change as various environmental parameters change. So, for example, it is possible to predict which areas of current sage grouse habitat might still remain good habitat in 2080, assuming various changes in climate conditions. Very useful information to have when trying to help plan for sage grouse survival into the future!

Audubon North Carolina Perspective

Heather Starck, the new President of Audubon North Carolina (ANC), followed up the next day with a presentation from the ANC perspective that essentially reiterated the priorities of the NAS in terms of focusing on what can be done at the state, and even on local levels, to help birds survive and thrive not only during nesting and wintering seasons, but also during periods of migrations along our Atlantic Flyway. Clearly ANC and NAS are closely aligned in terms of reorganizing their focuses and approaches to bird conservation priorities.

Avary and I had an important opportunity to discuss with Heather what support HPAS can expect from ANC for specific conservation priorities and other programs. Heather emphasized a renewed emphasis on communication and cooperation between the new management at ANC and the chapters. After this conversation I was encouraged that HPAS can expect significant support at the ANC level; time will tell! So, although it sure was good to finally return home, I think the long drive to Greensboro and back resulted in a valuable experience for Avary and myself, as well as hopefully for HPAS in general.

Russ

Eagle Lady Returns

Sponsored by the Highlands Bird Barn

Doris Mager, “The Eagle Lady”, is coming back to Highlands. She will give a program for the elementary students at Blue Ridge School in Cashiers on Friday, October 28, and then she will present her informative and entertaining program for the public at the Highlands Rec Center that evening. Ms. Mager has several live birds and it is a really fun event. We hope to see you at the Rec Center at 7:30 p.m. Friday, October 28.

Greenway Work Day

As many of you know, Highlands Plateau Audubon Society has adopted the part of the Highlands Greenway from behind the Rec Center down to the Mirror Lake bridge. We will be working to clean up the Trail on Monday, November 7. We will be clearing some dog hobble, cleaning off steps and just doing a general clean up job. Please bring your own tools - rake, broom, snippers, etc. We will meet at the lower parking lot behind the Rec Center next to the Dog Park entrance at **9:00 a.m. Monday, November 7**. If you have any questions, contact Edwin Poole at 526-2775 or kaywick@nctv.com Hope to see you there!

Field Trip to Lake Junaluska

We have been invited by Christine Gibson (Greater Smokey Mountains Audubon) to come look for waterfowl on Lake Junaluska, November 29. Hopefully we'll see some things we don't normally see around here and we may even meet some GSMAS folks in the bargain. If you are interested in this outing, please contact Russ Regnery at russellregenery@mac.com or 404-559-1085. He will provide additional details as to time of departure, meeting place and expected time of return.

Christmas Bird Count

We will once again be participating in National Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count on Friday, December 16. This is the 111th year for this event!

From December 14 through January 5 tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. Families and students, birders and scientists, armed with binoculars, bird guides and checklists go out on an annual mission - often before dawn. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the Holiday season. Each of the citizen scientists who annually braves snow, wind, or rain, to take part in the Christmas Bird Count makes an enormous contribution to conservation. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations - and to help guide conservation

If you would like to be one of these citizen scientists, mark your calendar for December 16 and plan on joining the Highlands Plateau Christmas Count. After being out in the cold all morning counting birds, we always have a delicious chili lunch while we tally the day's results. Contact Edwin Poole, 526-2775 or kaywick@nctv.com if you are interested in joining us.

Treasure Highlands

Curtis Smalling, Audubon NC Mountain Region Biologist

Audubon North Carolina and a number of local partners, including the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society, are working together on a long term project known as the Treasure Highlands Campaign. This project is intended to bring together the various environmental and conservation organizations in the Plateau working to conserve the natural wonders of the area and to encourage participation by the permanent and seasonal residents of the Plateau. Several components are already up and running and include the www.treasurehighlands.org website. Here you will find a selection of resources available for the community, including consolidated calendars of programs and volunteer opportunities, other volunteer opportunities and citizen science projects. Links to great on-line resources, partners, and other projects are also found there. One of those allied projects is the K-to-Gray Challenge, a National Science Foundation funded project that seeks to bring students and adults together to complete a variety of citizen science projects to benefit wildlife and habitats in the Plateau. More content and lots of programs are being offered through the partners, so check the website and Treasure Highlands Facebook page frequently for more information and updates on new content.

Herbicide Use on Power Right-of-Way

The HPAS Conservation Committee is interested in documenting what appears to have been the excessive or non-selective use of herbicide under certain sections of Duke Power right-of-ways this past summer. If you have photographs or other documentation of what you consider to demonstrate excessive herbicide application by Duke Power contractors, please contact someone on the Conservation Committee (i.e., Glenda Zahner, Hillrie Quinn, George Kaye, or Russ Regnery) or a member of the HPAS Board of Directors. If you are interested in possibly helping investigate this, but don't currently have photographs, please contact someone on the HPAS Conservation Committee or Board of Directors.

Field Trip to Beaufort, SC

Brock Hutchins

On September 29th six of our members headed to South Carolina to attend the Carolina Bird Club fall meeting. The highlight of the trip was two days of guided field trips led by local CBC members. We visited Hunting Island State park, Bear Island WMA and Bennett's Point, and several local birding spots around Beaufort. Along with the normal coastal species we were able to observe migrating warblers, tanagers and shorebirds. We even saw our Black-throated Blue Warbler in a bush out on the marsh. Normally we see this warbler in the forests around Highlands where they breed, but the forces of migration brought it to the coast on its way to the tropics. Carolina Bird Club meetings are a great way to visit new birding areas and have a local guide to show you around!

Add Highlands Audubon Website to Your Favorites

Have you looked at our excellent website recently? www.highlandsaudubonsociety.org is *the* place to get the latest up-to-date information about what is going on with the Highlands Plateau Audubon Society. So check it out – frequently!!

Email Newsletter!

Remember, if you would like to help us save a little money and also save a tree or two (and some time), have your newsletter sent to you via email. If you would like to help in this way, please contact Edwin Poole at kaywick@nctv.com

2011 Members of Highlands Plateau Audubon Society

Special thanks to all our Local Chapter members, both Individual and Corporate. Your generous support of our growing organization has provided funding for expanded activities in our mountain community. List reflects payments received through October 15th.

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Land Trust of the Little Tennessee
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Highlands Plateau Audubon Society

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