



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

April 2010

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Next Meeting Thursday, April 1 at 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center

Kerrie Anne Loyd, Ph.D. student in Wildlife Ecology and Management in the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources will discuss “**Feral cat management: The science and social science behind the conflict.**”

The widespread growth of feral domestic cat populations has significant and documented implications for public health and native biodiversity. Interestingly, policy on feral cat management is currently being constructed throughout the U.S. with seemingly little regard for such concerns. She will summarize the science informing this issue and explain the powerful and polarizing human dimensions behind the controversy. The social aspect of feral cat management remains the greatest challenge to decision-makers; understanding the perspectives of opposing stakeholders should help organizations and agencies to develop acceptable yet effective solutions.

Meetings are held...the first Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. To get to the Nature Center, take Highway 441, exit # 12, off the north side of the perimeter, go north on 441 approximately one mile, and turn left at the Sandy Creek Nature Center sign displaying this logo:



Go left at the end of this short road. The ENSAT building is a short way down the road on your right.

GOS Spring Conference in Athens

The Georgia Ornithological Society's Spring 2010 Conference is April 16-18, 2010, at The Georgia Center, Athens, Georgia. For details, see <http://www.gos.org/meetings/2010-spring-reservation.pdf>

Spring Bird Walks & Field Trips

Have you heard the birds starting to sing? It's time to get outdoors and join the spring bird walks, which ORAS sponsors jointly with Sandy Creek Nature Center. Whether you are an experienced birder or a beginner, come join us as we witness the miracle of the northward migration. Come to the monthly meeting or email Jonathan Gray at fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org for information about specific bird walks and field trips.

- March 27: State Botanical Garden
8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.: meet at the upper parking lot by Day Chapel
- April 3: Sandy Creek Park
8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.: meet at the last parking lot on Campsite Drive across the dam; the gates open at 8 a.m.
- April 10: Whitehall Forest
8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.: meet in the driveway at the end of South Milledge Road (go through T-junction with Whitehall Road into Whitehall Forest)
- April 17: Sandy Creek Nature Center
8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.: meet at the Allen House parking lot (the 1st lot on the left)
- April 24: Charlie Elliot Wildlife Center
7:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.: meet at the Shops of South Athens parking lot by the Waffle House on South Milledge near the bypass
- May 1: State Botanical Garden
8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.: meet at the upper parking lot near Day Chapel
- May 8: Kennesaw Mountain
7:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.: meet at the Shops of South Athens parking lot by the Waffle House on South Milledge near the bypass

River Rendezvous 2010

Upper Oconee Watershed Network's keystone annual event, mobilizing volunteers to sample streams throughout our region, will take place Saturday, March 27th, from 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at Sandy Creek Nature Center. Check out <http://www.uown.org/news.html>

Gardening for Butterflies

by Liz Conroy

Many gardeners are interested in more than just planting a vegetable garden; they'd like to grow a garden to benefit wildlife, too. Consider these basic tips for helping the butterflies this summer:

Think about diversity in a yard or garden with sun-loving plants to create interest and to attract a variety of butterflies. Also, butterflies need shelter from wind. Thick shrubs provide protection.

Butterflies have a complete metamorphosis. The adults lay eggs, and the eggs hatch into larvae (caterpillars). After intense feeding, the caterpillar forms a chrysalis and emerges as an adult. Many adult butterflies seek nectar plants; their mouthparts form a long, coiled tube (proboscis) for drinking liquids. Most caterpillars, with strong jaws for chewing, seek foliage plants.

Butterfly bush (buddleia), lantana (Asclepias), zinnias and salvias are excellent nectar plants. Native plants include: butterfly weed, milkweed, and more. The Athens-Clarke County Extension Agriculture & Natural Resources agent also recommends these plants: bee balm, coreopsis, Echinacea, Liatris, vitex. Website:

www.ugaextension.com/clarke/anr/index.html

For caterpillars, milkweed, parsley and fennel are easy to grow. But watch out for fennel! It can really spread. Passion flower (Passiflora) provides food for caterpillars of the lovely Gulf Fritillary.

In addition, it's important for every gardener to learn what different butterflies look like in each stage of life. Some gardeners get excited about attracting the nectar-loving adults, but don't know what the caterpillars look like and spray them or crush them underfoot. After all, some caterpillars are ugly. For example: the Viceroy caterpillar looks like a bird dropping. This appearance may help protect the caterpillar from predators, but not from gardeners who lack knowledge about what a beautiful butterfly this bizarre, little larva will someday become.

In addition, caterpillars voraciously feed on their favorite plants. Tidy gardeners lose it when they see the defoliation that caterpillars cause. Simply plan to feed these hungry creatures and avoid spraying in the garden as much as possible which may kill many other beneficial insects as well.

Finally, water and minerals are important for butterflies. A shallow container filled with dirt and enough water to keep the dirt "soggy" attracts butterflies. A computer search using the term "butterfly puddle" provides information on this topic, too.

Bringing butterflies into the garden is easy. Provide nectar and foliage plants, water with minerals, rocks for sunning and protection from the wind. The joy of watching these incredible creatures is well worth it!

Save the Brown Thrasher!

by Pierre Howard from <https://www.georgiaconservancy.org/>

Big Chicken last week launched a broadside attack against the noble Brown Thrasher, the state bird of Georgia. A Georgia purveyor of chicken parts announced a drive to get the Georgia General Assembly to throw the Brown Thrasher out like a dishrag and replace it with a new state bird- the chicken! Yes, you read that right - it's the fried chicken, the broiled chicken, the barbecued chicken that we all love to eat.

Don't get us wrong. Georgians love our chicken at mealtime, but the idea of making the chicken our state bird crosses the line from sanity to insanity. The Georgia Conservancy will do everything in our power to make sure that such a travesty does not occur. . . .

The Brown Thrasher has reigned as our State Bird for 82 years, and now, motivated by the apparent desire for profit, Big Chicken has launched a website (Flip the Bird) that calls for the General Assembly to ignore history and install the chicken as our new State Bird.

The Georgia Conservancy calls upon all Georgians to sign our petition to reject such a move.

Please join us today. We can't let the Brown Thrasher down. Since it cannot speak for itself, we must speak for it! Sign the petition at <https://www.georgiaconservancy.org/>

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Dr. Karl Miller, research scientist and instructor in wildlife biology in the University of Georgia's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, talked about "Southeastern Fruit-Producing Trees and Shrubs: Some of the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" at the March 7 meeting.

What he had to say fit right in with the work that the volunteers at the Memorial Park Ecological Restoration Project Workdays have been doing because the "bad and ugly" plants that he discussed included invasives like privet and bush honeysuckle.

One main point that Miller made was that variety of habitat results in variation of the timing of fruit production. A clear cut (early succession) will provide soft mast in summer; a mature forest (late succession) will provide hard mast in fall, etc.

Another point to think about involves plants that have "persistent" fruit—fruit that stays on the plant for a long time—and its benefits for wildlife, for instance, holly and smilax.

A further category includes plants that have fruits that provide both hard mast and soft mast and so feeds even more various wildlife. For example, the black cherry that the birds love eventually also may feed a chipmunk with its pits, and the chipmunk perhaps may then be eaten by raptors.

Loon Story: Additional Notes, Part II

by Tim Homan

In *Essential Field Guide Companion*, Pete Dunne's introductory tagline for the common loon is "A Big Bruising Longshoreman of a Loon."

This species is a study of specialization and evolutionary compromise. In order to squeeze the loon into its fish-eater niche, evolution's insistent honing sacrificed normal walking altogether and made quick and easy escape from gravity's grasp impossible. Unabashed at the latter-day dinosaur's stumble-footedness on land, natural selection's pottery wheel sculpted a quick diver and powerful underwater swimmer, one that can torpedo fast and far, yet be nimble enough to match lake trout or yellow perch turn for desperate turn.

All of this age-long molding has created three obvious physical adaptations. The loon's legs and huge feet (paddle shaped and up to five inches long) are set far back on its body to enable foot-propelled underwater swimming. *Gavia immer*'s narrow and pointed wings have been pared to the minimum surface area required for flight so they can help execute whip-snap quick turns underwater. And, in the case of the lake-mothered loon, evolution has doubled back on itself for the sake of utility. It has back-filled this diving bird's bones, making them heavier and nonpneumatic, more solid than air-pocket hollow. This physiological switchback has increased the loon's specific gravity, outfitting it to ride lower in the water, make quicker flip-ass dives, and expend less energy while swimming below the surface. Her Holiness Mother Nature is the founding priestess of the First Utilitarian Church of Whatever Works.

Today's Holocene loon is a compact and deceptively heavy creature, one 25 to 36 inches in length that weighs only slightly less than the bald eagle—the second largest North American bird of prey (only the California condor is larger). Body mass varies widely in both birds. The female eagle is larger than the male, and the species puts on weight as it climbs the latitude ladder to the north. The male common loon is longer, heavier, and wields a significantly longer bill than its mate. *Gavia immer*'s smallest version of itself, in size and weight, summers in North Dakota, Minnesota, and the surrounding mid-continental locations. This sushi-eater is substantially longer and heavier within that continent-wide sweep of Canadian lake country spanning west-northwest to east-northeast away from the upper mid-west.

Common loons from one study in eastern Ontario actually outweighed bald eagles from one study in Alaska—10.95 to 10.53 pounds, averaging the average weights for both sexes. That loons should ever weigh more than eagles—raptors 28 to 38 inches long with hang-glider wings approaching eight feet at their maximum—is

testament to this species' heavy bones and biathlete musculature needed for both flying and swimming.

The northern diver's ballast-heavy bones, which prove their worth underwater, require long runways of flat water for liftoff. Even with a maximum wingspan of up to 58 inches, the common loon still has a body weight disproportionately heavy for its wing surface. Biologist Sigurd T. Olson (son of author and environmentalist Sigurd F. Olson) compared *Gavia immer*'s wing area with its weight and arrived at a ratio of 0.5 compared to 8.87 for the golden-crowned kinglet (a bird's weight per square unit of wing area is known as wing loading). In his book, *Birds of the World*, Oliver Austin emphasized this fact by noting that loons have the "... least wing surface in proportion to their body weight of any flying bird." Researcher D. B. Savile described the loon's flight: "The common loon is a flying anachronism. It has an appallingly high wing load and very inefficient wing form ... it takes off only with great difficulty, after a long run and climbs shallowly."

Genetic evolution overcame the loon's wing loading problem by applying two standard aeronautical solutions: create more lift, create more speed. While natural selection was busy building solid bones, it was also compensating by cambering the loon's wings to provide more lift and revving up the engine to provide more speed. Today's model features a very fast flap rate, blurring wing speed up to 260 to 270 beats per minute.

Look for "Loon Story: Additional Notes, Part III" in an upcoming issue of *The Yellowthroat*.

All Women's Birding Bust—April 24

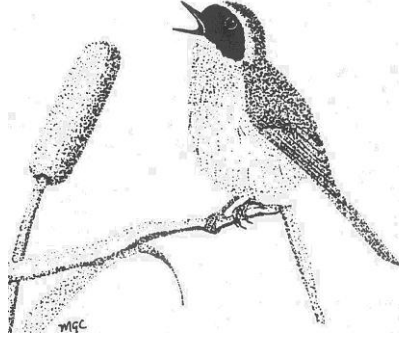
from Georgann Schmalz at <http://birdingadventuresinc.com/>

Get out your binoculars, ladies, and join your female birding buddies in Georgia's Big Day Count for women only. For one day we will count birds in Georgia. You can participate for as many hours as you like and count birds anywhere in the state that you want. You can bird as hard or little as you desire. Do it by yourself or form a team with some of your favorite women birders. The 2009 AWBB consisted of 16 teams and 51 women who enjoyed not only seeing great birds but also the thrill of improving their birding skills year after year.

Our primary goal is to get women out into the field and participate in a Big Day Count and have fun. This is not a competitive event unless you make it so, which some of us have, I'll admit. In any case, come out and join us.

To register for the 2010 All Women's Birding Bust, simply fill out the information on the website at <http://birdingadventuresinc.com/upcoming-events/all-womens-birding-bust/>

Thank you,
Joel McNeal, for
preparing the
Purple Martin
gourds at Sandy
Creek Park for
spring nesting.



Volunteers Make a Difference!

ORAS relies on volunteers, in fact, exists only because of volunteers. If you would like to contribute at any level, contact one of the officers or board members by email or at the monthly meetings.

ORAS needs bird walk leaders, individuals who can represent ORAS at a display table at local events, speakers to community organizations, ivy-haters to pull invasive plants at the Memorial Park Ecological Restoration Project Workdays on the first and third Saturday mornings of each month. ORAS needs folks to bring snacks to our monthly meetings. You can get a glimpse of what some folks do by reading the ORAS message board at <http://www.quicktopic.com/29/H/6JbdZFsuHuc6>

Find a niche where you can help!

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

President Vanessa Lane
President@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Vice-President Edwige Damron
vp@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Treasurer Eugenia Thompson
treasurer@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Secretary Mary Case
secretary@oconeeriversaudubon.org

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Submit information to the address above or by e-mail to yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org. Articles, artwork, notices, and sighting reports welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the first Thursday of each month. All articles and artwork are copyrighted, and all rights are reserved by the authors. Opinions expressed in articles are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of Oconee Rivers Audubon Society.

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Oconee Audubon Society
P.O. Box 81082
Athens, Georgia 30608-1082

