



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

February 2008

Vol. 19 No. 2

Next Meeting:
Thursday, February 7, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center

Doug Carlson, who recently published *Roger Tory Peterson: A Biography*, will talk about “**The Legacy of Roger Tory Peterson**” at our February meeting.

Paul R. Ehrlich, in *The Birder's Handbook*, says that “in this century, no one has done more to promote an interest in living creatures than Roger Tory Peterson, the inventor of the modern field guide.” The University of Texas Press says that in Peterson’s biography “Carlson creates a fascinating portrait of the complex, often conflicted man behind the brand name. He describes how Peterson's obsession with birds began in boyhood and continued throughout a multifaceted career as a painter, writer, educator, environmentalist, and photographer. Carlson traces Peterson's long struggle to become both an accomplished bird artist and a scientific naturalist.”

Dr. Carlson has written extensively about the natural world. A longtime resident of the New York area where Peterson grew up, Carlson also lived and taught in Minnesota before moving to Athens, Georgia, to work on the editorial staff of *The Georgia Review*.

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 will be a short way down the road on your right.

Spring 2008 Bird Walks

- March 22 State Botanical Garden
- March 29 Sandy Creek Park
- April 5 Whitehall Forest
- April 12 Sandy Creek Nature Center
- April 19 State Botanical Garden
- May 3 Sandy Creek Nature

Spring 2008 Field Trips

- April 26 Kennesaw Mountain
- May 10 Cochran Shoals
- May 24 Ivy Log Gap Road & Sosebee Cove

A Fire Lighter on Fire Fighting

summarized by Maggie Nettles

Shan Cammack, Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Ecologist, kicked off the new year for ORAS by talking at the January meeting about the spring 2007 Okefenokee wildfires. Shan described her experiences of the fire and of the Incident Command System and explained the strategy of attack as well as the ecological effects of the fire. She summarized what happened—that the fire ran from mid-April until the end of May and burned almost 500,000 acres.

However, she also provided breathtaking details—for instance, that the Bugaboo fire traveled nine miles in one day and that the fire crews had to remove all potential fuel around houses in Fargo. She conveyed the intense excitement of seeing the fire approach Stephen Foster State Park and the crew pumping water from the boat launch area until it was just about drained. At one creek, she said, a fire burned up to the bank, dove down 16 feet into the peat, crossed under the creek, and reappeared out on the far side.

One key point Shan made was that the Okefenokee Wildlife Refuge with its history of controlled burns survived better than surrounding pine plantations. Also, the fire itself didn’t harm the hydrology of the land, but the fire-fighting equipment had left its mark.

Variations on the Theme of Nuthatch

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

by Sigrid Sanders from *Birding Notes* at

<http://www.sigridsanders.com/birding/index.html>

This fall we've been experiencing the rare pleasure of having three different species of Nuthatches around our yard daily. All three—Brown-headed, Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatch—visit the feeders and forage in the nearby trees, and their calls add spice, and often a comical touch, to the dry sounds of the late-autumn woods. Each of the three is a variation on the theme of Nuthatch—a small, short-tailed, long-billed family of birds that creep over tree-trunks or branches, often moving downward head first, feeding on insects.

It's been a great opportunity, especially, to observe the Red-breasted and White-breasted Nuthatches, neither of which we've ever had around for more than brief visits before now. I'm having fun listening to their calls and trying to learn them well. While the Red-breasted Nuthatch's most common call is the "tin-horn toot" of *ank-ank-ank*, the White-breasted's call is deeper, slightly hoarse, and more like *cronk, cronk*. Both make much softer nasal calls while they're foraging, a very gentle *eenh*, frequently repeated as they creep up and down and over branches.

The more familiar squeaky-dee chatter of our year-round resident Brown-headed Nuthatches is probably heard less often than the other two right now, though they still come around at some time every day. When they do, they seem to dominate the other two species, as well as I can tell, and while they're at the feeders, the others seem to stay out of the way. But in general, all three of the Nuthatch species are pretty bold and even aggressive. I've seen a Red-breasted Nuthatch chase a Chickadee away from a feeder several times—though larger birds like the Titmice aren't so easily intimidated. On the other hand, I've often seen Brown-headed Nuthatches sharing a feeder with Chickadees, Titmice, a Downy Woodpecker and other birds—maybe because they live here together all year long.

Red-breasted Nuthatches—with ruddy red breasts, bluish backs and bright white and black stripes over and through the eye—first showed up here in early October, and since then, at least two have been visiting the feeders regularly, pretty much all day, every day. They also come to the birdbaths, and are less shy when I'm around than most of the other birds. One of them will often come for a drink when I'm sitting only a few feet away, as if it's just too busy to be bothered by my presence.

When I took down a feeder one morning recently to refill it, one Red-breasted Nuthatch waited in a branch just over my head, and as soon as I walked away, it came immediately back to the tray. One sometimes will stay on the hanging block feeder for a long time, mostly hanging upside down and feeding from the bottom of it, snaking its head up to look around frequently. On the tube feeder, they more often grab a bite and fly away with it toward the back yard, where there are several pines, or fly up to one particular stub of a branch to work on whatever seed or nut they have taken.

So I'm having a good time watching them all. I like the small, feisty Red-breasted Nuthatch for its intensity and apparently unwavering focus on food gathering; for the way it's not shy and will come so close to me; and for its funny *ank-ank-ank* calls that carry like echoes of another time through the pines and the bare gray branches of the woods.

When the Brown-headed Nuthatches arrive, chattering back and forth to each other, they brighten up the whole yard, sounding cheerful and seeming to bring sociability and activity with them. Though I know that's only my interpretation, it always sounds like a party when they're around.

The White-breasted Nuthatch—my favorite right now—I admire for its beauty and grace, for the elegant lines of the black head and nape against the snow-white of the throat and breast; for the sleek arch of its neck as it looks up, and for the artful way it moves over a branch as it forages, as if the movement itself were a pleasure.



Red-breasted Nuthatch

Photographer: Charles H. Warren at <http://images.nbio.gov/>

Editor's note: Kenn Kaufmann has an excellent article on nuthatches and focuses especially on this year's "invasion" of Red-breasted Nuthatches in *Bird Watcher's Digest*, January/February 2008, "After the Spark: Inverted Invaders."

Birding Bothin Marsh

by Ed Maioriello

Over the Christmas Holidays, my wife, Katherine, and I took a trip out to visit family in the San Francisco Bay area. While not specifically a birding trip, I did get one day to get out with my binoculars and focus on birding. The morning of Christmas Eve found us at Bothin Marsh. It was a beautiful morning, but at first I was dubious about the location due to the noise coming from Highway 101. Bothin Marsh is just north of San Francisco, across the Golden Gate at the Sausalito exit in Marin. The trail is essentially a two-mile-long path extending out from 101 between the marsh and Richardson Bay that is used extensively by joggers, bicyclists, hikers, and birders. You definitely want to pay attention to what is coming down the path at you! Happily, as we drew farther away from the highway the noise abated.

Almost immediately we came upon a raft of Ring-necked Duck and Scaup off to our right. This felt pretty much like home until I paid closer attention to the Scaup and consulted my field guide. These were Greater Scaup, not the Lessers that I'm used to seeing at home. There were a few Ruddy Ducks and Bufflehead mixed in to sweeten things. A little farther, just past a hotel on our left there was quite a bit of mud still exposed by the not yet high tide. A group of 15 Black-necked Stilts was just casually probing the mud. Behind them on an island there were quite a few Willet with a few Long-billed Curlews among them. Behind the Willets was one of the highlights of the day for me, a flock of perhaps 20 American Avocets. While not displaying breeding plumage they were still beautiful. There were also quite a few Western Sandpipers nearby too. Further down the marsh on the left we had more and more waterfowl. Canvasback, Bufflehead, Greater Scaup, Ring-necked Duck, and American Wigeon were all present.

My brother-in-law, Joe, and our niece, Ella, came along to see just how crazy we really were, but Ella became completely fascinated by a Great Blue Heron that landed right beside the trail. At seven-years-old, she was no taller than the bird, who did not move as she neared to within six feet of it. The two eyed each other with much interest before both backing off to give a little room. At this point, Joe who had borrowed Katherine's binoculars pointed out some ducks against the back of the marsh. I took a look and first saw Gadwall, but then about 16 Northern Pintail, roughly half male and half female. As we neared the Pintail, they accommodated us by coming even closer so that we had great bare-eye looks at these beautiful ducks. At this point we met a couple of local birders

who pointed out a Peregrine Falcon on a power-line tower.

A little farther down the trail a foot path off to the right goes out into the bay on a narrow spit of land. We had Western Scrub Jays following us as we were out there, and I was able to get Ella a really good look at a male Common Yellow-throat, a bird that I most assuredly did not get a look at on my first foray into birding! Out on the spit were many waterfowl to our right, but we noticed a much whiter bird out in the water. A look at it revealed a Western Grebe, which definitely makes our local Pied-billed variety seem rather dull.

Farther down the trail a Sedge Wren popped up out of the reeds and sat there taking a good look at me. Farther yet, a Spotted Sandpiper teetered along at the south end of an island that sported playing fields as well as some off-leash areas for dog walkers. (It's a good idea to be aware that there are quite a few dogs running around here). While walking around the island with hundreds of Western and California Gulls out in the bay along with a few Mew Gulls for company, I had Anna's Hummingbirds chasing each other from their respective roosts. By this point the tide had finished coming in, so I headed back.

Bothin Marsh—what a remarkable place! Amidst the noise of the highway, runners, racing bicyclists, dog walkers, and people just out having a chat walking on a nice day, it offers some of the best and easiest birding that I've ever experienced.

Give the Gift of Audubon!

For an introductory National Audubon Society membership (which includes *Audubon* magazine, local membership, and a subscription to *The Yellowthroat*), mail this form with a \$20.00 check payable to **NAS** to

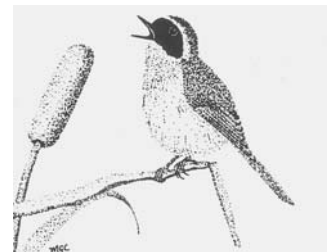
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

For a short time only, new members who sign up at the meetings will receive their choice of a laminated four-fold Pocket Naturalist.



Natural History on Earlier Migration

excerpt from Natural History, <http://www.naturalhistorymag.com/>

Birds returning from a winter's retreat are showing up in England earlier and earlier each spring as a result of global warming, a new study confirms. Unexpectedly, populations in decline show a less pronounced shift than thriving ones do, sparking fears that ecologists have underestimated the effect of rising temperatures on migratory birds.

Led by Tim H. Sparks, an ecologist at the Natural Environment Research Council in Monks Wood, England, a team of investigators studied up to fifty-six years' worth of data, gathered at six English locales, on the arrival and departure dates of thirty-three migrant bird species. On average, they discovered, the birds are arriving in the spring twelve days earlier than they did fifty years ago. That's a big change, and it mirrors advances already noted for migratory birds throughout Europe and in the United States. But the change was even bigger among species, such as the blackcap, whose numbers are on the rise in England: they now arrive as many as twenty days ahead of schedule. By contrast, species with declining populations have been flying in just five days early.

Why the difference between thriving and declining species? Sparks thinks observers may spot the earliest birds more readily when a species is abundant. If so, the true average advance in European and American arrival times may be even greater than actually measured because, sadly, many migrant bird species are on the wane. (*Journal of Ornithology*)

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

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|----------|
| President | Edwige Damron | 613-9875 |
| Vice-President | Mary Case | 548-3848 |
| Treasurer | Jim McMinn | |
| Secretary | Amy Barbe | |

The Yellowthroat

Published monthly by the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

Submit information by e-mail to maggie_nettles@charter.net or mail to PO Box 81082 Athens, GA 30608. 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.

Visit our website at
<http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/>

Non Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Athens, GA
Permit No. 41

