



# The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the  
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

January 2002

Vol. 12 No. 1

## Upcoming Meetings

**January 3<sup>rd</sup>: 7:00 p.m.,  
Sandy Creek Nature Center ENSAT building**

**January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2002:** Brad Winn, wildlife biologist with the DNR, will present a talk entitled, "Red Knots and American Oystercatchers, Georgia's role in the lives of migrant and resident shorebirds." Brad grew up in New England and graduated from the University of Vermont. He has worked in the field of conservation on the Georgia Coast for 14 years. His most recent jobs were as the Sea Turtle Project coordinator and now the Waterbird Biologist for the DNR.

**Meetings are held...** first Thursday of the month at 7 p.m. To get to the Nature Center, take the Highway 441 exit off the north side of the perimeter, go north on 441 approximately 1 mile, and turn left at the Sandy Creek Nature Center sign. Go left at the end of this short road and the new ENSAT building will be a short way down the road on your right.

**Field Trip February 9<sup>th</sup>:** We will go to Gary Crider's parent's home for our annual Loon trip at Lake Hartwell. Plan to meet in the Athens VoTech parking lot at 7:30 am to car pool to Hartwell. Bring a lunch. Maps will be available at the February meeting if you need one. Maggie Nettles reported at the December meeting that the loons have already been sighted on the Lake Hartwell.

**Sandy Creek Nature Center Sponsored Programs.** Pre-register for all programs by calling 613-3615 ext 0. Adopt-A-Stream Chemical Workshop: January 19<sup>th</sup>, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Walker Hall. Fee: \$5:00. Learn how to chemically monitor streams through this certification program. Adopt-A-Stream Biological and Chemical Training. March 30<sup>th</sup> 9:00 a.m. to 4 p.m. Walker Hall. Fee \$5:00. This combined workshop for adults will train you to identify biological and chemical indicators in our local streams to access the health of that stream.

**Monthly Meeting Raffle:** In December Marianne Happek won the beautiful Honey Pot glowing orb candle donated to the ORAS donated by Frontier Gifts on North Jackson St. in downtown Athens. In January we will raffle one of the 2002 Audubon Calendars. The winner can pick the calendar of their choice.

**Highlight of the December meeting:** Many thanks to Paul Sykes for a very interesting talk on the origin and progress of the Christmas Bird Counts over the years. The Christmas Bird Count was first started by Frank Chapman on Christmas day 1900 to count birds to see how many birds they could see rather than how many birds they could shoot. On the first count there were 25 localities, in 12 states and two Canadian provinces. In 1998 there were 1767 counts with 48,000 participants and the number of counts and participants is growing each year. The results of the counts and the names of the participants are published in American

Birds. These results determine the population trends and diversity of the different species. Paul Sykes concluded his talk with slides as an overview of the birds that we might see on the 102nd Christmas Bird Count in the Athens area.

### *The Yellowthroat*

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PO Box 48132 Athens, GA 30604-8132

<b>President</b>	Maggie Nettles	543-8823
<b>Vice-President</b>	Mary Case	548-3848
<b>Treasurer</b>	Eugenia Thompson	549-7318
<b>Secretary</b>	Page Luttrell	788-2973
<b>Field Trips</b>	David Galewski	543-1988
<b>Yellowthroat Editor</b>	John Posey	769-1417

Submit sightings or articles by calling the *Editor* By e-mail at: [mecase@arches.uga.edu](mailto:mecase@arches.uga.edu) or [jswillis@cb.uga.edu](mailto:jswillis@cb.uga.edu). Mail to: PO Box 48132 Athens, GA 30604

Articles, artwork, notices, and sighting reports welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month. All articles and artwork or 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.

Email ORAS at: [oconeeriversaudubon@yahoo.com](mailto:oconeeriversaudubon@yahoo.com)

Visit our website at:

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**Sightings:** The following is the list of birds reported since the last meeting. 11/18 Gary Crider, Maggie Nettles and Brown Weidner, four **Winter Wrens**, North Oconee River, 11/18 Mark Freeman, three **Redheads**, four **Double-crested Cormorants**, two **Ring-necked Ducks** at Lake Chapman. 11/24 Maggie Nettles and Gary Crider saw 15 species in birdbath within one hour in front yard at Spalding Circle including **Flickers**, **Red-bellied Wood Peckers** and **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers**. 11/25 Dennis Rice, **Kestrels** in South Carolina. 11/30 Carole Ludwig, **Northern Harrier** (mature male) flying along Colham Ferry Rd. 12/2 Judy and John Willis **Red-headed Woodpecker** at Dyers Pasture 12/3 Cam Kepler two **Great-crested Flycatchers** in the power line area at the State Botanical Gardens.

**In Memoriam:** The following members of the UGA Department of Speech Communication have donated \$165 to the ORAS in memory of Kenneth DeLuca, father of Kevin DeLuca of the UGA Speech Department: Alicia Beckworth, Dr. J. Kevin Barge, Dr. Kenzie Cameron, Dr. Jerold Hale, Dr. John Murphy, and Jeanette Reid. ORAS expresses its gratitude to the donors and its sympathy to the DeLuca family and friends. Kenneth DeLuca was throughout his life an avid gardener— especially flowers, an admirer of trees, and a general lover of nature, especially birds. His son's earliest memories include bird feeders and admiring the visiting birds. Kevin DeLuca says that his father was "troubled by... the predictably dire environmental consequences of a Bush Administration. A donation to Audubon is one small way of combating runaway capitalism and corporate greed." Please contact a member of the ORAS Board for suggestions for how we could best honor Kenneth Deluca in the use of this donation.

**Report on the 102nd Christmas Bird Count.** Dec. 15th was a very warm and beautiful day for birding. Not all of the count information is in, however 33 participants observed 82 different species. Some of the species not usually seen on our winter count include: Blue-winged Teal, White-crowned Sparrow, Pine Siskin, Horned Lark and Eurasian Collard Dove. Many thanks to all the group leaders and participants who helped make this count possible.

**Poisoning Blackbirds:** Despite objections by conservation and environmental groups the U.S. Department of Agriculture's plan to poison two million blackbirds to reduce their impact on the sunflower crops is moving forward. Starting in 2003 this plan calls for placing poisoned rice in fields in South Dakota during spring migration. Farmers claim that the birds destroy about \$10,000,000 a year in South Dakota and Minnesota. That loss represents about 2% of the total crop. The primary targets are Red-winged Black Birds, Yellow-headed Blackbirds and grackles. Environmentalists say that thousands of other birds will be killed with no evidence that poisoning will reduce losses to the sunflower crop. To protest this U.S.D.A. plan write to: Ann Veneman, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, 14th & Independence Ave., Washington, D.C. 20250 or e-mail [agsec@usda.gov](mailto:agsec@usda.gov).

**Whooping Crane Update:** The Whooping Cranes made it to Florida. Since this is an ongoing multiyear project contributions are still needed. A generous friend is willing to match each dollar raised through contributions. No amount is too small. What does it cost for Operation Migration? Here are some of the needs. \$15 buys one 50lb. bag of crane chow. \$32 pays for 5000 mealworms for the Robo-crane to dispense. \$180 covers the cost of a water-guzzler unit, which will supply the cranes with fresh water during their stay in Florida. \$25 helps with the cost of food for the volunteer crew. \$250 pays for one complete costume and crane puppet, used by pilots and handlers to help disguise the human form and train the birds. If you think you can spare \$1.00 or even \$5:00 just put it into an envelope and mail to Operation Migration P. O. Box 868, Buffalo, NY 14207 1-800-675-2618.

**Great Backyard Bird Count, Feb 15-18, 2002:** Help the scientists track the birds in your community. What do you do? Count the birds in your back yard, at your feeder, or local park on any of the four days. Watch your feeders or take a short walk in your neighborhood recording the highest number of individuals that you see at any one time. Be careful that you don't count repeat visitors at your feeders. Count for at least 15 minutes. Then enter your count on-line at the Great Backyard Bird Count web site—

(<http://www.birdsource.org>) and use the State/Province Checklist to submit your highest counts for that day. After you record your results, visit the map-room to view the results from across the continent. The 10 most common Species in the GBBC 2001 were as follows: Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Dark-eyed Junco, American Crow, Blue Jay, House Finch, Downy Woodpecker, American Goldfinch, Black-capped Chickadee, and Tufted Titmouse. Last year more than 53,000 checklists were submitted by volunteers from every state and Province. This information helps to understand the dynamics of the North American bird populations. Every contribution is important, even if you see only 5 species at your feeder or 75 from a more extensive day's outing. Don't hesitate to participate in this year's count. The count is hosted by the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

**Black Skimmer:** To prepare for the MLK field trip to the coast, read Rachel Carson's *Under the Sea Wind*, 1941, and imagine Gould's Inlet. Here are the opening paragraphs from the "Edge of the Sea"—

"With the dusk a strange bird came to the island from its nesting grounds on the outer banks. Its wings were pure black, and from tip to tip their spread was more than the length of a man's arm. It flew steadily and without haste across the sound, its progress as measured and as meaningful as that of the shadows which little by little were dulling the bright water path. The bird was called Rynchops, the Black Skimmer.

As he neared the shore of the island the skimmer drifted closer to the water, bringing his dark form into strong silhouette against the gray sheet, like the shadow of a great bird that passed unseen above. Yet so quietly did he approach that the sound of his wings, if sound there were, was lost in the whisper song of the water turning over the shells on wet sand.

About sunset the tides had been out. Now it was rising, covering the afternoon resting places of the skimmers, moving through the inlet, and flowing up into the marshes. Through most of the night the skimmers would feed, gliding on slender wings above the water in search of small fishes that had moved in with the tide to the shelter of grassy shallows. Because they fed on the rising tide, the skimmers were called flood gulls.

On the south beach of the island, where water no deeper than a man's hand ran over gently ribbed bottom, Rynchops began to wheel and quarter over the shallows. He flew with curious, liling motion, lifting his wings high above the down-stroke. His head bent sharply so that the long lower bill, shaped like a scissor blade, might cut the water."

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**P.O. Box 48132**  
**Athens, Georgia 30604-8132**

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