



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

May 2009

Vol. 20 No. 5

Next Meeting

**Thursday, May 7, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

Dr. Kevin Keel, research scientist at the Southeastern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Georgia, will present a program on May 7 entitled **“Recent outbreaks of salmonellosis in backyard birds: it’s not in the peanut butter.”**

Dr. Keel will discuss the epidemiology of the infectious disease caused by *Salmonella* bacteria in passerine birds that visit backyard feeders, including what sick birds look like, how the disease is transmitted, and what you can do to help the birds.

Dr. Keel has degrees in Forest Resources and Veterinary Medicine from UGA and a PhD in Pathobiology from the University of Arizona. A board certified veterinary pathologist, Kevin is interested in infectious diseases of wildlife.

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.

Spring 2009 Bird Walks & Field Trips

Bird Walk:

- **May 2 8:00 a.m., Sandy Creek Nature Center**
(Cook’s Trail Cleanup) SCNC Allen House

Out-of-Town Field Trips:

- **May 9 Kennesaw Mountain**
6:00 a.m. Meet at Shops of South Athens Lot at Milledge Avenue near Bypass
- **May 23 Ivy Log Gap Road / Sosebee Cove**
6:00 a.m. Meet at Homewood Shopping Center Prince Avenue/Jefferson Road and the Bypass
Note the date change from original listing.

Come to the monthly meeting or email Jonathan Gray at fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org for information about specific bird walks and field trips.

Whitehall Birding

from GABO listserv, by Jonathan Gray, Field Trip Chair

Oconee Rivers Audubon had a magnificent turnout for our April 4 Whitehall Forest field trip. It's so great to see so many folks who are willing to get up early on Saturday Morning! Not only was the birding (and conversation) great, but also, I learned a whole lot, and I believe other folks did too.

One of the highlights was a magnificent view of a Northern Parula that flew down right in front of us to forage on a Carolina silverbell tree. While the "sweet, sweet, sweet!" of a Prothonotary Warbler was undeniably heard, the culprit was never seen, and a vociferous Louisiana Waterthush was briefly spotted down by the river as well.

Additionally, we got a good look at a singing Yellow-throated Warbler as well as one of the most enthusiastic Blue-gray Gnatcatchers I have ever seen.

Another exciting moment was when Vanessa Lane (and eventually the rest of us) heard two Black-throated Green Warblers singing. An expedition team set off down the railroad tracks to search for these elusive birds, but to no avail.

First Mesoamerican Birding Festival

Las Glorias Hotel, Lake Yojoa, Honduras
Feb.22-27, 2009
by Carole Ludwig

A blurb in the AJC travel section about the festival listed the all-inclusive price at \$375, per person. I was sure this was a typo, but called the contact, Mark Willun, anyway. He assured me that it was correct and included all meals, lodging, transfers and guides. Mark Freeman and I decided that we couldn't stay home for that, and we wouldn't have to wash up after meals! So after a call to Chris Skelton, who also signed on, I was booking an inexpensive flight to San Pedro Sula, Honduras. With three members from the same Audubon, we got a 10% discount. What a deal!

Enough about money. How was the birding you ask? Fabulous is the one-word answer. Lake Yojoa sits about 50 miles southwest of San Pedro Sula in a farming area surrounded by significant mountain rain forest. The lake is huge, measuring in the square miles, with several attractive lodges on its shores to accommodate tourists.

There were about 35 participants at the festival, mostly American, and about 10 guides. Each morning we split into groups and went to one of four habitats: high rain forest (Santa Barbara National Park), a coffee plantation and lodge grounds (Finca Paraiso), a montane national park (Cerro Azul Meambar,) and an archeological site of the Lenca people at Los Naranjos. Although most meals were at Las Glorias, we had some meals at a private home and at a neighboring lodge where we birded. Meals were consistently excellent, varied, and plentiful. In each habitat we sought a sexy target bird: Resplendant Quetzal, Olivaceous Piculet, Sungrebe, Black crested Coquette, not always finding them, but seeing many other species and sights along the way. In all we saw about 150 species, one being the Blue and White Mockingbird, never before documented at this latitude.

Upon returning from morning trips Mark, Chris and other hard-core birders explored the hotel grounds, a wonderful eco-system all its own. I usually took a siesta, lulled to sleep by the oropendulas that churttled outside our cabin. Idyllic is the word. There were even a few horses on the grounds to make me feel at home.

At night we had programs detailing eco-projects in other Central American countries, a hummingbird art exhibit, a round-table discussion on Central American eco-tourism, and the final night a festival with live band and free beer.

The next Mesoamerican Birding Festival will be in 2011 in Belize, Nicaragua or Guatemala. And the word from Robert Gallardo, who organized the festival, is that it will also be a bargain for birders. I can't wait!

Addendum: The purpose of the festival was to educate guides, promote ecotourism and create links with international markets for Honduran tourism.

Birds of a Father

by Jeremy Berlin in *National Geographic*, April 2009

Some birds that look very different—say, bright hummingbirds and drab nightjars—are long-lost kin. Some never considered together, like songbirds and parrots, are really close relatives. Others that act similarly, such as falcons and other birds of prey, may be genetically unrelated.

Those are just some of the sure-to-cause-a-flap findings of the Early Bird Project, a landmark study led by Chicago's Field Museum that compared the genes of 169 species and sequenced nuclear DNA from 15 chromosomes to fill in big evolutionary holes. The bird branch of zoology has always been a thorny one, with little fossil evidence to show stages of development, making anatomy, appearance, and behavior the main means of gauging kinship—until now. With five years' worth of new data, other long-held beliefs may also fly right out the window.

Nest Boxes and Citizen Science

from <http://watch.birds.cornell.edu/nest/home/index>

Got Nest Boxes? You can help nesting birds by registering your nest box with NestWatch! NestWatch is a nest-monitoring project developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in collaboration with the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, and funded by the National Science Foundation.

NestWatch provides detailed instructions on how to construct nest boxes for specific species—chickadee, bluebird, owl, duck, etc.

For additional information, check out the pages at <http://watch.birds.cornell.edu/nest/home/index>

The State of the Birds Report

from <http://www.stateofthebirds.org/>

The 2009 State of the Birds Report is online at <http://www.stateofthebirds.org/> along with links to additional information about the challenges birds face, endangered species, and what we can each do to help:

- Drink shade-grown coffee.
- Reduce your use of pesticides.
- Keep your cat indoors.
- Plan your yard for diversity.
- Prevent window strikes.
- Donate your old binoculars to conservation.
- Reduce your carbon footprint.
- Take action for birds and familiarize yourself with contemporary bird conservation issues.
- Participate in volunteer monitoring activities that help to document the status and trends of bird populations.
- Join a bird conservation organization.

Feeder Maintenance & Hygiene

from National Audubon Society at

http://audubon.org/bird/at_home/bird_feeding/

Cleaning birdfeeders and birdbaths is a crucial practice in preventing the spread of disease between birds. Recently, scientists noted that the spread of Trichomonad protozoan parasites, which cause a disease termed Trichomoniasis, was on the rise especially among mourning dove and band-tailed pigeon populations in the West.

You can tell if you have a disease problem at your feeders because diseased birds are less alert and less active, they feed less and may cower on a feeder, they may be reluctant to fly, and their feathers do not appear to be in good shape. Birds afflicted with Trichomoniasis typically develop sores in their mouths and throats. Unable to swallow, they drop food or water contaminated with Trichomonads that other birds then consume, thus spreading the disease.

With the concern over this and other diseases, including Salmonellosis, Aspergillosis, and Avian Pox, which are easily transmitted at birdfeeders and birdbaths, Audubon recommends paying diligent attention to cleanliness in pursuit of responsible and rewarding bird feeding practices. Birds with disease are more likely to die from starvation, dehydration, predation, and severe weather, so protect them by following these tips.

- **Disinfect your feeder and birdbath:** To keep pathogens at bay, immerse your seed feeder or birdbath in a nine to one water-bleach solution, rinsing it thoroughly, one to two times per month. In the presence of outbreaks, disinfect twice as often.
- **Empty water from your birdbath every day:** Brush or wipe it clean and rinse, then refill the birdbath with fresh water.
- **Discard old seed and hulls:** When you clean your feeder, get rid of the old seed. Rake or sweep up any uneaten hulls on the ground. The disease-causing Trichomonad protozoan, for example, can live for five days in food and several hours in water.
- **Avoid overcrowding:** If possible, provide more than one feeder and spread them out. Crowding only expedites the spread of disease, so give the birds variety and plenty of room.

Georgia Wild E-Newsletter

Keep track of what the Georgia Department of Natural Resources is doing to protect and conserve nongame wildlife, plants, and native habitats by subscribing to Georgia Wild. Look at the current issue—which features such topics as the importance of location for nest boxes—and sign up for the email version at <http://www.georgiawildlife.com/enewsletters.aspx>

First, Learn the Song Sparrow

summarized by Maggie Nettles

Charlie Muise, Georgia Important Bird Areas (IBA) Coordinator, shared important clues in demystifying “**Sparrow Identification**” at the April meeting.

Charlie’s enthusiasm for sparrows highlighted his descriptions of the various sparrow species with comments asking the audience to notice the marvelous gradations of color on individual sparrow feathers. If Peterson had loved sparrows as much as he had warblers, Charlie said, we would all be seeing more than little brown birds. And Charlie proceeded to detail precisely what we should look for with each sparrow species. He included some common identification pitfalls to avoid—some which are shown in popular field guides.

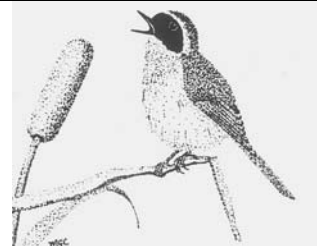
His first piece of advice was to learn to identify the Song Sparrow—the chubby bird with the big head and long, rounded tail, with coarse streakings almost like blotches on the breast and sides. The Song Sparrow’s tail, he said, is its brightest part.

His second, and repeated, caution was to remember that a breast spot was NOT a great field mark, that a seeming breast spot could simply be blown or ruffled feathers. Birders, he said, should rely more on a bird’s shape, especially the tail and head, and on a bird’s behavior.

Then Charlie proceeded to go through each species detailing identifiers in appearance and behavior, using photos from his bird-banding experiences as illustrations.

One person in the audience wished Charlie’s talk had been videotaped for subsequent review. Charlie, maybe you need to think about a book!

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 _____

Sightings

Reported at the April meeting:

- **Red-throated Loon**, Charlie Muise & Vanessa Lane, Bear Creek Reservoir, 4/2/09
- **Orange-crowned Warbler**, Lorene Winter, continues to visit peanut butter suet, 4/2/09
- **8 Blue-winged Teal**, Mark Freeman, Bell Lake on Colham Ferry Road, 3/30/09
- **Purple Martins**, Carole Ludwig, Old Farmington Road, Watkinsville, 3/30/09
- **Eastern Kingbird**, Carole Ludwig, Old Farmington Road, Watkinsville, 3/25/09
- **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, Eugenia Thompson, Millstone Circle, 3/30/09
- **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher**, Page Luttrell, Sandy Creek Nature Center, 4/2/09
- **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, Leta & Gary Bird, Maxeys, 4/2/09
- **Brown-headed Cowbirds** (lots!), Leta & Gary Bird, Maxeys, 4/2/09
- **Summer Tanager** (with a face covered with suet), Gary Crider & Maggie Nettles, East Athens, 4/15/09

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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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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