



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

November 2008

Vol. 19 No. 9

Next Meeting

**Thursday, November 6, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

Recycling = Resources

Come and talk trash with **Suki Janssen**, the Waste Reduction Administrator for Athens-Clarke County (ACC). Suki will cover new national trends in waste reduction and what that can mean for our area.

Suki's duties include the contract management of the public/private recycling facility in Athens-Clarke County, a variety of waste reduction events, and local green school program, just to name a few. Prior to her position in Athens-Clarke County, she was a Program Coordinator for the Keep Georgia Beautiful (KGB) program within the Georgia Department of Community Affairs. She was responsible for the coordination of *Winning Water: Children's Water Festival*, Waste in Place teacher workshops, and a variety of education initiatives for the KGB program. She is a certified middle grades teacher, Georgia Recycling Coalition President for 2008-09, and Northeast Georgia Regional Solid Waste Management Authority board member.

Invite a friend to come with you!

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.

Christmas Bird Count

Mark your calendar: The Athens Area Christmas Bird Count will take place on Saturday, December 20th.

During the period between December 14, 2008, and January 6, 2009, people will be counting birds all across the North American and in some foreign countries. Birds have been counted during the Christmas period for the past 108 years. This information is used to determine the fluctuations in the populations of different bird species. This count is open to anyone who likes to bird.

If you would like to help, please contact Mary Case (mecase@uga.edu) or Eugenia Thompson (ERoberthom@bellsouth.net).

Paragraphs below are from <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/>:

The longest running Citizen Science program in the world, the count originally began on Christmas Day in 1900 when ornithologist and legendary birder Frank Chapman posed an alternative to an earlier traditional holiday "side hunt." Chapman proposed "hunting" birds to record their numbers. Instead of firing a shotgun, now we have an annual snapshot. Decades of data have added up to results envied by other scientists who don't enjoy such a fleet of volunteer help, or creatures as easily seen and counted as birds.

"Counting is the first step in learning how environmental threats are affecting our birds," said Geoff LeBaron, Audubon's Christmas Bird Count Director. The proverbial "canaries in the coal mine," birds provide an early warning indicator of the health of the world we all share.

Volunteer Opportunity

Charlie Muise, Important Bird Area Coordinator, has scheduled native grass seed collecting and bird banding activities at Panola Mountain State Park on November 8 and a Sprewell Bluff State Park interpretive walk through long leaf pine on November 9 with seed collecting afterwards. Call him at 678-967-9924 or email him at cmmbirds@yahoo.com

Swift Night Out

by Carole Ludwig

Excellent would describe both the avian and human turnout on September 14 for our annual counting of Chimney Swifts in downtown Athens. Participants showed up at 7:00 p.m. at the Bottleworks and split into two groups. One led by Gordon Ward went to the downtown police station; the other group posted around the main chimney of the Bottleworks and waited.

The birds started gathering in a kettle about 7:30, the numbers gradually increasing til almost dark. An occasional Nighthawk flew high over as the swifts swirled clockwise, then counterclockwise, obeying some primitive directive only they could detect. Finally the vortex edged closer to the chimney, and one bird back-pedaled then dropped into the opening. With each pass, a few more plummeted in, always in single file. One could only imagine the scene within the chimney as each bird found his place and clung to the brick wall. The drop-in process was deliberate and orderly, while we on the ground scrambled to keep count, often distracted by questions from passers-by. All in all it was short but exciting evening.

Those participating were Alison Huff, Berkeley and Dan Minor, Margaret Weirich, Lisa Kelly, Paul and Albie Smith, Gordon Ward, Mark Freeman and myself. My group counted approximately 440 birds from 7:50 to 8:20 p.m., and Gordon's counted about 180 birds from 7:50 to 8:30 p.m.

Conservation Corner Sounds Out about Rare Altamaha Mussels

by Jennifer Johnson, Graduate Research Assistant at the UGA Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources

Freshwater mussels may be commonly mistaken for rocks, but they play an important role in aquatic ecosystems such as rivers and lakes. They are long-lived filter feeders with limited mobility and sensitivity to certain changes in the environment—such as changes in land use practices. These characteristics also make them excellent indicators of local water quality and river or lake health. Indeed, widespread changes in land use, construction of dams, pollution, invasive species and other factors have led to an alarming decline in mussel numbers and species. In fact, mussels are among the most imperiled animals in the world and here in Georgia the story is much the same. Of particular concern are eight species of freshwater mussels that are only found in Georgia and no other place in the world. Seven of these species are inhabitants of the Altamaha River and its tributaries, and three of these Altamaha species are



declining, for reasons currently unknown. The two rarest species are the Altamaha spiny mussel (*Elliptio spinosa*) and the Altamaha arc mussel (*Alasmidonta arcuata*). The Altamaha spiny mussel is currently state-listed as endangered and is an official candidate to be on the federal endangered species list. The Altamaha arc mussel is currently state-listed as threatened.

Restoration efforts for the rare Altamaha species are currently impeded by lack of basic information about their life history. Freshwater mussels have a unique lifecycle that requires that the larval mussels (glochidia) attach to the gills or fins of a specific species of fish to transform from the larval form into juvenile mussels. The larval mussel remain attached to the fish for a few weeks while transformation occurs before releasing from the fish and settling into the bottom of the river or lake to grow and mature into adult mussels. If the appropriate species of host fish is not available, the larval mussels will die within days of being released from the female mussel. Currently, very little is known about the fish species required by the rare Altamaha mussels but researchers and biologists at the University of Georgia and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources are hoping to change that. Dr. Robert Bringolf, an assistant professor in the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, will lead an effort to describe the lifecycle of rare Altamaha mussels including identification of the fish species required by the mussels. Identification of suitable host fish may provide insight about why these mussel species are declining while the other species in the same river are more stable. It will allow managers to determine if suitable fish hosts are currently available in the Altamaha River and if suitable habitat exists for both the fish and mussel species. Once suitable host fish have been identified the team plans to develop methods to grow (propagate) mussels at their facility at Whitehall Forest in Athens. Laboratory-reared mussels could eventually be used to supplement declining populations and to identify other factors such as contaminants that may be leading to their decline in the wild. Research at UGA and mussel surveys in the Altamaha River and its tributaries will begin this fall.

Going Green is for the Birds!

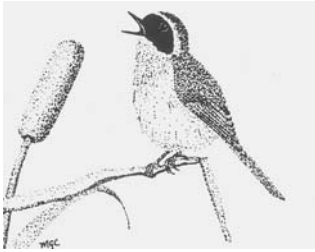
ORAS now has shopping bags for sale for eight dollars! Each bag is made of five recycled two-liter bottles, is machine washable, and could prevent hundreds of plastic shopping bags from filling landfills!

Help the environment by carrying a bag made from trashed soda bottles that would otherwise end up in a landfill.



Conservation Corner

by Verna Johnson,
Conservation Chair



Welcome to the ORAS Conservation Corner—an open forum where we can share tips and ideas on providing for, protecting, and preserving our rivers, forests, and wildlife. This month's Conservation Corner will highlight **Bats and Your Backyard Habitat**.

Bats are mammals and belong in an order of their own called Chiroptera, meaning "hand wing." Bats hunt for food using echolocation, a high frequency sound wave that is bounced off of an object and "echoed" back to the bat. This gives them the ability to navigate through some pretty tight places. As nocturnal hunters, bats can eat up to 1,000 insects an hour and over 5,000 in a night. Who wouldn't want to be a landlord to such a wonderful natural pesticide? Insect-eating bats protect our crops, fruit-eating bats disperse seeds to re-grow our rain forests, and nectar-eating bats pollinate our plants and flowers. Bats roost in caves, dead or live trees, cliffs, rocks, and man-made structures or "bat boxes." There are over 1,000 species of bats in the world, 40 of which reside in North America.

Of the 40 bat species in the United States, half are listed as endangered, threatened, rare, or declining. Pesticide use, killing by humans, environmental toxins, and habitat loss are all causes for declining numbers of bats. The next time you see a bat, think of all the good they do and of all the good that we can do for them.

If you have a submission for Conservation Corner, email us at conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org, or mail it to

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
P.O. Box 81082
Athens, GA. 30608

Audubon Report on Common Birds in Decline Echoed Worldwide

excerpted from <http://web1.audubon.org/news/pressRelease.php>

A new international report entitled State of the World's Birds reveals precipitous declines in populations of many of the world's most familiar birds, broadening the alarm first sounded in the U.S. by Audubon's 2007 Common Birds in Decline analysis. Growing threats include logging, invasive species, and agriculture.

"All the world's governments have committed themselves to slowing or halting the loss of biodiversity

by 2010," says the new BirdLife International report launched today at organization's World Conference in Buenos Aires. "Reluctance to commit what are often trivial sums in terms of national budgets means that this target is almost certain to be missed."

The BirdLife report highlights avian losses worldwide. A staggering 45% of common European birds are declining, and on the other side of the globe, Australian wading birds have seen population losses of 81% in just quarter of a century. In Latin America, the Yellow Cardinal - once common in Argentina - is now classified as globally endangered.

Citing the 2007 Audubon report, BirdLife's State of the World's Birds report states that populations of twenty North American common birds have more than halved in number in the last four decades. The Northern Bobwhite fell most dramatically, by 82%. As documented in Audubon's first State of the Birds report in 2004 and reinforced in this report, some of North America's fastest declining birds are grassland species whose habitat has been damaged by agricultural expansion and intensification.

"Direct habitat loss continues to be a leading cause for concern at home and abroad," emphasized Audubon Bird Conservation Director, Dr. Greg Butcher, speaking from Buenos Aires, the site of the BirdLife conference. "As we found in 2007, this report points out the increasing impact of large-scale environmental problems such as global warming, along with the continuing toll from weak conservation policies at home."

More than half of the bird species that breed in North America and winter in the Neotropics show declining populations over the past 40 years. "This demonstrates the importance of working throughout the Western Hemisphere for bird conservation," said Craig Lee, director of the Audubon International Alliance Program. The Alliance establishes connections that can make a difference across the Western Hemisphere. "If we hope to continue sharing our North American communities with familiar avian visitors, we must ensure that birds find food, safety and shelter in all of their seasonal homes south of the border, and in the places in between."

Audubon protects those "place in between," including many wetlands and grasslands on the major flyways, by working with BirdLife to designate and protect Important Bird Areas. The global effort identifies and conserves areas vital to birds and other biodiversity.

Population data for both the new Birdlife Report and Audubon's Common Birds in Decline included vital "citizen science" findings from Audubon's century-old Christmas Bird Count program. The involvement of ordinary people in identifying the problem spurs many to become part of the solution. The 2007 report galvanized local conservation efforts and national policy efforts.

Project Puffin

summarized by Maggie Nettles

ORAS President Vanessa Lane regaled attendees of the October 2 meeting with a history of Project Puffin and her experiences as an intern on the Maine islands of Eastern Egg Rock and Matinicus Rock—including photos and amusing stories.

The project, started by Audubon ornithologist Steve Kress in 1973, involved such tactics as transplanting young puffins from other islands and—since they are a sociable species—using decoys to lure them into returning to these islands after spending four years at sea.

Vanessa's daily work included checking the rock burrow nests, banding new hatchlings, and close monitoring of all avian activities.

My favorite of her stories involved a tern nesting along the path to the outhouse. That tern would attack every person taking the path and learned to aim for the gap in the back of a baseball cap. Finally, Vanessa tricked it by simultaneously dodging and holding up a towel. That was the last time the tern attacked her!

The Project Puffin webpage provides a wealth of information and fun viewing material. For details, see <http://www.projectpuffin.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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