



# The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the  
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

November 2009

Vol. 20 No. 9

## **Next Meeting Thursday, November 5 at 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center**

Shan Cammack of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources will talk about “Longleaf Pine: The Fire Forest That Shaped and Built the South.”

Her talk will describe the history of the longleaf pine forest and how it has changed since the first descriptions by De Soto in the 1400's. From lumber to naval stores, this forest built the South. The intensive use of the forest and absence of fire has led to its demise, with longleaf found in only three percent of its original range. Conservation efforts are underway to restore and protect this incredibly diverse ecosystem.

Shan has been working for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for 12 years. She now serves as the Fire Management Officer for the Nongame Conservation Section, focusing on habitat restoration for rare species. The longleaf pine ecosystem is her favorite thing to burn!

**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.

## **The 110th Christmas Bird Count: Citizen Science in Action**

from <http://www.audubon.org/Bird/cbc/>

The next Audubon Christmas Bird Count will be held from December 14, 2009, through January 5, 2010. Tens of thousands of volunteers throughout the Americas will take part in an adventure that has become a family tradition among generations. For over one hundred years, the desire to both make a difference and to experience the beauty of nature has driven dedicated people to leave the comfort of a warm house during the Holiday season.

Each citizen scientist who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count makes an enormous contribution to conservation. Audubon and other organizations use data collected in this longest-running wildlife census to assess the health of bird populations and to help guide conservation action.

From feeder-watchers and field observers to count compilers and regional editors, everyone who takes part in the Christmas Bird Count does it for love of birds, the excitement of friendly competition, and the knowledge that their efforts are making a difference for science and bird conservation.

The Athens area Christmas Bird Count takes place on **December 19** this year. To participate, contact Eugenia Thompson at [erobertthom@bellsouth.net](mailto:erobertthom@bellsouth.net) or Mary Case at [mecase@uga.edu](mailto:mecase@uga.edu).

## **The Moral Obligation to Act**

Janisse Ray, writer, naturalist and activist, will give the Wilson Center-EECP (Environmental Ethics Certificate Program) Odum Lecture at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 3, in the UGA Chapel. She will speak on “The Moral Obligation to Act.” For details, see <http://www.uga-eeep.com/>.

Ray lectures on nature, community, sustainability, and the politics of wholeness. She works to create sustainable communities, local food systems, a stable global climate, intact ecosystems, clean rivers, life-enhancing economies, and participatory democracy.

## Counting Quail

Charlie Muise, Georgia Important Bird Coordinator, announced that the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge needs a few birders to help with a survey counting Bobwhite Quail on the refuge to help monitor the progress of their management efforts.

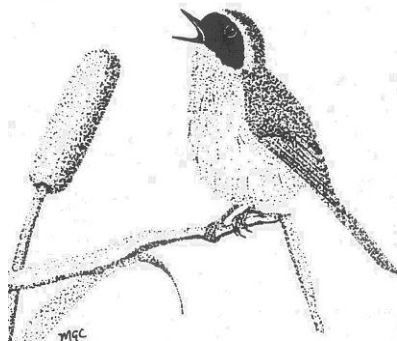
Volunteers have the opportunity to drive in places that are often not accessible to the public, including right by a few of their Red-cockaded Woodpecker colonies.

The count is to be held two or three week days (depending on number of volunteers) between October 20 and November 15. Weather parameters are very important, so the schedule is based on the forecast. Each designated plot is visited one time for the survey, so the number of days it lasts is determined by the number of staff and volunteers can help. A volunteer can help on one or all days.

By the time this newsletter issue reaches you, it may be too late to volunteer, but the event sounds like a good reason to ask him to add you to his email list.

If you would like to receive future notices of such volunteer events, contact Charlie Muise at [cmmbirds@yahoo.com](mailto:cmmbirds@yahoo.com) or 678-967-9924, or see the IBA website: <http://www.atlantaudubon.org/iba/>

## Support Georgia's Important Bird Areas



The Georgia Important Bird Areas program is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to protecting the most significant bird habitats in the state. To make a tax-deductible contribution, please make your check out to "AAS" and write "IBA" in the subject line. For more information, contact Charlie Muise at the addresses given above.

## October Program on Honey Bees

Paul Smith talked to the October ORAS gathering about the importance of honey bees as pollinators of our food supply and the health benefits derived from various hive products. He also addressed the dangers bees are facing. Thank you, Paul, for the information and for maintaining an award-winning honey supply!

## Swift Night Out 2009

by Carole Ludwig

Like magic, the skies, empty only five minutes ago, were filled with an eddy of birds. I wondered what innate force caused hundreds of Chimney Swifts to converge en masse over a 12 by 16 inch chimney hole, and then manage to drop into it within a 20 minute time frame. Sometimes singly, sometimes in a line of two or three, the birds fluttered almost to a stop as they reached the hole, then dropped vertically into it to grasp an unoccupied space on the interior of the chimney. While finding it very difficult to perch on a limb, swifts can clutch a rough vertical surface just fine. Oh for a view of the chimney interior!

And so went another swift count at the Bottleworks location, aided greatly by the "clicker counter" provided by Gordon Ward. Mark Freeman, Alison Huff, Lorene Winter, and I counted 822, created by the average of our individual counts. Gordon Ward, accompanied by Lisa and Ed Kelly and Laura Steadman, counted at the police substation, the downtown parking garage looking south onto a chimney a little below, and at City Hall. Their numbers in the three places were 85, 65 and 1 respectively.

As usual, passersby often stopped and questioned us about our activities. It's always fun to see them lift their eyes and watch the show. Plan to join us next year. It's fun, it's entertaining, and it's easy! Plus we may be contributing a bit of data for the good of birds in general.

As an addendum, Alison went back to the Bottleworks a few days later and counted over a thousand birds. Perhaps we should expand the count next year.

## ORAS Backyard Bird Sanctuary Certification Program Coming Soon

ORAS is gearing up to start offering a Backyard Bird Sanctuary Certification, modeled on Atlanta Audubon's certification program.

For details on what Atlanta Audubon is doing, see <http://www.atlantaudubon.org/aaswww/conservation/sanctuary.htm>. For updates on our local plans, keep checking *The Yellowthroat* and the ORAS webpage at <http://www.oconeriversaudubon.org>.

## From Privet to Native

Sue Wilde, Linda Chafin, and Dorothy O'Niell have received a \$300 grant from ORAS to purchase native spice bush, winterberry, and river oats as part of their restoration work at Memorial Park.

## Georgia Freshwater Turtles in Peril

submitted by Vanessa Lane from Mike Murdock  
Sierra Club, Wildlands/Wildlife Committee

Georgia freshwater turtles must contend with a lot of problems. Their nests are raided by fire ants, feral pigs and a growing raccoon population. The pet trade and the loss of wetlands to development are also threats, along with their well-known problems crossing highways. If that were not enough, they now are faced with a new foreign threat, the Asian gourmet food market. In Asian countries, especially China, a voracious appetite for turtle meat has greatly depleted their numbers. Now Chinese importers are looking at the turtle rich Southeastern states, including Georgia.

Of the 320 species of turtles worldwide, 27 of them occur in Georgia. If Georgia were a country, it would be among the top 25 richest nations in turtle diversity, being home to 8% of the world's freshwater turtles. This makes Georgia a prime target for commercial turtle harvesters. Other Southern states, including Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, and North Carolina have seen the need for enacting regulations protecting their freshwater turtles from commercial harvesting. With the exception of six species that are considered rare or endangered, Georgia law allows unlimited and unregulated harvest of freshwater turtles. Without protective regulation it is feared that Georgia will become the focus of intense commercial harvesting.

In March 2008, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources was petitioned by several conservation groups requesting an emergency rule to prohibit commercial collection of freshwater turtles in Georgia. The conservation of freshwater turtles had also been a DNR issue during the development of the State Wildlife Action Plan. Receipt of the petition prompted DNR to move the turtle issue to the forefront.

During the summer of 2008, DNR hosted two stakeholder group meetings to review the issue and discuss possible approaches. Members of the scientific community universally agreed that the turtle population could not sustain any significant amount of commercial harvest. This is because turtles are slow growing and may take 10 plus years to reach breeding age. These will be the largest turtles and the ones most attractive to harvesters. Several current and former trappers were also in attendance. Their opinion was divided, with some believing that commercial harvesting is not a threat, and others conceding that it is.

Subsequent to the stakeholder meetings, DNR drafted legislation that would give them authority to establish rules and regulations governing the taking of freshwater turtles. The legislation was submitted to the General Assembly as companion bills going to both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The House version was titled HB603 and the Senate bill was SB203. The legislation was modified to permit continued turtle taking on private property with landowners' permission.

Unfortunately time ran out and the General Assembly adjourned without passing either measure. They will be on the docket again for this year's session of the General Assembly. Both bills can be reviewed at [www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009\\_10/](http://www.legis.ga.gov/legis/2009_10/). Interested persons can look up more information on the DNR web page by navigating to the Non-Game, E-newsletter of March 2009.

History has shown us that no species of wildlife can sustain unrestricted commercial harvesting or market hunting. The buffalo could not, nor could the ducks, the deer, or the whales. Contacts for more information include Sierra Club's Mike Murdock at [murdock1@mindspring.com](mailto:murdock1@mindspring.com) and Phil Zinmeister at [pzinmeister@oglethorpe.edu](mailto:pzinmeister@oglethorpe.edu) plus Georgia Department of Natural Resources at [www.gadnr.org/](http://www.gadnr.org/)

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**Oconee Rivers  
Audubon Society**

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

## Project FeederWatch

adapted from <http://www.birds.cornell.edu>

Help Project FeederWatch track backyard birds

Bird watchers are needed to help scientists discover changes in bird populations—like the massive southern movement of Pine Siskins during the 2008-09 season.

What happens in the backyard should not stay in the backyard—at least when it comes to bird feeders. By sharing information about which birds visit their feeders between November and April, backyard bird watchers can help scientists track changes in bird numbers and movements from year to year, through Project FeederWatch, a citizen-science program from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada.

Project FeederWatch begins on November 14 and runs through early April. Taking part is easy. Anyone can count the numbers and kinds of birds at their feeders and enter their information on the FeederWatch website. To learn more and to sign up, visit [www.feederwatch.org](http://www.feederwatch.org) or call the Cornell Lab toll-free at (866) 982-2473. In return for the \$15 fee (\$12 for Cornell Lab members) participants receive the FeederWatcher's Handbook, an identification poster of the most common feeder birds, a calendar, complete instructions, and Winter Bird Highlights, an annual summary of FeederWatch findings

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Submit information to the address above or by e-mail to [yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto: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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