



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

October 2009

Vol. 20 No. 8

**Thursday, October 1
Social at 6:00 p.m.
Program at 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society will hold its annual Social and Recipe Swap at 6:00 p.m. on October 1. Come one, come all! Share your recipes and dishes at our annual potluck of favorite appetizers and join us for an evening of socializing in the outdoors! Come snack early at 6:00 and then stay for a presentation afterwards.

Paul Smith will talk about “**Honeybees and Your Good Health**” at 7:00. His presentation emphasizes the importance of honeybees as pollinators of our food supply. He will also discuss the health benefits of various hive products (i.e. honey, pollen, royal jelly, propolis and bee venom).

Paul D. Smith moved to Athens in 1979 to work for the USEPA as an aquatic biologist. He and his wife, Alberta, are big gardeners, and Paul learned beekeeping with a UGA evening class. Paul retired in 2005 after a 37-year career. He and Albie are charter members of ORAS.

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.

Fall Bird Walks & Field Trip

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society and the Sandy Creek Nature Center co-sponsor these bird walks. We hope that both beginning and experienced birders will join us. The pace is generally slow, but participants should dress for occasionally muddy paths.

- September 26: 8:00 a.m. **State Botanical Garden** upper parking lot (Day Chapel)
- October 3: 8:00 a.m. **Sandy Creek Park** South Milledge Ave & Whitehall Rd
- October 10: 8:00 a.m. **Whitehall Forest** last lot on Campsite Dr. across dam

Going Green for the Birds!

ORAS is running a special sale on shopping bags **\$5.00 each**. You can buy them at the monthly meetings.



Each bag is made of five recycled two-liter bottles. Help the environment by carrying a bag made from trashed soda bottles that would otherwise end up in a landfill.

JIBS Bird Banding Opportunity

The Jekyll Island Banding Station will be banding birds October 3 – 18. To volunteer, contact Chris Pitman at 770/339-0916 or ovenbird@att.net

You can experience birds up close and share an awe-inspiring opportunity among the sand dunes!

SCNC Annual Bird Sale

Sandy Creek Nature Center is taking orders for bird seed through October 24. Distribution will be held on October 30 and 31. For details and an order form, see <http://www.sandycreekpark.com> or call 706-613-3615.

Seeing the Kirtland's Warbler

by Alberta M. Smith

This June, Paul and I flew into Detroit, Michigan, to hopefully see the Kirtland's Warbler. Originally I had wanted to attend one of the Kirtland's Warbler festivals, but all were held the weekend of May 15-16, which was a little earlier than we could plan to attend. Several tours are available into sites where the Kirtland's warbler nests. We chose one led by the Forest Service out of Mio, Michigan.

Arriving at the visitor center by 6:45 a.m., we were shown a film on the life of the warbler and provided updates on the nesting success in Michigan. We then traveled about 12 miles to a nesting site and were successful in hearing several singing males and observing one cooperative bird. This stand of jack pines was about 3-4 feet tall. We also stopped at another site where trees were 10 feet tall but could only hear the birds singing. We learned a lot about the Kirtland's Warbler on this guided tour.

The Kirtland's Warbler is very particular about where it nests, and can only be found nesting on the ground under living branches of small jack pine trees, 5-20 years old. This restrictive band of jack pine forest grows on Grayling sand across northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and into Ontario. The first nest was discovered in Oscoda County in northern lower Michigan in 1903 by Norman A. Wood. Until 1996 all located nests were within 60 miles of that site.

The population of Kirtland's Warbler had peaked between 1885 and 1900. With the advent of modern fire protection and suppression, nesting habitat drastically declined until the population reached a low of 167 singing males in the 1974 and 1987 and became severely endangered. Their average life expectancy is only two years!

Several ongoing management practices have aided in their recovery. About 150,000 acres of Michigan forests are currently managed for the Kirtland's Warbler. This includes logging, burning, and then reseeding or replanting 3,000 acres per year with jack pines to maintain about 38,000 productive nesting habitat acres per year.

Cowbird management was also deemed necessary for the recovery of the Kirtland's Warbler. We learned that the Brown-headed Cowbird was native to the prairies and followed the wandering herds of buffalo. Unable to roam and maintain a nest, the cowbird then began to lay its eggs in the nest of other songbirds. As Michigan forests yielded to agriculture in the 1900s, cowbirds moved in and began to parasitize the nests of Kirtland's Warblers. This is believed to have been a major factor in their decline. Since 1972, an average of 4,000 cowbirds per year have been live trapped and euthanized. We were shown these walk-in size traps, which are baited with millet, water, and live cowbirds.

The nest parasitism rate has declined from 69% in 1966-71 to less than 5% today.

In 2008 there were 1791 singing Kirtland's Warbler males counted, which exceeded the goals for delisting set in the recovery plan. Nine birds were heard in Wisconsin; there were 5 nests and 10 fledged. One nesting pair was observed in Ontario that year.

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the annual census, which is conducted the first two weeks of June. To see the Kirtland's, we would recommend going on a tour. All areas where nesting has occurred in the past two years are posted, and one cannot enter without a ranger.

AVM, Hydrilla, Coots, Bald Eagles

Dr. Susan Bennett Wilde, of UGA Warnell School of Forest Resources, talked about "Invasive species, toxic cyanobacteria, and their potential effects on waterfowl and birds of prey" at the September meeting.



*drawing by Kirsten Munson, from
http://www.audubon.org/local/cso/wetlands_images/km/*

Avian Vacuolar Myelinopathy (AVM) is an often fatal disease that primarily affects raptors and waterfowl in the Southeastern United States. To date, over 100 Bald Eagles and thousands of American coots have died from AVM. AVM bird deaths have since been confirmed in 17 different reservoirs in 5 Southeastern states, affecting Canadian Geese, Ring-neck Ducks, Mallards, Buffleheads, Great-horned Owls, and Killdeer.

Field surveys and feeding studies implicate invasive aquatic plants, especially hydrilla, and associated epiphytic cyanobacteria species as links in this emerging disease among herbivorous waterfowl and their avian predators.

Dr. Wilde is trying to elevate concerns about spreading the hydrilla to new sites, plan strategies to eliminate hydrilla in existing sites, and encourage observation of waterfowl and birds of prey to determine the prevalence of the disease in Georgia.

Bird Banding with Charlie Muise

Learn how to mist net, measure, and band birds with Charlie Muise, Georgia's Important Bird Area Coordinator and his crew of banders! Charlie Muise

runs two MAPS stations in the Atlanta area, including Panola State Park near Conyers and Joe Kurz Wildlife Management Area.

Bring water, food, cameras, sun screen, and sturdy shoes. Also, be aware that bird banding may be cancelled due to rainy or windy weather. If you would like to participate, please contact Charlie Muise at 678-967-9924 or cmmbirds@yahoo.com

- September 28: Joe Kurz, 06:45
- October 4: Panola, 06:30
- October 5: Joe Kurz, 06:50
- October 30: Joe Kurz, 07:10
- October 31: Panola, 06:50

Use eBird!

Your birding notes are essential to biologists! Tallying the species and number of individuals you see while birding is important not only for your personal records, but your lists are valuable to track birds throughout the country. The National Audubon Society and the Cornell University Lab of Ornithology encourage birders to report their sightings.

Enter your data at <http://www.ebird.org>. Login is easy. ebird not only allows scientists to monitor nationwide bird populations, but it also keeps track of your sightings for you. **Entering your lists is especially vital for Important Bird Areas** (such as the State Botanical Garden) since the Audubon Society is interested in the birds that occur there. You can also find lists for birding hotspots in Georgia and nationwide on this site!

A real-time, online checklist program, eBird has revolutionized the way that the birding community reports and accesses information about birds. Launched in 2002 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, eBird provides rich data sources for basic information on bird abundance and distribution at a variety of spatial and temporal scales.

eBird's goal is to maximize the utility and accessibility of the vast numbers of bird observations made each year by recreational and professional bird watchers. It is amassing one of the largest and fastest growing biodiversity data resources in existence.

Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge

by Eugenia Thompson

When we started making plans for a trip to visit family in Roswell, New Mexico, for late May, I knew we would see some new birds, but I really wanted to maximize our chances. I immediately started researching the area and was thrilled to find Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge (BLNWR), just a few miles outside of town.

BLNWR, established in 1937, is one of the most significant wetlands of the Pecos River watershed; it is located where the Chihuahuan Desert meets the Southern Plains. Established primarily as a breeding and wintering ground for migratory birds, it also has the distinction of having a huge variety of Odonates (over 90 species of dragonflies and damselflies). It has been designated a Globally Important Bird Area by the American Bird Conservancy and an Important Bird Area by the New Mexico Audubon Society.

Much of the refuge is closed to public use, but the public use area includes an eight-mile auto tour loop through a variety of habitats. We were lucky enough to drive this loop three times during our visit. Highlights were Black-necked Stilt*, Scaled Quail*, Greater Roadrunner*, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, White-faced Ibis, Cinnamon Teal*, Black Phoebe*, Blue-winged Teal*, Northern Shoveler*, Chihuahuan Raven*, Northern Bobwhite*, Black Tern (flying at eye level just beside the car windows), Snowy Egret*, Forster's Tern*, Great Egret, Bullock's Oriole*, Eared Grebe, Northern Harrier*, Snowy Plover*, American Avocet*, Western Meadowlark*, Blue Grosbeak. (* Asterisk denotes birds that breed at BLNWR.)

Other highlights that we saw in and around the Roswell area were White-winged Dove (very noisy and everywhere!), Great-tailed Grackle, Curve-billed Thrasher, and Ferruginous Hawk (flying over the town one day).

Now to plan another trip for the winter when thousands of Sandhill Cranes and all sorts of ducks and geese are wintering there. And then to go again in the summer after I learn to identify all the Odonates.....

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

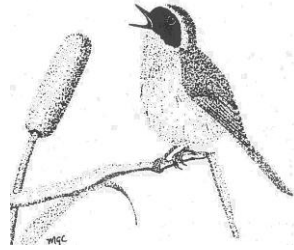
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

ORAS Volunteer Recognition



The following people were recognized at the June meeting for their contributions to the smooth running of ORAS:

- Jonathan Gray – organizing field trips and bird walks
- Gary Crider – arranging speakers for meetings
- Maggie Nettles – editing newsletter
- Page Luttrell – proofing newsletter
- Mary Case – addressing and mailing newsletter
- Elizabeth Little – organizing and printing labels for newsletter
- Ed Maioriello – leading bird walks
- Alison Huff – leading bird walks
- Kate Mowbray – educational outreach

A donation has been made to the IBA program in their honor.

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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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