



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

February 2007

Vol. 17 No. 2

Next Meeting

**Thursday, February 1, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

Rua Mordecai, of UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, will give a presentation on "Our Shared Forests," detailing some of the biological and economic connections that exist between forests in Georgia and Ecuador.

One of these connections is coffee, and we will be reminded about the many benefits of shade-grown coffee. A prime example of this coffee is produced in Ecuador by the Maquipucuna Foundation, a non-profit organization committed to preserving the biodiversity and culture of Ecuador. Its freshly roasted shade-grown coffee will accompany refreshments/snacks. You will also be able to support the Maquipucuna Foundation by purchasing some of their coffee beans.

For more details, visit the Maquipucuna website at <http://maqui.myweb.uga.edu/> and Our Shared Forests at <http://www.coe.uga.edu/~cwang/osf/index.htm>.

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.

Sad Note: On Christmas Day, Athens resident and enthusiastic volunteer Lee Meinersmann passed on. Lee had until recently been an ardent participant in Oconee Rivers Audubon Society meetings.

Sightings

Reported at the January meeting:

- **Hermit Thrush**, Old Farmington Rd, Carole Ludwig, 12/31/06
- **2 Black-capped Chickadees**, Maxeys, Leta Bird, 3 December week-ends
- **Hummingbird, female Rubythroat?**, Thomson, Leta Bird, 1/4/07
- **Fox Sparrow**, Karla and Bill O'Grady, East Athens, 12/25/06
- **300+ Turkey & Black Vultures**, roost off Jennings Mill Rd., Steve Holzman & Pete Pattavina, 12/18/06
- **Brown Creeper**, off Morton Road, Eugenia Thompson, 12/16/06 and two more times
- **Eastern Palm Warbler**, Satterfield Park, Marianne Happek, 1/2/07
- **Brown Creeper**, Clemmons, NC, Alison Huff, 12/27/06
- **4 Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows**, St. George State Park, FL, Albie Smith, 12/27/06
- **Field Sparrows**, Ann Mahoney & Fred Rossini, SE Clarke Park, 1/2/07
- **Brown Creeper**, Ann Mahoney & Fred Rossini, Cedar Creek, 1/1/07

Upcoming Events

- **February 16-19, Tenth Annual Great Backyard Bird Count.** For details, see last month's *Yellowthroat* or <http://www.audubon.org/gbbc/>
- **February 23, 6:30-7:30 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center Owl Prowl.** Search for owls that inhabit our woods during the time of year they are most active! For families. Free but please preregister—613-3615.

Local Subscribers

If you subscribe to *The Yellowthroat* and do not belong to National Audubon Society, you should check the renewal date on your newsletter's mailing label. Don't forget to renew your subscription!

Phinizy Swamp Field Trip

by Ed Maioriello

The Oconee Rivers Audubon had a field trip Saturday to the Phinizy Swamp Nature Park and the Merry Brothers Brickyard Ponds in Richmond County. We had selected this day in December to try to avoid the cold weather we had experienced when we last went in January. Alas, we got not only the coldest day of the year, but what had to be the coldest in years.

Nonetheless, we had seven hardy souls from Athens joined by Chris Feeney of the Aiken Augusta Audubon attend the trip. The day started off around 20F, but warmed to the 50's, and provided some fantastic birding. We recorded 79 different species for the day with quite a few highlights.

When we started out at the Cattail Trail, we had a flock of Rusty Blackbirds that just kept coming and coming and coming. Conservatively, there had to be over a 1000 individuals. From here we got many Mallards as well as a few Northern Pintail.

The sparrow field did not yield any great sparrows. We had a lot of Swamp Sparrows, plenty of Song Sparrows, and a few each of Field and Savannah. We did get a Sedge Wren there as well as two Eastern Meadowlarks and a few Common Yellowthroats.

The woods behind the sparrow field contained Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, two Brown Creepers, two Blue-headed Vireos, and a few Hermit Thrushes.

A restroom break at the main Campus gave all of us a great look at a Loggerhead Shrike perched on a small bare sapling toward the Rain Garden Deck.

There were Ruby-crowned Kinglets and Palm Warblers around almost all the cells as well as Sora and King Rail calling from most cells. We had visuals of Sora, American Coot, Common Moorhen, and Blue-winged Teal in cell 12. We located a Marsh Wren on the path between cell 12 and cell 5.

The American Bittern and the immature White Ibis were in cell 3, and most of the other ducks were in cells 1, 2, and 3.

The equalization pond was slow with just a few Ring-necked Duck and Pied-billed Grebe. There were quite a few Golden-crowned Kinglets on the trail by Butler Creek, and we got the American Widgeon on the creek past the bridge with more Mallard.

From there we did a quick drive through of the Merry Brothers Brickyard Ponds. Coming from the bait shack on the Main Haul road we found Ring-necked Duck, Ruddy Duck, a single Redhead, a Hooded Merganser, and a Bonaparte's Gull on the Pond to the left. We went down further and birded the pond near the freeway and found quite a few Hooded Merganser as well as several hundred American Coot.

While we were there we heard an American Pipit call. It landed nearby, and we all got a good look. Cormorant, Anhinga, Great Egret and Great Blue Heron were all over.

At this point it was pushing 4:30 and we were all tired and hungry so we called it a day. Many thanks to Chris Feeney for coming along!



Buy a Duck Stamp

adapted from <http://www.gos.org/duckstamp/duckstamp.htm> & <http://www.fws.gov/duckstamps/Info/Stamps/stampinfo.htm>

Make yourself known as a birder who supports wetland conservation. Buy a Federal Duck Stamp with a plastic holder suitable for attaching to your binoculars case or key ring from the Georgia Ornithological Society. Wear your Stamp with pride, and let others know that you support habitat conservation.

Traditionally bought as a hunting license, the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, commonly known as a "Duck Stamp," is a vital tool for wetland conservation. Ninety-eight cents out of every dollar generated by the sales of Federal Duck Stamps goes directly to purchase or lease wetland habitat for protection in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The Duck Stamp program has become one of the most successful conservation programs ever initiated and is a highly effective way to conserve America's natural resources.

Besides serving as a hunting license and a conservation tool, a current year's Federal Duck Stamp also serves as an entrance pass for National Wildlife Refuges where admission is normally charged.

GOS is selling the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp with holder for only \$15. Send a self-addressed envelope with two (2) 1st class stamps and your check for \$15 payable to GOS to:

GOS - Duck Stamp
P.O. Box 181
North High Shoals, GA 30645

Whooping Cranes

by Amy Barbe

My Saturday started out normally—a morning hike on Cook’s Trail. About 20 minutes into the woods, my phone rang. My birder friend Lisa was calling excitedly about the Operation Migration Whooping Cranes. I had called her Thanksgiving morning to let her know they were most likely flying over Hiawassee Wildlife Refuge over the week-end. She had driven over and spent the night, but the cranes ended up being grounded for nine days—which meant that (we hoped) they would be flying over the next day. So we decided to try to catch a sight of them and headed out.

Stopping by the Refuge at 10:00 p.m. after the long drive to Tennessee, we immediately heard a loud hoot from a Great Horned Owl, followed by some weird, raspy short dog barks. Turns out we were hearing the Short-eared Owl! Then we heard the Sandhill Cranes as they murmured amongst themselves.

With the full moon shining down, I was ready to bunk right there and listen to the birds all night, but it was rather chilly, so we went on to Dayton.

Sunday morning we were on our way by 5:45. As the night sky brightened, we could see movement in the trees around us. A birdhouse on a nearby tree took shape—and as we watched, one, then two, and eventually nine Bluebirds piled out sleepily and seemed surprised to have an audience but quickly got busy foraging for breakfast.

As dawn broke, scattered clouds took on a silvery pink, purple, orange, red, and gold tint. Our eyes, however, were looking westward, scanning for trikes. About this time Liz Condie showed up. You may recognize her name from the Operation Migration field journal; she writes the daily updates—http://www.operationmigration.org/Field_Journal.html. She had a radio, so we could hear the dialogue between the bird handlers and the trike pilots, and BOY did we all get excited! By then, about 40 cars were in the parking lot, and scopes and binoculars were everywhere.

We could now see the lay of the land before us. The Tennessee and Hiawassee Rivers merge and create a triangular island. The surrounding areas were planted with corn to feed the thousands of Sandhill Cranes that migrate through each year. We soon realized we were surrounded by Sandhills. A true bird lover’s paradise! From the cranes to the many ducks and herons and egrets to the blackbirds and Pine Warblers in the trees, there were birds everywhere.

Then a shout from Liz: “The trikes are in the air!” In only a moment, we sighted one, then two, and then all four. Imagine a crowd of folks staring up as a trike buzzed us closely and a man in a whooping crane suit waved to us. We heard the handlers give the A-OK, and the lead pilot flew over the whoopers. All but two flew out and up, so they called out the swamp monster. Then all 18 were in the air!

One huge circle around the area, and the whoopers were off—15 of them at least. The others entertained us for 30 minutes while the pilots tried to get them on wing. Remember, this is a wonderful spot for birds, and the whoopers had been grounded for nine days, then had flown a grueling flight over the Cumberland Ridge the previous day. They thought they had a nice spot to spend a few days. Eventually, though, two birds followed, and after a couple hours of searching, the final one was located and crated and driven to the next stop, in Gordon County, Georgia.

I have followed Operation Migration for years, but never had I seen a Whooping Crane. What a production—one I hope to witness again.

Burn Boss

summarized by Maggie Nettles

Burn Boss and Ecologist, Shan Cammack, combines her enthusiasm for fire with her love for nature by working for the Nongame Conservation Section in the Wildlife Resources Division of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

At the January ORAS meeting of about 60 people, Shan explained the dramatic difference between a wildfire and a prescribed fire. After outlining the type of training a person must have before using fire as a tool, she explained the multiple factors that a Burn Boss must consider in planning a fire—weather, of course, but more specifically wind speed and direction, precipitation, atmospheric stability, and relative humidity. She described how she must analyze the topography of a potential burn area, the kind of fuel that would be available on the site, and even the seasonal growth cycles of the plants.

Then she talked about Georgia’s varied ecosystems and plants that need fire, mentioning especially the longleaf pines and wiregrass of areas like Moody Forest Natural Area as well as the pitcher plants of bogs like Doerun Pitcherplant Bog Natural Area.

For plants, she said, fire promotes diversity, cycles nutrients and regenerates fire-dependent plants. For animals, fire provides both habitat benefits and forage benefits.

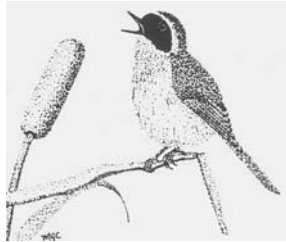
Athens 2006 CBC Report

by Eugenia Thompson

The Athens 2006 Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, December 16, under blue skies and in balmy temperatures. Fifty-two participants counted 89 species (almost 14,000 individual birds).

Highlights were Wild Turkey (five seen in western Clarke county), Northern Harrier, Wilson's Snipe, American Woodcock (a good total of nine this year), Great Horned Owl (another good total of nine), a single Loggerhead Shrike, a single Gray Catbird, Orange-crowned Warbler, Wilson's Warbler, Palm Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Vesper Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Purple Finch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and one Selaphorus Hummingbird.

We would love to have more participants, so if this sounds like fun to you, get out your new 2007 calendars, and mark the date for this year's CBC – December 17, 2007.



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The Yellowthroat

Published monthly by the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

Submit information by e-mail to maggie_netles@charter.net or mail to PO Box 81082 Athens, GA 30608. 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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