



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

January 2009

Vol. 20 No. 1

Next Meeting
Thursday, January 8, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center

April Ingle, Executive Director of Georgia River Network, will talk about “**The Flint River: Jimmy Carter, 300+Paddlers, Riverkeepers and Metro Atlanta’s Thirst for Water**” at the January 8 ORAS meeting.

She will highlight the current battle to build new dams on the Flint River with photos and stories at the January 8 ORAS meeting. She will discuss the fight against the same dams in the 1970s and how 300+ Georgia Paddlers brought President Jimmy Carter into the modern fight in the summer of 2008 and how a new group of activists have come together to protect the Flint with a new Flint Riverkeeper.

For additional information on Georgia River Network, see <http://www.garivers.org>

Added note: Paddle Georgia 2009 will take place June 20-26 on the Coosawattee / Oostanaula Rivers in Northwest Georgia. For additional information about Paddle Georgia, check out the information and photos at http://www.garivers.org/paddle_georgia/pghome.html.

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.

Sightings Reported at December Meeting

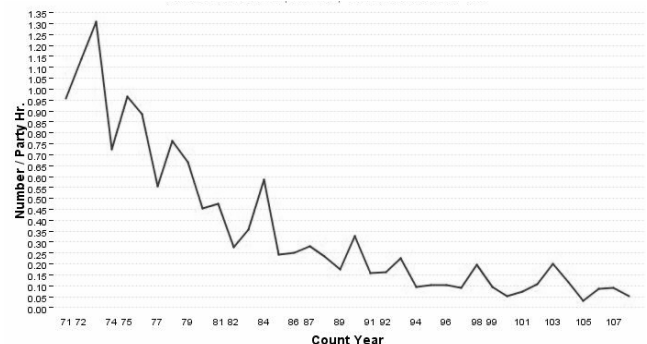
- 100 **Pine Siskins**, Mark Freeman, Old Farmington Rd., 11/4/08.
- **White-crowned Sparrow** (immature), Jim Hanna, Georgia Botanical Garden, 11/23/08.
- 11 **Wild Turkeys**, Eugenia Thompson, Millstone Circle, 11/10/08.
- 2 **Brown-headed Nuthatches**, **Pine Warbler**, Kay Gammons, Clotfelter Rd., 12/4/08.

ORAS Chairpersons & Contact Info

Program Chair	Gary Crider program@oconeeriversaudubon.org
Field Trip Chair	Jonathan Gray
Education Chair	Kate Mowbray education@oconeeriversaudubon.org
Conservation Chair	Verna Johnson conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org
Membership Chair	Brad Hogue membership@oconeeriversaudubon.org
Hospitality Chair	Sarah Cliett
Yellowthroat Editor	Maggie Nettles editor@oconeeriversaudubon.org
Fundraising Chair	<i>vacant</i>
Volunteer Coordinator	<i>vacant</i>

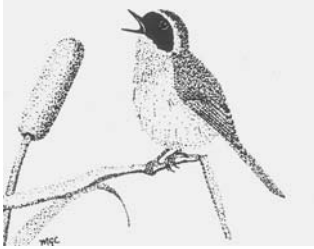
Guess

Read the newsletter to learn what species this graph represents—a drastic decline in Georgia from 830 in 1973 to 65 in 2007 and only one in the Athens count circle.



Conservation Corner Sounds Out on Sprewell Bluff State Park

by Verna Johnson,
Conservation Chair



Sprewell Bluff State Park is located ten miles west of Thomaston, in west central Georgia. The Georgia State Park web site describes it as a little-known gem on the Flint River, perfect for a daytime getaway. On approximately 1,372 acres, this park offers a three mile trail that winds along the bank of the Flint River and up rocky bluff. A boat ramp provides an access point for paddlers and anglers.

Charlie Muise of Lamar County recently posted on *Georgia Birding Online* (GABO) a concern regarding the potential closing of Sprewell Bluff State Park. Charlie posted the following entry:

The recent post about birds at Sprewell Bluff State Park in Upson County stirred me to let you all in on a very important issue here in Georgia. There have been rumors for a few years about the possible closing of Sprewell Bluff State Park. A friend with state connections recently let me know that there has been serious talk about this in the state legislature in the last 2 weeks.

Sprewell Bluff is more than just a beautiful place that offers high-quality family recreation. It hosts a rare plant community; it hosted the endangered Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) less than 20 years ago; it was the site of the northernmost recent observation of Coral Snake. Sprewell Bluff could, I'm told, have Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) again, with proper management. But it is hard to support the time and money proper management would entail on a site that may be closed on a whim.

And this is only part of a larger problem; the drought fostered many bad ideas. Among them is the resurrection of a dam on the Flint River. In my opinion, this could be the single biggest environmental issue in Georgia at this time. A legislator out of northeast Georgia - HOURS away from the Flint, has proposed spending money to research the feasibility of a dam. The closing of Sprewell Bluff would certainly make it a more politically viable option.

I urge you to contact your state legislators ASAP and let them know that closing Sprewell Bluff would be a very bad idea.

Thank you, Charlie, for your contribution to the Conservation Corner. Readers, check out postings at <http://www.birdingonthe.net/maillinglists/GABO.html>

To submit an article for Conservation Corner, email us at conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org

ORAS and IBA Goals

by Alison Huff

Georgia's newest Important Bird Area, the State Botanical Garden, may not hold that distinction for long. Honored in May 2008, the Garden became an IBA after the dedicated efforts of several Oconee Rivers Audubon Society members who spent over two years gathering technical data that solidified the Garden's importance to native birds and neotropical migrants. Now plans are under way to name a new IBA in northeast Georgia.

Charlie Muise, Georgia's IBA Coordinator, has been in contact with members of ORAS to enlist our help in naming the Sandy Creek Nature Center and Park as the next IBA in Georgia. With an unusual combination of swampland, riparian and large lake habitats, the two parks, connected by the footpath known as Cook's Trail, offer some of the best birding in our area. A recent fall walk on the four-mile Cook's Trail revealed a large flock of American Black Ducks, Wilson's Snipe, a pair of Green-winged Teal and magnificent looks at a Fox Sparrow. In springtime migrations, it is not unusual to encounter "clouds" of warblers foraging through the tree tops along Sandy Creek.

The Important Bird Areas Program (IBA) is a global effort to identify and conserve areas that are vital to birds and other biodiversity. By working with local Audubon chapters, landowners, public agencies, community groups, and other non-profits, National Audubon endeavors to interest and activate a broad network of supporters to ensure that all Important Bird Areas are properly managed and conserved. To become an IBA, a potential site must meet some general criteria standards, which include a reliable estimate of the number of birds of a particular species at a site in a season and in a year, with particular emphasis on species that are threatened or endangered.

Several ORAS members are already collecting the data that will help designate Sandy Creek Nature Center and Park an official IBA site. So far, 133 species have been recorded at these sites, and ongoing seasonal work is planned. Helping in this exciting project could not be easier. Simply bird it and list it. When you visit either the Nature Center or the Park, make a list of the birds you encounter. Then post them on eBird using the existing Georgia Hotspot locations for Sandy Creek Nature Center or Sandy Creek Park. If you bird the Oxbow Lake on Cook's Trail, include those sightings in the Sandy Creek Park list only.

Contact ORAS president Vanessa Lane (aiko@geckolair.com) or Alison Huff (arhuff@uga.edu) for more information. You can also visit the Georgia IBA web site for a complete list of all current and potential IBA sites at www.atlantaudubon.org/aaswww/iba/iba.htm. The eBird site is www.ebird.org and click the button "submit observations."

Note from *The Hyla*

Sandy Creek Nature Center is offering an owl prowl on February 20, 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. for families (children under 13 must be accompanied by an adult). Please pre-register by calling 706-613-3615 ext. 0.

A Pileated Woodpecker on Thanksgiving Day

from *Sigrid Sanders' Birding Notes* at <http://www.sigridsanders.com/birding/index.html>

The dead pines clustered in one section of the woods behind our house continue to attract woodpeckers, including Downy, Hairy, Red-bellied – and early this afternoon a Pileated Woodpecker that spent more than an hour working on one trunk after another. I heard its traveling call as it moved through the trees down near the creek, and about 15 minutes later, heard the sound of loud whacks nearby, and found it about three-quarters of the way up the trunk of one of the larger dead trees. It was a male, with a full red crest and thin red moustache stripe punctuating the white and black stripes on its face.

He worked hard and steadily, turning his head on the snake-like neck to chop at the bark sideways, and using his bill to flick off huge slabs that went flying. Then he struck the bared bark more directly and occasionally seemed to find something to eat. I couldn't see well enough to see the barbed tongue coming out to lick up the ants or grubs he was probably finding. He made his way up the trunk, staying longer in some spots than in others, and leaving rectangular patches stripped of bark behind him. As he hitched his way up, his big gray claws made scratching sounds. He stayed remarkably focused on the task, not often looking around, but turning his head to flip off chunks of bark and then pounding straight into the cleared spots.

It was a clear, colorful day, warm in the sunshine, cool in the shade, with a soft blue sky and faint breezes. Brown-headed Nuthatches, Chickadees and Titmice carried on a lively chatter in the green pines and hardwoods, and Yellow-rumped Warblers flitted from place to place. Two or three Carolina Wrens sang and fussed somewhere nearby, and one Ruby-crowned Kinglet made its dry, staccato call as it moved through a dogwood and the dry, red-brown leaves of an oak.

After several minutes, the Pileated Woodpecker hopped to another dead pine close by, spreading its wings enough to show dramatic flashes of white. From there, he moved to another tree fairly soon, then to another and another, each time trying out several spots on the trunk, fiercely clearing off patches of bark, but apparently not finding much of interest, and moving on. Finally, he found a spot about midway up another tree that seemed to his liking, and stayed there working for a good while. In this tree, he was often in perfect profile against the blue sky, showing off the broad black back and tail, the large head and powerful bill, the long ribbon of white on the black neck, and the pure, clear scarlet of his crest.

Pileated Woodpeckers are considerably less common here than they were only a few years ago, so I'm particularly happy when I get the chance to watch one for a while like this. This one was still working in the dead pines when I finally had to go back inside – one thing among many to be thankful for on a beautiful, peaceful Thanksgiving Day.

CBC History: National & Local

summarized by *Maggie Nettles*

The December meeting featured a **Panel Discussion and Question/Answer Session on the Christmas Bird Count (CBC)** with Steve Holzman, Eugenia Thompson, and Vanessa Lane.

Steve—list manager for Georgia Birding Online and member of Georgia Ornithological Society's executive committee—talked about the origins of the CBC and its evolution into an important international Citizen Science tradition. In addition he brought some wonderfully detailed maps of each section of the Athens-area circle. Eugenia, former ORAS president and longtime CBC organizer, shared some of the history of the local CBC count circle. Vanessa, our current president, provided the enthusiastic perspective of a new participant.

Steve explained the concept of the bird count circle as a fifteen-mile diameter circle designated by the National Audubon Society (not a flexible circle, to the disappointment of some in the audience, who had hoped their own yards could be included). The 2008 Athens count circle contains 16 divisions, with a leader for each route.

One little-promoted fact: Persons who live within a designated CBC circle are welcome to count the birds at their feeders. They would need to contact the local Compiler to report results on the Count Day. That is, they would need to make arrangements with Mary Case (mecase@uga.edu) or Eugenia Thompson (ERobertthom@bellsouth.net).

Some highlights from Eugenia's history of the Athens area CBC circle included information on the earliest counts and notes on various recorded highs and lows. The first count was in 1949. The next one didn't take place until 1962. The first date there are records for Athens on the CBC website is December 18, 1972. The records show that 12 people participated. They reported 78 species, including Ruffed Grouse (!), Monk Parakeet (!), Purple Finch (61), and Evening Grosbeak (6).

Those early counts provide quite a contrast to last year's local count on December 15, 2007, with 40 participants and 85 species reported. The year with the highest species count was 2006 with 89 species. The highest number of participants—54—occurred in 1994.

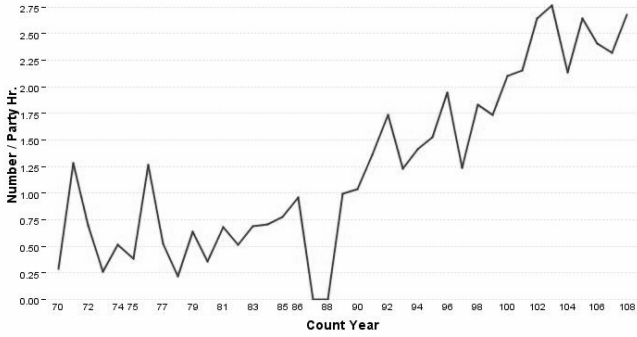
Eugenia noted that the CBC website could provide a curious birder with all kinds of illustrations of population trends and suggested that we should browse www.audubon.org/bird/cbc. For example, the local high count for Wild Turkey was 46 in 1991. One species she highlighted was the Northern Bobwhite, which has shown a steep decline:

- 68 in 1986
- 27 in 1992
- 1 in 2007
- Many recent years were zero.

The CBC data can show a species rapidly increasing or a species irrupting irregularly (see graphs below for Georgia, 1970-2007).

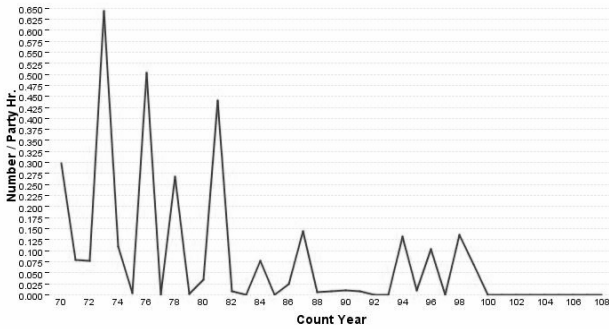
Steve's Test Question: What bird does this graph represent?

Canada Goose, US-GA, From Count 70 to 108



Steve's Test Question: What bird does this graph represent?

Evening Grosbeak, US-GA, From Count 70 to 108



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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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