



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

June 2007

Vol. 17 No. 6

**Next Meeting:
Annual Picnic & Elections
Thursday, June 7, 6:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Park**

ORAS will hold its annual picnic and election of officers on **June 7 at 6:00 p.m. at Sandy Creek Park** at a picnic shelter. Come and join us for this fun potluck meeting. The agenda includes elections, volunteer recognition, food, and canoeing. Bring your canoe if you have one or use one from the park, and let's have fun together. Park entrance will be free for ORAS participants, and dessert will be provided.

So mark your calendars for Thursday June 7 at 6:00 p.m. Thank you, **Sandy Creek Park** for hosting us on our last meeting of the year. And thank you, **Sandy Creek Nature Center** for hosting all the other monthly meetings.

Sightings

Reported at the May meeting (no dates, to save space):

- Great Horned Owl, Manita & O.C. Dean, Kenney Ridge
- Great Blue Herons (two, circling), Manita Dean, Kenney Ridge
- Bald Eagle (older immature), Liz & Mike Conroy, Huntsville, AL
- Wood Thrush, Alison Huff, Clemmons, NC
- Blackpoll Warbler, Ovenbird, Cape May Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Vanessa Lane, Old Epps Bridge Rd.
- Mississippi Kites, a pair, Tim Homan, Congaree Swamp
- Louisiana Waterthrush, Eugenia Thompson & Dennis Rice, creek near Morton Rd
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Julie Greene, Rivergrove Parkway
- White-breasted Nuthatch, nesting, Linda Russell, Roswell, GA
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Black Poll Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, Carole Ludwig & Mark Freeman, Old Farmington Rd., Oconee County
- Wood Thrushes, Redwing Blackbird, Meadow Lark, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Kingbird, Sarah Cliett, Madison County
- Orchard Oriole, Red-shouldered Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Goldfinch, Eastern Kingbird, Cheryl Ludwig, Bishop

- Baltimore Oriole, 4 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, 17 warbler species including Canada, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, American Redstart, Chestnut-sided, Joel McNeal, Botanical Garden
- Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, warblers including Black Poll, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, Anne Mahoney & Fred Rossini, Cedar Creek

Youth Birding Competition 2007

The Kestrels: Elliott Radcliffe and Adrian Tasistro-Hart

The Kestrels participated in the Youth Birding Competition identifying 63 species of birds, 20 more than last year.

Beginning on Tybee Island on Saturday evening, the team identified shorebirds and gulls. The day ended with a visit to the marsh with a discovery of Red-winged Blackbirds and a Marsh Wren.

Waking up early Sunday morning, the Kestrels went to the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge (SNWR). The first habitat was hard woods where the team quickly identified a few small birds such as the Yellow-rumped Warbler and Common Yellowthroat. What seemed like a failure of an idea, the visit to the SNWR perked up when we saw a Moorhen. Immediately after seeing the Moorhen, a rare Swallow-tailed Kite flew overhead, followed by a huge flock of White and Glossy Ibises. The team was puzzled by a large bird of prey, at first mistaken for a Bald Eagle, but later realizing it was an Osprey. Continuing along the road, the Kestrels stopped when Adrian spied a Purple Gallinule hiding in the reeds.

After attempting to visit the Beaverdam WMA, which was closed, the team headed to the Charlie Elliott WMA. Driving along 441N., Adrian noticed a white crane like-bird walking among some cows, which was a Cattle Egret and led to the discovery of Brown-headed Cowbirds among the cows. The third bird of prey for the day was the Red-tailed Hawk seen while driving along the highway. Racing to get the last few species before 6:00 p.m., the boys spotted ten additional birds at the Charlie Elliott WMA. The last bird of the day was the Eastern Phoebe, which they heard as they were going to the visitors' center.

The day ended with a banquet, birds of prey show, and an awards ceremony. At the ceremony, the Kestrels won first place for raising the most money for a charity. The team will contribute \$491.75 to Operation Migration – The Whooping Crane Project.

A Tribute to David

by Sigrid Sanders

One hot summer afternoon in the low country of South Carolina, a Bachman's Sparrow sat in the branches of a small longleaf pine, singing. Against a background spray of pale green needles, the subtle, brown, gray and rose colors of the sparrow reflected the patterns of the pine bark, and showed an intricate beauty no field guide even comes close to capturing. We stood so close every detail was clear, and we could see its throat tremble as it lifted its head to sing, again and again, two clear whistled notes, followed by a trill.

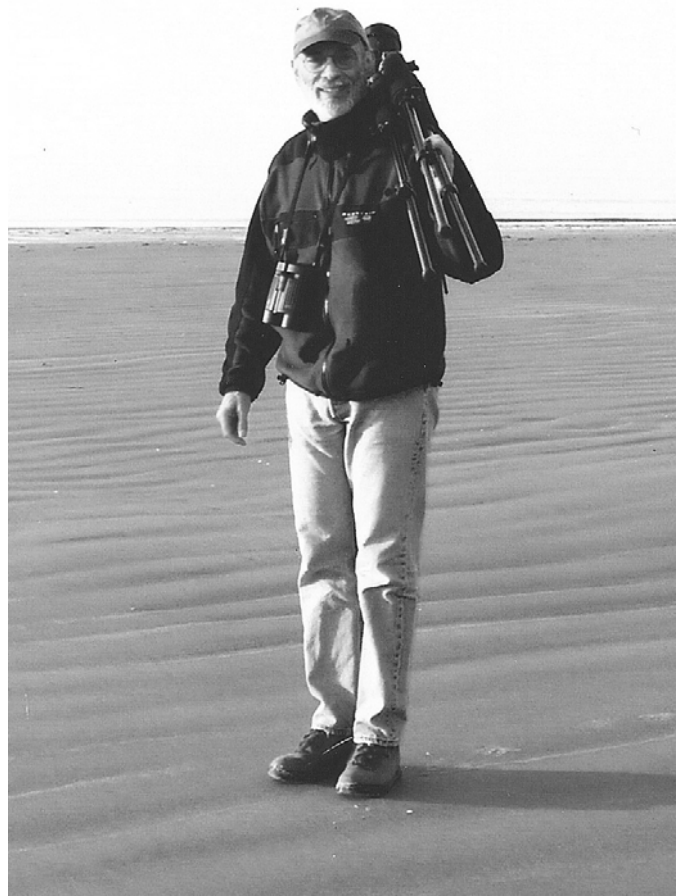
That unforgettable moment was a gift from David Galewski, Athens birder and longtime member of the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society, who died suddenly May 1. It was one of many such moments made possible for others by David's knowledge of birds – especially of their songs and calls – and by his willingness and ability to share the joys of birding with others. As field trip leader for ORAS for several years, he planned and led many bird walks and trips, and was uncommonly generous with his time and energy.

The trip to South Carolina, for example, where we saw the Bachman's Sparrow, was typical: David had spent hours planning the trip, researching the sites we should visit, going over the field marks and songs of the birds we hoped to find, and lining up places to stay. So all we had to do was pile into the car with our gear and go – and be willing to get up at an outrageous hour of the morning and keep birding all day until the sun went down and we were all about ready to collapse.

One of the nicest things about David was his genuine sense of wonder. He was never too cool to show his enthusiasm, not only for unusual birds, but even for the most common. But his favorite birds – the ones he would really get excited about and looked forward to seeing again and again – were shorebirds. He knew them down to the smallest detail of plumage and the most obscure call. Without his encouragement and help, I might never have seen and learned to recognize so many of the shorebirds that winter along the southeastern coast.

And he didn't only point out field marks – he took delight in the unique personality of each one, so we didn't just check them off on a life list. Each one acquired a colorful and memorable identity, and became much more than a name or a picture. I'll never hear the tew-tew-tew! of a Greater Yellowlegs, see the silvery flash of a Forster's Tern's wings, or hear the pee-oo-eee of a Black-bellied Plover, without thinking of David – and of the huge, immediate smile that filled his face whenever he encountered them again.

I can think of few gifts greater than the ones he gave to me and to many other birding friends – gifts of beauty, of music, and of living intensely in the moment. Remembering him and the joy he found in the natural world, especially in birds, will always make me smile.



photograph by Linda Russell

One Hot Day

by Maggie Nettles

David Galewski entered my life during one of his Botanical Garden runs when he paused to ask Gary Crider and me (both peering through our binoculars) to identify the bird he kept hearing during his run on that trail. Gary identified the bird and the next day mailed David a tape of bird calls. Thus began David's love of birding.

He immediately learned the mnemonics for the various bird songs and calls and soon became expert at hearing and identifying the birds. His passion for birds and for teaching led him to agree to serve as the ORAS bird walk leader, and for several years he shared his enthusiasm with those who joined him on bird walks, which often took place at the Botanical Garden.

David loved to run on hot days. He loved listening to birds at the Botanical Garden. On a recent warm day with bird migration at its peak, David went for his last run at the Garden. Shortly after, he died. We all miss him, but I like to think that he spent his last day doing precisely what he loved to do.

Commentary on Thinking

by John Willis

Growing up, and later as a student of biology, I was thoroughly indoctrinated with the need to avoid anthropocentrism in interpreting the behavior of animals. When one sees a squirrel burying acorns in the fall, I was taught, this is NOT an industrious animal consciously planning ahead for the coming winter, but simply the display of a built-in program being carried out in response to external cues. This paradigm has been supreme in the realms of both biology and comparative psychology for over a hundred years, but lately cracks have begun to occur.

The first tremor in my personal experience, was occasioned by the appearance of a book, *Animal Awareness*, about 30 years ago written by one of my graduate school mentors, Donald Griffin, the rediscoverer of bat echolocation and expert on bird migration. He argued that when a killdeer does her "broken wing" act, she is aware of (conscious of) what she is doing - or at least we don't have sufficient evidence to believe otherwise. Many thought that Griffin had gone "round the bend"; for my part I merely shook my indoctrinated head in wonder.

True, we had all that accumulating evidence on chimpanzees making tools and other primates being cooperative and linguistic, but, heck, those are so close to human beings that they hardly count as an exception. But birds!?!? No way. They are well-known to be the essential little mental automatons. But then, as I began reviewing articles for the *Yellowthroat* in the past few years, a different image presented itself to my brain (now at the gaga age that Griffin's was when he wrote that book).

First there were those Caledonian Crows (*Yellowthroat*, January 2002) with their remarkable ability to make tools from Pandanus leaves and to fashion a tool, without previous experience, from a piece of wire to fish for inaccessible food. Then there was Dr. Nicola Clayton and her Scrub Jays, a long way from home in Cambridge, England, who showed all sorts of cunning in hiding food from peers and remembering where to find it later (*Yellowthroat*, June 2005).

More recently Dr. Clayton and two colleagues have extended these studies with widely acclaimed results (*Nature* 445:919, 2007). While these were briefly alluded to in an article in last month's *Yellowthroat*, they deserve a fuller description. Her jays were kept in a three-chambered cage and fed in the evening in the central compartment. In the morning, they were confined to one of the other two compartments. In the first of two experiments they were provided with breakfast in one compartment but not the other. The jays used the opportunity of the evening meal to cache peanuts in the "no-breakfast" compartment three times more than in the "breakfast" compartment. In the second experiment they received kibble for breakfast in one compartment and peanuts in the other. The jays stored the deficient item in each in preference to the same item. These well-controlled experiments are judged superior to recent experiments on chimpanzees and bonobos in demonstrating a capacity to plan for the future (*Nature* 445:825, 2007),

though the authors point out that they cannot say whether the birds "picture themselves" in the future or are operating at a simpler level. There are many subtleties both of the design and of the criticism of the interpretation of such experiments, but to my mind the results justify the courageous stand that Griffin took three decades ago. It is just as anthropocentric to proclaim, as Daniel Gilbert does, "The human being is the only animal that thinks about the future" (*Stumbling on Happiness*, 2006, Alfred Knopf, p.4), as it is to assume that other animals storing nuts for the winter (or tomorrow's breakfast) means that they do, too.

Birds Do Think!!

by Walt Cook

This is more evidence that birds do think, as reported in May's *Yellowthroat*. This isn't research, but an eyewitness event.

We were driving north on I-5, in California, and stopped at a roadside shelter to eat a picnic lunch. As we were sitting at the table, eating our sandwiches and crackers, we noticed a starling on the floor looking up at us, seemingly begging for food. Then we noticed it had only one leg. Although the loss of a leg isn't as serious for a bird as it might seem, we still pitied the bird, who did its best to look pitiful. So we tossed it a piece of bread.

WOW!! In an INSTANT, the floor was thick with starlings. At least fifteen birds had come out of nowhere and were jostling one another for the bread. The one-legged bird never had a chance.

We deduced the one-legged starling was a shill. The flock had somehow discovered that it could elicit pity - and food - from visitors to the shelter, where the healthy birds could not. Certainly, starlings are not on the list of most admired birds, and if the flock had appeared first, they would likely have been shooed away.

So, do birds, with their tiny little bird-brains, actually reason? Animal experts say no, but I say yes.

Dragonflies and Damselflies

summarized by Maggie Nettles

Giff Beaton entertained and educated a packed room at the May meeting with his enthusiastic presentation on dragonflies and damselflies. After providing background on body parts and taxonomy, he talked about odonate life cycles, habits, and habitats—all illustrated with stories from his personal experiences and with his photographs, available in his new book, *Dragonflies & Damselflies of Georgia and the Southeast*.

He made the larval, or nymph, stage of dragonflies sound so interesting some of us were ready to start searching water edges for their cast-off shells.

Among the many species he introduced, a memorable one was the Gray Petaltail, which occupies the unusual, for dragonflies, habitat of tree trunks, with its nymphs living in moist leaf litter on edges of seeps. This dragonfly resembles a 300-million year-old fossil although the fossil has a wing span of over two feet.

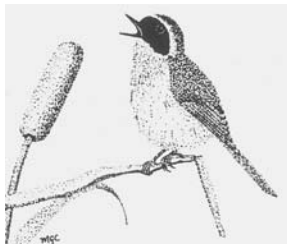
All Women's Birding Bust

By Eugenia Thompson

At last, Georgia's annual All Women's Birding Bust included a team from Athens.

Mary Case, Page Luttrell, and Eugenia Thompson made up the Athens Yellowthroats and spent much of Saturday, April 28, birding in a three-county area (Clarke, Oconee, and Greene) with tiny bits of two other counties. In eight hours of perfect spring weather, we counted 82 species. The highlight of highlights was the colorful triumvirate of Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Baltimore Oriole seen in a small group of trees at the end of old Barnett Shoals Road, a quick detour in our plans. Other highlights were 75-100 Black Vultures, a Great Egret, and three Ospreys at Dyar Pasture, Spotted Sandpipers at a swamp near Scull Shoals and at Oconee River Park, a surprise White-breasted Nuthatch at Oconee River Park, a Barred Owl calling in the middle of the morning and two Wild Turkeys in a field on Ward Road, two Loggerhead Shrikes (one on Old Farmington Road, one at Bostwick Sod Farm).

So all you women out there, make plans now to include the AWBB in next spring's birding. You can cover as much or as little territory as you want, and all you have to count is species.



Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

President	Edwige Damron	613-9875
Vice-President	Mary Case	548-3848
Treasurer	Jim McMinn	
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PO Box 81082
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Submit information by e-mail to maggie_netles@charter.net or mail to PO Box 81082 Athens, GA 30608.

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