



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

March 2007

Vol. 17 No. 3

Next Meeting: A Double Feature! Thursday, March 1, 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center

Georgia's Important Bird Areas

Mary Elfner, the new Georgia Important Bird Areas Coordinator, will talk about "Georgia's Important Bird Areas, There's One Close to You!"

Audubon, as the Partner for BirdLife International, is working to identify a network of sites that provide critical habitat for birds. This effort, known as the Important Bird Areas Program (IBA), recognizes that habitat loss and fragmentation are the most serious threats facing populations of birds across America and around the world. The Georgia Important Bird Area program recognizes 48 sites throughout Georgia (with more on the way), including one of our newest—The Georgia Botanical Gardens/UGA Whitehall Forest. Come find out more about our efforts in Georgia regarding this global effort to conserve bird habitats and what you can do to help.

eBird—Birding on the Web

Bill O'Grady and Ed Maioriello will demonstrate the use of the eBird.org web site during a short session at the beginning of the meeting. The eBird White Paper says that "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. For example, in 2006, participants reported more than 4.3 million bird observations across North America.

The observations of each participant join those of others in an international network of eBird users. eBird then shares these observations with a global community of educators, land managers, ornithologists, and conservation biologists. "

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.

Upcoming Spring Bird Walks

Have you heard the birds starting to sing? Time to get outdoors and join the spring bird walks, which ORAS sponsors jointly with Sandy Creek Nature Center. Whether you are an experienced birder or a beginner, come join us as we witness the miracle of the northward migration. Call Ed Maioriello at 208-8504 for details.

- March 24, **Botanical Garden**
Meet in upper parking lot at 8:00 a.m.
- March 31, **Sandy Creek, north end of Cook's Trail**
Meet in the farthest parking lot at the end of Campsite Drive.
- April 7, **UGA Whitehall Forest:**
Meet at gate for caravan in at 8:00 a.m.
(Don't be late!)
- April 14, **Sandy Creek Nature Center**
Meet at Allen House at 8:00 a.m.
- April 21, **Botanical Garden**
Meet in upper parking lot at 8:00 a.m.
- May 5, **Sandy Creek Nature Center**
Bird walk and Cook's Trail Cleanup
Meet at Allen House at 8:00 a.m.

Upcoming Spring Field Trips

Check the April newsletter for additional details.

- April 28 Field trip to **Kennesaw Mountain**
- May 12 Field trip to **Georgia International Horse Park** (Conyers)
- May 19 Field trip to **Ivy Log Gap Road/Sosebee Cove**

Avocets, Goldeneyes, and Snowy Plovers—A Mid-Winter Trip to the Florida Panhandle

by Sigrid Sanders

On a balmy January morning in St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, the striking black and white plumage of two long-legged American Avocets stood out against the murky background of a mudflat. Around the Avocets – with their neatly shaped, small round heads and very thin, upturned bills – the mudflat stirred all over with other shorebirds, sandpipers, herons, egrets and ducks. Several Greater Yellowlegs – tall sandpipers with long yellow legs and lively, animated behavior – fed near the Avocets, probing the shallow water for prey, and occasionally sparring with each other over a choice spot.

Three Reddish Egrets raised their wings and hopped in their comical “dancing” way to stir up fish in a shallow pool. A Great Blue Heron hunched at the edge of the pond. Buffleheads, Common Moorhens and American Coots swam in and out of the grasses. Feeding together in one area were Dowitchers, Semipalmated Plovers, Western Sandpipers, Dunlins, one Black-bellied Plover, and a Willet. In the background, we could hear the “chet-chet-chet” of a Marsh Wren, and now and then the “tew-tew-tew” of a Greater Yellowlegs, or the raucous cackle of a Common Moorhen.

The scene at Stoney Bayou Pool in St. Mark’s Refuge was one of the highlights of a trip by five ORAS members to the Florida Panhandle region January 12-15 (MLK weekend). The group (Bob Gadd, David Galewski, Marianne Happek, Linda Russell and myself) stayed in Panacea, in a beach house on the Gulf, a great location for birding several different places in the area. The trip was made even better by the friendly and generous help of Florida birders and other residents from the local area, who told us about new places to bird and about recent sightings – such as a Western Kingbird near Carabelle Beach, which we found, flashing its yellow belly and black tail around a picnic pavilion.

Other highlights included both Piping Plovers and Snowy Plovers on the beach in St. George’s Island State park; solitary Black-bellied Plovers feeding on the same beach – each one of them followed everywhere by two attendant Sanderlings; two sightings of mature Bald Eagles; and more than a dozen American Oystercatchers in different places.

One evening near sunset, on a small trail along Oyster Bay, we found both Nelson’s Sharp-tailed Sparrow and Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow. The subtle differences in sparrows can be frustrating – I’m still often tempted just to throw up my hands and say, “It’s a sparrow!” But the soft, muted orange that suffused the facial markings of the Nelson’s as it perched in a scrubby bush made it individual and memorable.

In all, we recorded a total of 130 species. One of our last sightings came on Monday, under a cloudy, somber sky. For several minutes, we watched a pair of brilliantly marked Common Goldeneyes floating not far from a fishing pier in

Bald Point State Park. The water in the bay was dark and restless, and the ducks looked as if they were resting, at times tucking their heads, at others looking around calmly. The male’s golden eye gleamed against his black head with its white marking, and the female’s eye shined equally bright in her handsome, dark red head. Silvery gray and white Forster’s terns fluttered over the water and chattered “kerrr-kerrr,” and three serene and almost other-worldly White Pelicans swam gracefully by, gliding past the pier.

Catastrophic Loss & A Lone Survivor: Class of 2006 Ultralight-led Cranes

by Maggie Nettles, based on information from http://www.operationmigration.org/Field_Journal.html

“Tornado in Central Florida” warned the first news reports. Then came the devastating announcement that the tornado had killed the 18 Whooping Cranes that had so recently completed their migration south, coached by people in crane costumes and led by ultralights.

Many of us had followed the cranes’ migration from Wisconsin to Florida and the daily trials of their shepherds in the online Operation Migration field journal. Recently, we had enjoyed lighthearted entries like the following one from January 26 that also explains why they still needed their shepherds:

“Poor little chickies. First we put them in a very muddy top netted pen. Then we let them out so they have the pleasure of coming and going as they see fit. But wait a minute, who are those big white birds hogging the food and water? Mean ol’ nasty adults. Leave the chicks alone. Go away.”

Now they were all dead? The fact was difficult even to talk about. These birds—and the previous five years of ultralight-led flocks—represent our hope that we can undo one human-caused catastrophe—that we can re-create a self-sustaining eastern migratory flock of Whooping Cranes. They are, as the Operation Migration website says, “the start of a new generation of life for the species” (<http://www.operationmigration.org>).

Then came a ray of hope—crane 615’s signal was picked up. The next day’s journal entry announced that “615’s radio signal was detected east of the Chassahowitzka pen on Feb 3rd. On Feb. 4 he was detected in the air several times between the Chassahowitzka and Halpata Tastanaki pensites, and eventually found foraging with two Sandhill cranes in Citrus County by tracking aircraft.” One ten-month-old Whooper had survived!

Read about 615’s life at <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/crane/06/BandingCodes615.html>.

And if you need an additional boost, you should read about the first Whooping Crane ever hatched by parents who did their initial migration by following the ultralights: <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/tm/crane/06/BandingCodesW601.html>. You can view slides of this chick’s life at <http://www.learner.org/jnorth/images/graphics/crane/html/FirstFamilySlide1.html>.

Birding on Kennesaw Mountain

posted on Georgia Birding on 01/30/2007 by Giff Beaton
<http://www.birdingonthe.net/maillinglists/GABO.html>

GABbers- The following is a notice that will be appearing in the next issues of AAS *Wingbars* and GOS *GOShawk*, but we wanted to get it out to as many people as possibly right away. Please especially note point 3 below, if you are interested.

Most members of AAS have probably birded at Kennesaw Mountain (KMT) at one time or another and those that haven't probably at least know that the birding is great out there! The number of migrant passerines is so good that we have been conducting a long-term migration study for the last 15 years at KMT, possibly the most complete migratory database in the inland south.

Numerous rarities have also shown up during that time, and if that wasn't enough it's one of the best places to see a Cerulean Warbler anywhere.

Now that I have your attention, change is in the air at KMT. Usage of the Park, in particular the Mountain Road, is increasing steadily, but the Park continues to face a shrinking budget. The Park is currently reviewing traffic on the Mountain Road, and Federal road safety engineers have told the Park that the road cannot continue to operate as it is now because of serious safety concerns. From pedestrians to bicyclists to cars, they are deciding how to best handle the various constituencies that use it. The increased traffic of all kinds has also strained the limited resources at the Park. What can we do to try to make sure that birders are heard from and seen as responsible and cooperative users of this great site, you ask?

- 1) Stop by the KMT Visitor Center if you are at the Park, and just mention that you are birding and that's why you came. We think mentioning that you are there to walk up and down the mountain via the Mountain Road may also be helpful.
- 2) The University of Georgia will be conducting surveys of users on the Mountain Road. If you are asked, please answer the representative's questionnaire. It will be important to get birders' opinions included in the survey findings.
- 3) Drop a note or an email to Dan Brown, the Superintendent, in support of continuing pedestrian access on the Mountain Road. But please be courteous! We want to promote goodwill, not antagonize anyone by protesting too strongly. Sending him a note now will put you on a contact list for the upcoming changes, and you will then be notified when the various proposed alternatives are published. At that time, it will be crucial to comment on the alternatives that would allow road birding to continue. Here is his contact info:

Daniel R. Brown, Superintendent
National Park Service
Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park
905 Kennesaw Mountain Drive
Kennesaw, GA 30152
daniel_r_brown AT nps.gov

- 4) Please be mindful of the posted rules about using the

Road. Please don't walk up the middle of the Road, and try to stick to the edges to stay out of the way of cars and bikes. Stay to the left on the way up, and to the right on the way down. This works out well for us because the best viewing is usually down the hill anyway, and helps you avoid "warbler neck." If you are there with a large group of birders, please stretch your group out a bit so you aren't blocking the road. Basically, just be nice like birders usually are, and promote a positive image of our community among all the others users of the Park!

Thanks for your help, and hopefully we can keep watching warblers from the road for many years to come.
Giff Beaton, Catharine Brockman Kuchar, and Dan Vickers

Our Shared Forests: Georgia and Ecuador

Rua Mordecai, of UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, told a full house at the February ORAS meeting about biological and economic connections between forests in Georgia and Ecuador.

Both forests host neotropical migrants, many of which summer here and winter there. Shade-grown coffee, specifically Maquipucuna Foundation coffee, provides habitat for the wintering birds, especially Blackburnian Warblers, Summer Tanagers, and Red-eyed Vireos. And we can help preserve the biodiversity of that habitat by drinking shade-grown coffee.

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>.

Sightings

Reported at the February meeting:

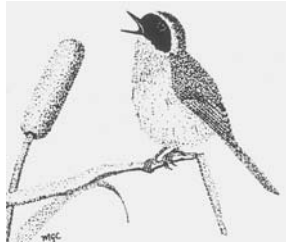
- **White-winged Scoter**, Alison Huff, Bear Creek Reservoir, 1/31/07
- **Ross's Goose**, Alison Huff, near Ila, 1/31/07
- **Hermit Thrush**, DeeAnee Meliopoulos, Riverbend Parkway, 1/31/07
- **Hermit Thrush**, Linda Russell, Winterville, frequently
- **Hermit Thrush**, Gary Crider, Athens, 1/31/07
- **Hermit Thrush**, Albie Smith, Athens, 1/31/07
- **American Woodcock**, displaying, DeeAnne Meliopoulos & Jim Hanna, Old Farmington Rd., 1/31/07
- **Brewer's Blackbird**, Gary & Leta Bird, Dyar's Pasture, 1/28/07
- **American Woodcock**, Carole Ludwig, Old Farmington Rd. 1/9/07
- **Ring-billed Gulls** (about 400), Mark Freeman, W. Franklin County, 1/31/07
- **Common Yellowthroat**, Karla O'Grady, beaver pond at the Botanical Garden, 1/27/07
- **Red-shouldered Hawk** attempting to take a male **Hooded Merganser** in flight which the Merganser avoided. A few minutes later the hawk went for the female Merganser on the pond which she avoided by diving. Tom Shelton, Madison County, 1/20/07

Georgia's Second Annual Youth Birding Competition

adapted from <http://georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us>

Georgia DNR's Nongame Wildlife and Natural Heritage Section is sponsoring the second annual youth birding competition in April. This event is a 24-hour competitive bird count where students compete against other teams to find as many birds as they can in a day in Georgia. The event starts at 6:00 p.m. on April 28th and ends at 6:00 p.m. on April 29th. Teams can start wherever they like and bird wherever they want, but they must arrive at the finish line (Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center in Mansfield, GA) and turn in their lists by 6 p.m. While the lists are being tallied, there will be a live wildlife program followed by a banquet and awards ceremony.

Teams need birding mentors to go birding with them at least three times prior to the competition. Do we have young people interested in forming a team? Do we have ORAS members who want to mentor teams?



Oconee Audubon Society
P.O. Box 81082
Athens, Georgia 30608-1082

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

President	Edwige Damron	613-9875
Vice-President	Mary Case	548-3848
Treasurer	Jim McMinn	
Secretary	Albie Smith	

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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.

Visit our website at <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/>

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