



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

May 2007

Vol. 17 No. 5

Next Meeting: Thursday, May 3, 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center

Giff Beaton will give an "Introduction to Georgia dragonflies" at the May meeting—a brief overview of dragonfly biology and some discussion about Georgia species, illustrated with his marvelous photography.

Dragonflies and Damselflies of Georgia and the Southeast, his most recent book, was just published by the University of Georgia Press. Autographed copies will be available for purchase. Beaton is also the author of *Birding Georgia* and coauthor of *Birds of Georgia*.

April and May Raffles

All April and May raffle proceeds will go to the Jekyll Island Banding station and be matched by ORAS. Our thanks to **David Dallmeyer** for donating the beautiful photography book *The Seasons of Cumberland Island* for the April raffle and the Sea Grant CD, *Jekyll Island: An Audio Tour of a Barrier Island* for the May raffle.

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.

Last Spring Bird Walk

Join the last of the spring bird walks, which ORAS sponsors jointly with Sandy Creek Nature Center. Call Ed Maioriello at 208-8504 for details.

- 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

Come to the May meeting for additional information. Or call Ed Maioriello at 208-8504 for details.

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

Annual Picnic and Election of Officers

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 p.m. Thank you, Sandy Creek Park for having us on our last meeting of the year.

Youth Birding Competition

Elliott Radcliffe and Adrian Tasistro-Hart will be competing in the Youth Birding Competition April 28th and 29th. They are collecting donations for Operation Migration (the Whooping Crane project). After the competition, they will send ORAS a report on the number of species identified.

Living by the Rules of the Sea

summarized by Maggie Nettles

Dr. David Dallmeyer explained the rules of coastal processes and conservation to a full crowd at the April meeting. "People build not to protect the beach but to protect their property," he said, and that attitude does not mesh with the rules of the sea. Coastal zones are a dynamic interaction of tide, waves, sand, climate, and human activities—with the tide being the prime shaper of the Georgia coast.

Our beaches move as surely as a single grain of sand moves, and Dr. Dallmeyer explained the process using such terms as longshore drift and ebb tidal deltas. He used dramatic photos to illustrate the phrases and also the consequences of human attempts to stop the moving sands.

Dr. Dallmeyer opened his talk with some numbers: 80% of the world's fresh water is tied up in the Antarctica, 20,000 years ago the Georgia coast was about a hundred miles further east, and the sea level is rising about nine inches a century (I hope I have his numbers correct). His closing warning to us: "You need to think about your impact on the climate."

Sightings

Reported at the April meeting:

- **Bullock's Oriole**, Mary Case, Dublin, GA, 3/18
- **Bachman's Sparrow, Red-cockaded Woodpecker**, Ed Maioriello, Bill & Karla O'Grady, Chris Feeney, Ft. Gordon, GA 3/05
- **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, Ed Maioriello, SCNC, 4/5; **Chimney Swift**, Five Points, 4/3
- **Ovenbird**, Tim Homan, Madison Co., 4/4
- **Black-and-white Warbler, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Louisiana Waterthrush**, Page Luttrell, Madison Co., 3/16-29
- **Northern Harrier**, Adrian Hart, 3/20-3/25
- **American Oystercatcher**, Gwen Bailey, Cumberland Island, 3/14
- **Bluebirds**, pair in a box, Cheryl Ludwig, Bishop, 3/21
- **Golden-crowned Kinglet, Broad-winged Hawks, Bluebirds**, Abrams
- **Black-necked Stilts**, Ann Mahoney & Fred Rossini, Brunswick, 3/36
- **White Pelicans, Piping Plovers**, Ann Mahoney, Cumberland Island & Ossabaw Island
- **Summer Tanager**, Marian Van Eseltine, Five Points, 4/5

Highlights of the Spring Bird Walks

excerpted from Ed Maioriello's reports

Whitehall Forest, April 7: The most exciting birding was in the bottom land below the Phoenix at the confluence of the North and Middle Oconee Rivers. There we had great looks at a Prothonotary Warbler that sat in the sun and sang

for us for about 10-15 minutes. We also got great looks at a Hooded Warbler, a White-eyed Vireo, and a Blue-grey Gnatcatcher. During this time we had a Red-eyed Vireo and several Northern Parulas singing around us. On the up river side of the dam we located a Louisiana Waterthrush.

Sandy Creek Park, March 31: We had almost 30 attendees on the walk including one team gearing up for the Youth Birding Competition. Our walk took us down the north end of Cook's Trail about two thirds of the way to Oxbow lake. The temperature was pleasant for the walk but overcast, so the light was very bad. Similarly, the birds were not particularly active, so it was difficult to get good looks at many birds, but there were a lot singing. We did get a total of 45 species.

While most of the birds stayed scarce, some birders did get a look at the Common Yellowthroat, and most got a good look at one time or another at a Louisiana Waterthrush as they were singing up and down Sandy Creek. We all got a good look at Rusty Blackbirds and a singing Black-and-white Warbler in the 3rd power line cut. I suspect the highlight was a Barred Owl that was seen by many and heard by all doing his full repertoire of "Who cooks for you all?", an ascending hoot, and the monkey-like caterwauling when it joined another owl farther back in the woods.

Georgia State Botanical Garden, March 24: We had a huge turnout of 45 birders. Those of you familiar with the Bot Garden can appreciate the challenge of 45 birders on some of the more narrow trails, but somehow we managed to pull it off. The temperature was cool early but warmed up beautifully. We got a total of 53 species.

Ossabaw Island IBA Dedication

from Mary Elfner, Georgia IBA Program Coordinator

The Georgia Important Bird Areas (IBA) program will hold an IBA Dedication Ceremony on Ossabaw Island State Heritage Preserve on Saturday, June 2, 2007, at 11 a.m. Speakers will be Mr. Noel Holcomb, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, and Mr. John Cecil, IBA Coordinator for the National Audubon Society.

Ossabaw Island, one of 48 IBA sites in Georgia, is a magnificent example of prime bird habitat in the largest state east of the Mississippi River. This island, bigger than Bermuda, provides vital habitats for many groups of birds including neotropical migrants, wintering shorebirds, and resident breeding birds. Several IBA priority species are found here such as Worm-eating Warblers, Short-billed Dowitchers and Painted Buntings.

While we act locally to conserve Georgia's bird habitats, the IBA program itself is worldwide with many conservation organizations partnering with BirdLife International to conserve bird habitats all over the world. In North America, the National Audubon Society has identified over 2000 IBAs. Once identified, these areas are monitored and examined for their conservation needs to protect them for future generations of birds and people.

Flight of the Sandhill Cranes

by Mary Case

Each spring the Platte River Region in south-central Nebraska hosts one of the greatest wildlife spectacles in North America—the gathering of some 600,000 Sandhill Cranes, both greater and lesser, 80% of the world's populations. Every evening the cranes return by the tens of thousands from the adjacent corn fields and wet meadows to roost on the river's broad channels and sandbars.

My niece and I had the opportunity this past March to view the spectacular flights both at dawn and at dark from a number of locations along the river. One evening we had a much closer view from a blind to witness their coming in to roost. These cranes come in to rest and refuel along the Platte River before they continue on their arduous journey to breeding grounds in Canada, Alaska, and Siberia. They arrive from their wintering grounds in Mexico, Texas, and New Mexico.

During their stop in Nebraska, the cranes gain nearly 10% of their body weight. Waste grain in the fields provides food to build up depleted fat reserved needed for migration. The adjacent meadows provide critical nutrients and secluded loafing area for rest, bathing and courting.

Sandhill Cranes are living dinosaurs. Fossils of wing bones dating back nine million years have been found in Nebraska. The species has survived because of complex social behavior, long term care of its young, innate wariness, and adaptability. Like all cranes, the Sandhill Cranes mate for life. They usually lay two eggs, but only one chick survives the first year. The cranes are 3-5 feet tall with a six-foot wingspan. They weigh from 8 to 12 pounds. They can migrate 170 to 450 miles a day at a flight speed of 38 miles per hr. They can live 20 to 40 years.

On a warm sunny afternoon we witnessed many of the Sandhill Cranes gathering on the thermals and heading north. The sky was full of cranes as far as we could see.

Animals Smarter Than We Thought

from <http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0329/p17s01-stss.html>
by Robert C. Cowen

Recent research shows some species make tools, or exhibit planning and logic.

Many animals exhibit smart behaviors. But do any of them show what humans would call "intelligence?" Some recently reported lines of research cautiously suggest that the answer is "yes." . . .

Western scrub jays have shown future planning – rather than instinctive actions – in their food-caching behavior. Ravens have demonstrated logical thinking in solving a food-retrieval puzzle.

Such revelations are beginning to enable scientists to make the crucial distinction between genetically hard-wired behavior or trial-and-error learning and "intelligent" thinking. . . .

Reporting their work in *Nature* last month, Nicola Clayton and colleagues, at Cambridge University, showed

how western scrub jays plan for the future.

The food caches of these North American birds aren't random. Specific types of food are stored at specific locations to meet specific foreseeable needs. The scientists say their findings "suggest that the jays can spontaneously plan for tomorrow ... thereby challenging the idea that this is a uniquely human ability."

Bernd Heinrich at the University of Vermont in Burlington and Thomas Bugnyar at St. Andrews University in Scotland go further. They explain in the April issue of *Scientific American* why they think their studies "have finally offered some hard proof that ravens are indeed intelligent, in that they are able to use logic to solve problems."

The researchers set different ravens the task of retrieving food suspended at the end of a string that was tied to the bird's perch.

But instead of dashing about trying to grab the food in midair, a raven would sit and study the situation for a few minutes. Then it would quickly go through the logically correct sequence to retrieve the food efficiently. The steps involve pulling up a loop of string and putting a foot on it to hold it, then pulling up more string, and so forth. Soon the bird had pulled up the entire string and obtained the food.

In other tests, ravens showed that they could distinguish between individuals – both ravens and humans.

A raven could then assess whether or not another individual was likely to have observed where that raven had stored food. The raven then knew which other individuals knew enough about its food caches to be potential thieves.

Our Thanks

ORAS deeply appreciates those who donate time, materials, and money to the organization. This month, we would especially like to express our thanks to **Jim McMinn** for matching the ORAS donation to WUGA in addition to all the many hours he has put into updating the ORAS financial arrangements.

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 _____

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May Volunteer Opportunities

by Edwige Damron

To volunteer for one or several of the following events, please contact Gabriella Cardenas at 706-254-3086.

Bird Blind Construction at Sandy Creek Nature Center, May 5, 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Join the ORAS construction team for phase II of the bird blind construction. Bring a water bottle and a charged hand drill if you own one. We will be building the walls of the blind. This project is a lot of fun! We hope that you will have the opportunity to participate.

International Migration Day at Sandy Creek Nature Center, May 12, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Help us make this first-timer a success by leading bird hikes for children and their parents. Bird hikes will go four times during the program and should last 20 minutes or so. Limited experience in birding is sufficient for a leader. We also need one more volunteer to help booth the binocular craft table.

Zoo Day at Bear Hollow Wildlife Trail, May 19, 11:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Come and table with us for a fun day at Zoo Day. Stay the whole time or come for only a couple of hours. We will be making craft binoculars with kids.

Binocular crafts are in high demand! So recycle your bathroom tissue rolls with us or at Sandy Creek Nature Center. We need as many as you can give.

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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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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Oconee Audubon Society

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