



# The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the  
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

November 2007

Vol. 17 No. 9

**Next Meeting:**  
**Thursday, November 1, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Sandy Creek Nature Center**

**Mac Callaham, Jr.**, research ecologist with the U.S. Forest Service's Southern Research Station in Athens, will be speaking on "Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Invaders Right Under Your Feet."

This presentation will focus on the issue of invasive earthworms in North America and their effects on soil ecosystems. Questions to be addressed will include:

- What species are of concern?
- How do they get here?
- What can be done about them?

For the past 15 years, Mac Callaham has studied native and introduced earthworms from tallgrass prairies to the Appalachian Mountains and from the piney woods to tropical rainforest.

**Raffle item for November:** Giff Beaton's *Birding Georgia* or coffee table book *March of the Penguins*

**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.

## Christmas Bird Count 2007

The Christmas Bird Count for the Athens Area will be December 15, 2007. You do not have to be an experienced birder to participate in the count. You can join one of the thirteen groups counting birds on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Then, we will meet for a covered-dish supper at 7:00 p.m. at the ENSAT building at Sandy Creek Nature Center to tally the birds.

If you want to participate in the count and do not already belong to a group, please contact Mary Case at [mecase@uga.edu](mailto:mecase@uga.edu) or 706-548-3848 or Eugenia Thompson at [erobertthom@bellsouth.net](mailto:erobertthom@bellsouth.net).

To learn details about past Christmas Bird Counts, see <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.html>

## Green Happy Hour

On behalf of the Athens Grow Green Coalition Elizabeth Little and Beth Gavrilles invite people to attend the Third Friday Green Happy Hour at Little Kings Club on the corner of Hull and Hancock Streets. This is an opportunity to get together with environmentally-minded colleagues and catch up on the latest issues.

## December Talk on Raptors of Georgia

**Kathryn Dudeck**, Wildlife Director at Chattahoochee Nature Center will talk about raptors of Georgia (natural history, ID tips, etc.) at the ORAS December 6<sup>th</sup> meeting.

She is a state- and federally-licensed raptor and reptile rehabilitator, and she has a B.S. in Ecology/Zoology and an M.S. in Marine Sciences, both from UGA.

She and a colleague will also bring two of the non-releasable raptors and biofacts (wings, tails, talons, skulls, etc.) for folks to see up close!

You can learn more about the nature center at <http://www.chattnaturecenter.com/>

## **Birding Notes**

*by Sigrid Sanders,*

<http://www.sigridsanders.com/birding/index.html>

### **Fall Equinox – Chestnut-sided and Tennessee Warblers**

**Sunday, September 23, 2007**

On the first day of Fall, a small feeding flock of migrating birds paid a quiet visit to the trees around our house. It was a cloudy, very warm and very humid day, with blue sky breaking through the big gray clouds now and then. The musical trill of a Pine Warbler's song, and the sweet, repeated puh-wee of an Eastern Wood Pewee set the mood of the day.

Late in the morning, an Acadian Flycatcher called a sharp wheet! from the edge of the woods; two female Ruby-throated Hummingbirds chased each other off and on around the feeder; two Carolina Wrens sang back and forth; a Red-bellied Woodpecker whirred; and then the call of a Downy Woodpecker and the chatter of Titmice and Chickadees announced the arrival of a feeding flock of several different species of birds.

Except for the Titmice and Chickadees, most of the birds were migrants passing through on their way south, and most were moving and feeding quietly. A Black and White Warbler crept down the trunk of an oak and along its branches; a sleek-looking male Scarlet Tanager lurked deeper in the oak leaves, black wings contrasting with its yellow-green plumage; a Red-eyed Vireo made its way from branch to branch, eating caterpillars; and a tiny, rather plain-looking greenish warbler with a yellow throat and breast, very faint, indistinct wingbars, dingy white under the tail, and a pale streak over the eye fluttered in the leaves like a butterfly – a Tennessee Warbler.

At least two Chestnut-sided Warblers hunted in clusters of oak leaves at the ends of branches. With smooth green head and back, rich yellow wing bars, white eye-rings and no trace of the chestnut sides of their spring plumage, they looked bright and neat, and moved quickly. I watched one as it ate a green caterpillar – these green caterpillars in the oaks are popular. It hit the caterpillar against a branch once or twice, almost lazily, and then snapped it down quickly. At one point, it moved into a ray of sunlight that turned its greenish head and back to gold. Calling out a soft cheff! as it moved, it fluttered in a cluster of leaves near the hummingbird feeder, and one of the female Hummingbirds zoomed up aggressively and tried to chase it away, but the warbler ignored her, and only flew on to another tree after another caterpillar or two.

While the Tennessee Warbler moved mostly in the shadows, deep in the leaves, almost completely quiet,

the Chestnut-sided Warblers looked sunny, lively and gregarious, even in their more subdued fall plumage, coming out into the open much more often.

The day ended with a break in the clouds and then, paradoxically, an unexpected but very welcome rain shower that fell steady and strong for a half-hour or more, much of the time raining through sunlight.

### **Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Green Caterpillars Monday, September 17, 2007**

A female Rose-breasted Grosbeak was in our White Oak trees this afternoon, eating some kind of large green caterpillars. They must be good – while I watched her for only a few minutes, she ate three, one after another, and they seemed to be easy to find in the oak. Each one was large enough to take a few seconds for her to get down. She held one in her bill, shook her head and snapped repeatedly, for several seconds, until she eventually got it swallowed. As I've read in species accounts, she didn't use the help of a foot or a branch to subdue a caterpillar – she just kept shaking it in her large, thick, pinkish bill until it was subdued. After eating one, she rubbed each side of her bill quickly against a branch.

The green caterpillars also attracted a Red-eyed Vireo with a different eating style to the same tree later in the afternoon. The Vireo held each caterpillar by one end in its bill and slapped it against a branch several times before swallowing it in one quick snap. Then it, too, wiped its long, comparatively slender bill against a branch.

We only see Rose-breasted Grosbeaks here during spring or fall migration. They stand out among the smaller, flighty fall migrants like warblers, which often can be maddeningly elusive. Relatively large and stocky, the Grosbeaks are not delicate or subtle in either shape or movement. The male's bold coloring – black back, pure white belly and rose-red splotch on the upper breast – identifies him immediately. The female is handsome rather than flashy, but still distinctive, with rich brown and cream-white plumage that blends more easily with a leafy autumn background – her head striped in very dark brown and white, with a broad white stripe over the eye, dark brown wings with white wing bars, flecks of white across the lower wings and back, and breast heavily streaked in dark brown.

At times even Rose-breasted Grosbeaks can go unnoticed, when they're quiet and stay hidden in deep or high foliage, but they often come to feeders, and the ones I've watched around our yard – both male and female – have shown personalities as colorful and assertive as the male's appearance. They're never dull.

## Sightings

Reported at the October meeting:

- **Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Swainson's Thrush**, Cedar Creek subdivision, John Willis, 09/27-10/01
- **Bald Eagle, Mottled Duck, Florida Scrub Jay, Common Ground Dove, Sandwich Tern**, Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge, Alison Huff, 09/28
- **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, two **Bobolinks**, Beaverdam Rd.; **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher**, Georgia Botanical Garden, Joel McNeal, 09/25-10/01
- **Swainson's Thrush** in bird bath; **Black-and-white Warbler, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hooded Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo**, Unicoi State Park, DeeAnne Meliopoulos, 10/04 & 09/28
- **Wilson's Warbler**, Georgia Botanical Garden, Vanessa Lane
- **Brown-headed Nuthatch**, Old Farmington Rd., Carole Ludwig, 09/20
- **Great Egret, Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, near Morton Rd., Eugenia Thompson & Dennis Rice.

## Eagles and Ospreys on a Jekyll Island Afternoon

by Maggie Nettles

JIBS (Jekyll Island Banding Station) offers volunteers all kinds of up-close experience with small birds, but it also provides excellent opportunities for sighting birds of prey. During the first week of October, we frequently saw Peregrine Falcons and Merlins swooping past the treetops next to the site. Stepping out on the boardwalk often led to a glimpse of a Northern Harrier gliding low over the marsh.

One warm afternoon, several of us were floating in the ocean and talking about the morning's success at the nets when a Bald Eagle chased an Osprey over our heads. The Bald Eagle kept harassing the Osprey until the latter dropped its fish. Then the eagle swooped down, caught the fish in mid-air, and then landed in a nearby pine tree to enjoy its stolen meal. Later, we watched both the Osprey and the Bald Eagle do some successful fishing in the ocean near us.

## Think about Christmas Gifts

Audubon calendars will be for sale at upcoming meetings. They make ideal Christmas presents, so bring your checkbook and take care of some Christmas shopping.

You should also think about buying SCNC Bird

Quilt raffle tickets. The drawing will be December 15<sup>th</sup>. Tickets are \$3 or 4 for \$10. Just think! You could win a beautiful quilt as a Christmas present for yourself or for your favorite person.

## Notes from October Speakers

**Berkeley Boone**, naturalist at Sandy Creek Nature Center and former animal curator at the Savannah River Ecology Lab, talked about "The Misunderstoods," the various plants and animals to be aware of when we wander around outside. He provided lots of fun facts about outdoor dangers we may encounter.

Did you know that humans and pigs are the only mammals known to be allergic to poison ivy?

Leaves of Three,  
Leave it be.  
Hairy Rope,  
Don't be a dope.

Box turtles can eat poison mushrooms and store the toxins in their muscles.

A baby alligator up to three feet long may still be under its mother's protection.

**DeeAnne Meliopoulos** talked about conservation and ecotourism in Ecuador and how it relates to people in Georgia in her presentation "Ecuador: Close to Home." She mentioned that at least 24 bird species that we see in Georgia overwinter in Ecuador. With its diversity of ecosystems, four square miles in Ecuador can contain 750 tree species.

### 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

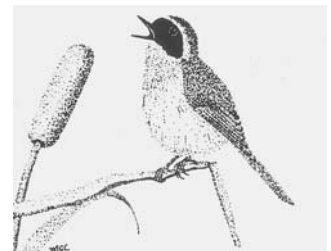
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society  
PO Box 81082  
Athens, GA 30608

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

For a short time only, new members who sign up at the meetings will receive their choice of a laminated four-fold Pocket Naturalist.



## Unusual Sighting

by Tim Homan

Recently, while canoeing in Brushy Creek Lake, I witnessed a bird of prey's surprising attempt at fishing. On my first lap down the lake, I skirted the shoreline and flushed the buteo off its bankside perch less than a paddle's length above the water. In the middle of my second lap, this one further out in the lake, I stopped to drink water and switch sides. As I started to stroke again, I saw the same hawk launch from a hornbeam branch seven feet above the shore. But instead of flapping away as expected, the raptor glided down toward the water, hitting the lake's glassy surface talons first. As the ripple rings widened, the buteo just sat there, buoyant as a duck, the red barring on its chest looking like a living depth gauge.

The red-shouldered hawk remained as still and calm as a corpse for a long six or seven seconds before effortlessly flying back up, empty handed, to its dead-branch perch. A few seconds later the hawk flung the lake water away with a quick quivering shake that ruffled its feathers. Then the unsuccessful hunter did the expected: it flew just deep enough into the woods to break my sightline.

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### Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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Submit information by e-mail to [maggie\\_netles@charter.net](mailto: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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