



# The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the  
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

September 2008

Vol. 19 No. 7

## **Next Meeting: Thursday, September 4, 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center**

**Charlie Muise**, Georgia Important Bird Area (IBA) Coordinator and experienced bird bander, will discuss "Bird Banding: What it is, why we do it, and how it helps the birds." He will explain how banding is done, display some of the tools used, and talk about different banding methods.

Charlie Muise has been hooked on birds since his college days, conducting several Breeding Bird Surveys and taking part in many Christmas Bird Counts and International Migratory Bird Day counts.

His first banding experience was at Shoals Marine Laboratory, on a little island off the coast of Maine. Since then he has assisted in banding activities in 10 states. He managed his first station, in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, from 2000 through 2006. This station worked under the Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) protocol. He co-designed and opened another MAPS station on the French Broad River in Tennessee in 2005. That station quickly became one of the busiest in the country, catching grassland species. Charlie was fortunate enough to be the first to band a Northern Saw-whet Owl in Georgia—in his own back yard.

Interested in life beyond birds, Charlie has studied salamanders, grasshoppers and other organisms. His most recent paper, "Preliminary Checklist of Odonata from Great Smoky Mountains National Park" was published in *Southeastern Naturalist*.

**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.

## **Fall Bird Walks**

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society and the Sandy Creek Nature Center co-sponsor these bird walks. We hope that both beginning and experienced birders will join us. The pace is generally slow, but participants should dress for occasionally muddy paths.

- September 6: 8:00 a.m. **State Botanical Garden** upper parking lot (Day Chapel)
- September 13: 8:00 a.m. **Sandy Creek Nature Center** (Cook's Trail Cleanup) Allen House
- September 27: 8:00 a.m. **State Botanical Garden** upper parking lot (Day Chapel)
- October 4: 8:00 a.m. **Whitehall Forest** South Milledge Ave & Whitehall Rd
- October 11: 8:00 a.m. **Sandy Creek Park** last lot on Campsite Dr. across dam

## **Fall Field Trip**

September 20: 6:00 a.m. **Kennesaw Mountain**  
Meet at Shops of South Athens Lot, South Milledge Avenue and the Bypass

## **A Swift Night Out**

*adapted from information provided by Paul and Georgan Kyle*

As summer draws to a close and the swifts have finished raising their young, these fascinating aerial acrobats begin to congregate in communal roosts prior to their migration in the fall. Some roosts may consist of an extended family group of a half a dozen birds or so, but the larger sites can host hundreds or even thousands of swifts! We encourage you to join your local Audubon chapter in this exhilarating spectacle.

Participants will meet with Carole Ludwig on **Sunday, September 14**, on the street behind the Bottleworks to count swifts. We will observe the Bottleworks roost starting about 30 minutes before dusk and estimate the number of swifts that enter.

To participate, contact Carole Ludwig at the September meeting or call her at 706-769-7008.

For additional information and results, please visit: [www.chimneyswifts.org](http://www.chimneyswifts.org)

# Serendipity

by Tim Homan

We were camped at southeastern Utah's Spanish Bottom, four miles below the confluence of the Colorado and Green Rivers, a half mile above where Cataract Canyon's first rapids rise into long rows of standing white waves—powerful movement flowing through stationary form, wild-river waves that neither roll nor break. The paddling portion of our canoe trip was over, one hike and last-chance birding left in the morning, then a fast ride up the Colorado toward the journey home.

While the raft guides and their clients were climbing up to the Dollhouse hoodoos, Page and I carried our sitting-tarp and supper down to the landing and its cottonwood shade. During dessert I heard Page give her birding call note, "ooh," three times in quick succession—ooh, ooh, ooh. Three rapid-fire oohs always means she has spotted a memorable bird—one beautiful, rare, or new. Or, as seldom happens now, a bird that is all three—beautiful, rare, and new—like the Swallow-tailed Kite that sky-danced with the wind's caresses over the Everglades long ago.

She has yet to give a bird four oohs; even the extraordinarily large and brilliantly white Whooping Cranes in Florida did not rate four oohs. So when Page oohs three times in the field, I raise my binoculars and wait for what and where. This time she said, "There's a big wren real close on the cottonwood log. Now he's gone. He's back, only five feet from you. Do you have him?"

We called out the markings: pale eye stripe, weakly striped breast, black and brown barring on the tail, etc. Page flipped to the wren section in her National Geographic birdbook. While we were comparing western wrens, a small, exceedingly plain bird landed on an overhead branch fifteen feet away. This time she uttered only one drawn-out ooh. Again we twisted our binocs into focus and called out field marks.

"It's got a crest."

"It's a titmouse."

"It's all gray. Do you see anything besides gray?"

"No, this should be an easy ID."

The titmouse flew away; we continued looking at the western wrens. We concurred. It had to be a Rock Wren. Right distribution, right habitat, right markings, right bird—a lead-pipe cinch. While we were still studying the paper-and-paint Rock Wren, the feather-and-flesh Rock Wren made an encore appearance in the same place, this time with a large and leggy pale green bug firmly clamped in its bill. The bird was so close that, had I held one of our paddles at arm's length, I could have easily touched its toes. The hyperactive songbird made a series of dips to tenderize the katydidlike insect, prepping it for a one-gulp swallow, then was off again, this time for good.

Page thumbed back to the titmouse. The plain, all gray titmouse's given name was Juniper; its range completely covered Utah with permanent-resident purple. Our Canyonlands National Park pamphlet listed the one-ooh Juniper Titmouse as a common summer breeder.

We looked at each other with exaggerated, go-figure expressions, knowing that we had just enjoyed a magical and memorable few moments for a couple of old twitchers. The two of us had just seen and easily identified two life-list birds while eating supper beside the red-cliffed Colorado, at the tag end of a long canoe trip where campsites, Anasazi ruins, and small warblers were often difficult to find. Luck, we called it. Serendipity, we said.

Serendipity had been one of the constant themes of our trip. We searched for a granary under the jack-hammer sun but found an incredible panel of petroglyphs instead. We tried to spot arches tucked away high in the fork of a side canyon but found mountain lion tracks instead. We sought shade and rest, but ice-cold beer and a chicken parmesan supper topped off with peach cobbler was cheerfully delivered to our camp by a rafting party instead. (The lead guide offered us those inducements if we would share our long, shady, bug-free camp with his group. Our water had been lukewarm since the first day, and we had begun matching the distinctly colored rock strata—the layered geology of Stillwater Canyon—to their corresponding ice cream flavors. We hollered yes faster than a starving wolf could pounce on a porkchop.)

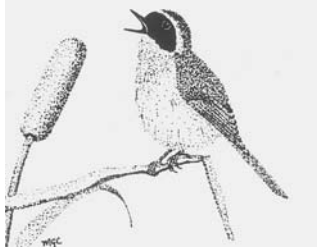
We paddled close to the tamarisk-and willow-lined banks, hoping to hear new birdsong, but the loudest and by far the most insistent riverside singer was the Yellow-breasted Chat—an oversized warbler of long acquaintance back home in Georgia. The chats' frequently rehearsed repertoires were familiar and welcome; their antics forced smiles to appear upon our red faces during the relentless onslaught of the afternoon sun. We searched the short-canopied pinyon-juniper forest for a Pinyon Jay without success, but were surprised by the sight and sound of a small flock of eight Clark's Nutcrackers—listed as occasional winter visitors—as they blustered their way through our late-June camp. The striking image of their black-and white-wings and tails remained imprinted upon our retinas for long moments after their passage.

Serendipity: "The phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for." Serendipity. Sometimes it flies right up to you on small wings.

**Notes:** In his *Essential Field Guide Companion*, Pete Dunne described the Rock Wren as "Tame, and almost indifferent to people." *The National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America* states, "Every 10 to 20 years, Nutcrackers irrupt out of core range into desert and lowland areas of the west."

## Conservation Corner

by Verna Johnson,  
Conservation Chair



Welcome to the first edition of the ORAS Conservation Corner—an open forum where we can share tips and ideas on providing for, protecting, and preserving our rivers, forests, and wildlife.

As the new conservation chair of the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society, I'm happy to be the first to share my favorite tip with you.

Any time of the year is a good time to provide nest boxes for birds. More boxes in one yard or location encourage a larger variety of species to nest for spring and summer and also provide adequate shelter for roosting in the fall and winter.

We look forward to receiving your ideas, suggestions, or comments, which you can email to [conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org) or mailed to

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society  
PO Box 81082  
Athens, GA 30608

## Supporting Belize Birding & Education

Carole Ludwig and Alison Huff continue to support Ruben Arevalo of Indian Church, Belize, by collecting books for the library he built (see write-up in May 2008 *Yellowthroat*). So if you have books you would like to donate—English language is fine—bring them to the September ORAS meeting.

Ruben is the resident expert bird guide at the prestigious Lamanai Outpost Lodge, which caters to international birdwatchers. However, he is also working to provide educational materials for the young people in his village. Carole is planning a return flight to Belize complete with boxes of books and maybe even some used optics.

## ORAS Notes

### Web Page Renovation

Have you been watching the evolution of the ORAS website? Check out the changes and track events at <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/>

### October Meeting Time Change

ORAS October 2 Social and Recipe Swap begins at 6:00 p.m. Come one, come all! Share your recipes and dishes at our annual potluck of favorite appetizers and join us for an evening of socializing in the outdoors! Come snack early at 6:00 and then enjoy a presentation afterwards at our monthly meeting.

### Volunteers Needed

ORAS depends on its enthusiastic members to keep the organization thriving. We need volunteers to undertake tasks ranging from providing snacks at our monthly meeting to giving talks to community organizations to supplying large-muscle work on outdoor projects. If you would like to volunteer, contact Edwige Damron at [edamron@uga.edu](mailto:edamron@uga.edu) or talk with an officer or chairperson at one of the monthly meetings.

## Jekyll Island Banding Station

Jekyll Island Banding Station (JIBS) will hold its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary banding this fall, September 28 - October 19. Chris and Jan Pitman invite you to participate as a volunteer. "The guests of honor," says *JIBSHEET*, # 38, "are the birds. The best part is that you are invited to welcome them. Each bird is a natural wonder, something you can learn from, marvel at, and study."

For details, call 770-339-0916 or email [ovenbird@earthlink.net](mailto:ovenbird@earthlink.net).

## Upcoming Birding Festival

Georgia's Colonial Coast Birding & Nature Festival on Jekyll Island will take place October 10-13. The featured speaker is Pete Dunne. To register and sign up for field trips, see <http://www.coastalgeorgiabirding.org/>

## 2008 River Cleanup

The Rivers Alive 2008 river cleanup here in Athens will take place on Saturday, October 4 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Join participants at the kick-off at Dudley Park. You can help clean up sites around the county.

### 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 \_\_\_\_\_

## Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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

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