



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

April 2011

Vol. 22 No. 4

**Next Meeting at
UGA Odum School of Ecology
Thursday, April 7, at 7:00 p.m.
Meeting place changed due to SCNC construction.**

Dr. Richard Hall, Research Scientist in the UGA Odum School of Ecology, will talk about "**The Littlest Big Year: how to see (almost) 200 species in Athens-Clarke County in a year**" at the April 7 meeting.

In spite of being Georgia's smallest county, in 2010 more bird species were recorded in Athens-Clarke County than any other in the Georgia Piedmont. Thanks to a combination of wonderful birding sites reachable by bike, invaluable eBird data on the timing of migration, dogged persistence, blind luck, friendly competition and a whole lot of help from Athens' superstar birders, the 'holy grail' of 200 species in a year seemed possible. Hall will describe the highs and lows of attempting an Athens 'Big Year', and what he learned about bird diversity and migration in Clarke County along the way.

Hall spent his formative years birding in the UK before moving to California, then France, to bird some more. He has been living in Athens for two years and will hopefully be living and birding here for many years to come!

To see some of his amazing bird photographs, go to <http://www.surfbirds.com/blog/rjhall>

Directions to Odum School of Ecology from bypass:

- Exit on College Station Road and turn west toward campus.
- Follow College Station Road to East Campus Road (the first signal-light intersection after the railroad tracks) and turn right.
- Drive north on East Campus Road.
- Turn left at second red light onto W. Green Street.
- Turn right into the S-07 parking lot (open after 5:00 p.m.).
- The Ecology building is on the north side of the parking lot behind a row of trees.
- A sidewalk on the far side of the parking lot leads to the Ecology Building.

Spring Bird Walks & Field Trips

Have you heard the birds starting to sing? It's time to get outdoors and join the Saturday 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.

- 4/02/2011 **Sandy Creek Nature Center**: 8:00 a.m. Meet at the Allen House parking lot (the 1st lot on the left).
- 4/09/2011 **Whitehall Forest**: 8:00 a.m. Meet in the driveway at the end of South Milledge Road (go through T-junction with Whitehall Road into Whitehall Forest).
- 4/16/2011 **State Botanical Garden**: 8:00 a.m. Meet at the upper parking lot by Day Chapel.
- 4/23/2011 **Sandy Creek Nature Center** - Cook's Trail Cleanup: 8:00 a.m. Meet at the Allen House parking lot. We will walk Cook's trail and pick up any trash we find, so bring a garbage bag or two!
- 4/30/2011 **Kennesaw Mountain field trip**: 6:00 a.m. Meet at Shops of South Athens parking lot by the Waffle House on South Milledge near the bypass.
- 5/07/2011 **USDA Agriculture Research Service** property (Watkinsville) 7:00 a.m.-12:00 noon. Meet at Shops of South Athens parking lot by the Waffle House on South Milledge near the bypass.

Sightings Reported at March meeting

- **Sandhill Cranes**, all over Athens, seen by many!
- **Sandhill Cranes**, SCNC, Kate Mowbray, 2/22
- **Red-headed Woodpecker**, SCNC, Kate Mowbray, 2/25
- **Fox Sparrow & Orange-crowned Warbler**, Watkinsville, Lorene Winter, daily visitors
- **Red-billed Tropicbird, Scarlet Ibis**, 110 life birds, Trinidad/Tobago, Alison Huff, 2/22-2/25

Keep up with daily sightings at the ORAS QuickTopic page: <http://www.quicktopic.com/29/H/6JbdZFsuHuc6>

Clarke County February 2011 sightings

by Richard Hall

83 species were reported to eBird for Clarke County this month, compared with 76 in 2010 and 77 in 2009. The highlight of the month for many was the largest flight of Sandhill Cranes over Athens in recent years. After the first report of 4 over Cleveland Road Elementary School on 8th (Lorene Winters) and a lone bird over the Five Points intersection on 13th (Mirko Basen), there were daily reports from the Athens area from 21st until month end. Lucky Mitchell Jarrett set the new Clarke County eBird high count for the species, when a noisy flock of 120 birds soared over his house on 22nd.

Several interesting waterfowl were spotted to the south of Athens during the month. Mark Freeman and Carole Ludwig found 4 Ross's Geese on Colham Ferry Road (Oconee County) on 8th, and a blue-phase Snow Goose (perhaps last year's summering bird) on the Apalachee Road Pond (Morgan), while nearby at Braswell Church Road, Vanessa Lane made the excellent discovery of 2 Greater White-fronted Geese at the cattle pond on 12th. Joel McNeal had a good count of 29 Wood Duck at the State Botanical Garden on 9th. A lone female American Wigeon flew over Lake Herrick on 1st (Mirko Basen), where Hooded Mergansers were seen on 17th and 21st. The Oxbow Lake held 2 American Black Ducks and a Northern Shoveler on 12th and 27th, with 5 American Coots there on the latter date. Raptor-wise, a new Northern Harrier was discovered along Spring Valley Road on 3rd (James Neves et al.). 5 American Woodcocks were displaying in the Botanical Garden on 9th (Joel) and were heard throughout the month along Morton Road (Eugenia Thompson). Eastern Screech-Owls were encountered along Cook's Trail on 12th (Joel) and in Watkinsville on 14th (John Whigham). After an absence of several weeks, the Red-breasted Nuthatch appeared again in the vicinity of the Ecology building on the UGA campus on 16th (Richard Hall). Pine Siskins continued to be seen in good numbers, with a peak count of 120 in the O'Grady's backyard on 23rd; Fox Sparrows and Purple Finches were also widely reported. Rusty Blackbirds were recorded multiple times from the Botanical Garden and Cook's Trail during the annual Rusty Blackbird Blitz, with a high count of 90 at the latter site on 12th.



photo by Richard Hall

Backyard Butterfly Garden

by Robin Woodroof,
Conservation Chair /
Backyard Wildlife
Sanctuary Program

Habitat conservation is needed to preserve Georgia's rich butterfly heritage because butterflies



depend on certain plants during all four stages of their life cycle: egg, caterpillar, chrysalis and adult. Creating a butterfly garden in your backyard can provide such a habitat while being an exciting and rewarding project. These beautiful insects will add bright colors and many hours of enjoyment to your garden. Here are some simple steps to create a successful butterfly garden.

Plant your garden in the sun-Butterflies and most butterfly-attracting plants require bright sunshine.

Plant colorful nectar-producing flowers- Butterflies are first attracted to bright colored flowers, especially red, orange, yellow, pink and purple and then feed on the nectar of the flowers. Clusters of short, tubular flowers or flat-topped blooms provide the ideal shapes for butterflies to easily find, land, and feed. Examples of plants include lantana, verbena, milkweed, and yarrow.

Choose single over double flowers-The nectar of single flowers is more accessible and easier for butterflies to extract than the nectar of double flowers which have more petals per flower.

Plan for continuous bloom-Butterflies are active from early spring until late fall. Plant a selection of flowers that will provide nectar throughout the entire growing season.

Plant native host plants-To ensure butterflies will stay in your habitat, include native host plants in your garden. Many butterflies and native flowering plants depend on each other for survival and reproduction. Host plants provide butterflies with the nectar and foliage they need as caterpillars and adults. Examples of host plants include tulip poplar, hollyhock, and pawpaw.

Let them puddle-Butterflies often congregate around puddles of wet sand and mud to drink water and extract minerals. Create a butterfly puddle by placing a shallow pan with moist sand on the ground to collect rainwater.

Provide flat stones for rest- Flat stones provide space for butterflies to rest, spread their wings and bask in the sun. Basking raises their body temperature so they are able to fly and remain active.

Avoid pesticides-Most lawn pesticides, especially insecticides, are toxic to butterflies as well as many beneficial insects. Utilize predatory insects or use insecticidal soap instead.

Search for butterflies and wildflowers in your state:

www.butterfliesandmoths.org/map and

www.wildflower.org/collections

The Ecology of War

summarized by Maggie Nettles

Dr. James Porter, Associate Dean of the Odum School of Ecology at the University of Georgia, talked about "The Ecology of War" at the March 3 meeting. He hit on four themes with eloquence and convincing evidence: war and conservation, war and ecology, a case study on Vieques, Puerto Rico, and the concept of a "Just War."

"Preparation for, and the conduct of, war costs \$1 trillion per year," said Dr. Porter, equivalent to the annual budgets of 1,000 EPA agencies and 100 National Science Foundations. "The human costs are well known," he said. "The environmental costs are not." War has a profound effect on the environment. To illustrate, he detailed investigations on the effects of naval bombardment of coral reefs on Vieques, Puerto Rico, which had been used for gunnery practice since 1943. In part based on his team's research, some areas of Vieques were declared an EPA Superfund Site in 2005, but to date none of these underwater areas have been cleared of their unexploded ordnance. This problem, he declared, can be solved. It is point source pollution with a proven solution.

The Geneva Convention, he pointed out, prohibits war tactics that may cause "widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment."

Keep Those Feeders Clean!

by Kathleen M. Raven

Sick or dying birds falling to the ground can send chills down a human spine. The songbirds in our backyards, forests, and fields are supposed to be chirpy, fluffy pictures of perfect health! But birds become ill, too. When sick birds join their flocks and nest or feed together, they easily spread germs to each other. So bird watchers with feeders should not only relish the rare glimpses of Dickcissel and Red-breasted Nuthatch, but should also keep a close eye on clues of the visiting birds' health.

Feeding birds is now the nation's second-largest past-time, behind gardening, according to The National Bird

Feeding Society. Each bird feeder can harbor seeds, viruses, and bacteria that target the immune systems of our feathery friends (*please see chart below*). Wildlife diseases associated with bird feeders have become more common in recent years, says Dr. Michael Yabsley, a professor at Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources at the University of Georgia. This news isn't cause for alarm. You can have your feeder, but you must clean it, too.

Wildlife disease specialists recommend soaking feeders once a week for at least three minutes in nine parts of warm water mixed with one part bleach. Given our busy lives, it may be more realistic to clean the feeders once a month. Allow the feeder to dry completely before refilling with fresh goodies. If a feeder is particularly grungy with layers of dirt, then you'll want to brush off the dirt first. Be sure to protect yourself during all cleaning activities by wearing waterproof gloves and a face mask.

Not all feeders are created equal. Some are better than others for preventing diseases. Wooden feeders end up excelling in two areas: bringing a natural aesthetic to any outdoor area and harboring harmful bacteria and parasites within the wood grain. For this reason, plastic, metal, or wire feeders are better than wooden ones. The food should be well protected from rain and changed regularly to prevent mold from growing. Aspergillosis is an avian disease caused by a fungus that grows on moldy grains and seeds. Tube bird feeders with beak openings are excellent for keeping food fresh, but may also contribute to the spread of conjunctivitis, which can occur on its own, or as a symptom of the disease mycoplasmosis. When birds jab at the food, they may scrape their infected eyes against the side of the tube, leaving bacteria there for the next bird to pick up. Large, flat bird feeders could be better at preventing conjunctivitis, but they invite outbreaks of salmonellosis. This disease is caused by the same bacteria found in undercooked food. The bacteria can spread through birds' excrement, which can land more easily on flat feeders.

The chart below shows avian diseases that can be spread using bird feeders. This is not an extensive list of avian diseases and it focuses on songbirds only.

<i>Disease name</i>	<i>Symptoms</i>	<i>Bird species affected</i>	<i>Season of occurrence</i>	<i>Human health concern?</i>
Salmonellosis Caused by bacteria	Ruffled feathers, labored breathing	All birds; but rarely results in death	Winter, spring	Yes; this is the same bacteria as the salmonella found in undercooked food.
Mycoplasmosis Caused by bacteria	Conjunctivitis, rubbing eyes against feeders	House finches	Autumn, winter	None
Avian pox Caused by virus	Wart-like growths on featherless parts of body	Mourning dove, finches and other perching birds	Year-round	None
Aspergillosis Caused by fungus	Drooping wings, emaciation	Crows; a variety of birds	Year-round; caused by moldy food	None

Source: *Field Manual of Wildlife Diseases: General Field Procedures and Diseases of Birds (1999)*

2011 Georgia Mountain BirdFest

by Page Luttrell

Unicoi State Park and Lodge is excited to be hosting the first ever Georgia Mountain BirdFest. Nestled in the Southern Appalachian Mountains, Unicoi is only a short distance from Atlanta, and located adjacent to the Chattahoochee National Forest and Anna Ruby Falls. Over 60 events are scheduled from Thursday, April 28 through Sunday, May 1, 2011, for beginners to experienced birders. Many familiar birders from the ranks of the Department of Natural Resources, the Georgia Ornithological Society, Atlanta Audubon Society, and Georgia Forestry Commission will be leading field trips, giving talks, and conducting workshops. Some examples of the field trips offered include Brawley Mountain (the only place in the state where Golden-winged Warblers still breed), Ivy Log Gap Road, Smithgall Woods, and Brasstown Bald. Talks vary from hawk and warbler identification to migration and nesting. There also will be presentations on other topics such as tree identification, nature journal writing, and nature photography. Most events are included in the registration fees, but a few will cost an additional \$5 to \$40 to cover lunches and/or transportation. See website for more details: <http://georgiastateparks.org/GaMountainBirdFest>

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

President Vanessa Lane
President@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Vice-President
vp@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Treasurer Eugenia Thompson
treasurer@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Secretary Mary Case
secretary@oconeeriversaudubon.org

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