



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

August/September 2012

Vol. 23 No.7

Next Meeting: **Thursday, September 6, 6:30 p.m.** **UGA's Odum School of Ecology**

In September, Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) will meet on our usual first Thursday of the month. Our September 6 meeting location, however, will be the Odum School of Ecology for a talk by the author of the upcoming field guide to Honduran avifauna, Robert Gallardo. (See below for driving directions.)

Before the program, we will have a reception at 6:30 to meet Gallardo and his illustrator, John Sill, who some of you may remember for his book, *A Field Guide to Little Known & Seldom Seen Birds of N.A.* There will be an exhibition of Sill's art and a silent auction of one or more of his prints to help fund this important work. The reception and presentation are free and open to the public.

Robert Gallardo worked in Honduras as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1993. After his Peace Corps stint, he continued working there as a naturalist and became the leading authority on Honduran avifauna. His talk will focus on his work to help create the first field guide to Honduran birds.

To promote avian conservation and birding in Honduras, the Honduran Ornithological Association (HOA) is currently developing the field guide in conjunction with John Sill. HOA must raise more than \$125,000 to complete the project. Donations for this project are tax-deductible and may be made at a donation table during the reception before the talk. For more information on Honduran birds, visit:

www.birdsofhonduras.com .

Directions to School of Ecology from Loop 10 By-pass:

- Exit 7 on College Station Road and turn west toward campus.
- At the second light, turn right onto East Campus Road
- Continue north on East Campus Road
- Turn left at second red light onto W. Green Street
- Turn right into S-07 parking lot (open after 6 p.m.)
- The Ecology building is on the north side of the parking lot behind trees (a sidewalk is nearby).

Heads Up for Special October Dates:

10/4: ORAS potluck at 6:00 p.m. before 7:00 p.m. meeting. Bring your favorite dish to share.

10/6: Rivers Alive—Athens (Oconee River clean-up) Email: stacee.farrell@athensclarkecounty.com Visit: www.keepathensbeautiful.org

10/13: Rivers Alive—Lake Oconee (lake area clean-up) Email: 1janetpearson@gmail.com Visit: http://riversalive.com/ra_cleanups.asp

Fall Bird Walks

Bird walks are from **8 a.m.-11a.m. or noon**. However, attendees may leave early. Dress for the weather and wear sturdy shoes. Also, bring bug spray, sun screen, snacks and water as desired/needed. (Please check upcoming ORAS announcements for any changes to this schedule).

- Sept. 1: **Sandy Creek Nature Center (SCNC)** (Allen House)
- Sept. 8: **State Botanical Garden** (Day Chapel)
- Sept. 15: **SCNC/Cook's Trail** * (Allen House)
- Sept. 29: **State Botanical Garden** (Day Chapel)
- Oct. 6: **Whitehall** ** (S.Milledge & Whitehall Road)
- Oct. 13: **Sandy Creek Park** (Campsites Dr.)
- Oct. 21: **Athens Landfill** (Lexington Highway)

* The SCNC Cook's Trail walk is also our Cook's Trail Cleanup trip. Bring a trash bag. We will bird on the walk in, then bird and pick up trash on the way out.

** Attendees for the Whitehall walk must be on time. We meet outside the gate and caravan down to Flinchum's Phoenix. (Attendees may leave at any time because the gate opens automatically from the inside).

Fall Field Trip

Sept. 22: 6:00 a.m. Kennesaw Mountain Meet at Shops of South Athens Lot, South Milledge Ave. and the Bypass.

May and June 2012 Clarke County eBird Sightings Summary

by Richard Hall

134 species were reported to eBird in May 2012, compared to 122 in 2011 and 121 in 2010.

Stormy weather on 9th brought the two highlights: the first county eBird record of Semipalmated Plover at the Charlie Bolton Road farm pond (MB, RH, SM), and the first county record of Laughing Gull at Lake Chapman (RH). Two Ruddy Ducks at Lake Chapman on 22nd (RH) were unseasonably late.

Interesting raptor sightings included a Bald Eagle over the UGA campus on 15th (KG) and a late Northern Harrier at the S. Milledge fields on 11th (MB).

Noteworthy shorebirds included a flyover Greater Yellowlegs on Whitehall Road on 5th (VL), a Semipalmated Sandpiper at the ACC landfill on 9th (RH) joined by a second bird on 12th, and a new county high count of 12 Spotted Sandpipers at Lake Herrick on 11th, with a late bird lingering there until 31st.

Bank Swallows were seen at Lake Chapman on 9th (RH), the ACC landfill on 10th (MB, RH, SM, JN) and Lake Herrick on 13th (MB, RH, JN). A Marsh Wren was singing at the State Botanical Garden beaverpond on 20th (MB, RH). Thrushes were thin on the ground this spring, with single reports of a Gray-cheeked Thrush from the State Botanical Garden on 6th (JH) and a Veery singing in the author's Five Points backyard on 13th (RH). Interesting warbler observations included a Hooded Warbler singing a perfect Swainson's Warbler song in the State Botanical Garden (RH, CJ), skulking Connecticut Warblers at Little Lake Herrick on 8th (RH) and the State Botanical Garden on 13th (RH, SM), and a singing male Wilson's Warbler at Lake Herrick on 17th (MB, KG, RH). The South Milledge fields held a White-crowned Sparrow on 6th (MB, KG, RH) and a Dickcissel on 11th (MB).

A Tallasseee Tract survey on 25th yielded exciting breeding records of birds more commonly recorded in the mountains: 5 singing Ovenbirds (the first evidence of this species breeding in Clarke Co.) and 7 singing male Scarlet Tanagers (RH, KP).

88 species were reported in June 2012, compared to 84 in 2011 and 76 in 2010. As expected, it was a quiet month, with the highlights being 2 Northern Bobwhites crossing Robert Hardeman Road on 4th (RH), the second county eBird record of Snowy Egret at the ACC landfill (RH, JN) and an exceptionally late Common Loon at Lake Chapman (RH), both following storms on 5th.

Observers: Mirko Basen, Krista Gridley, Richard Hall, Jim Hanna, Clark Jones, Vanessa Lane, Simon Mitchell, James Neves, Karen Porter

Backyard Wildlife Conservation Program

by Alison Huff

The Backyard Wildlife conservation program is back in action after the winter break. We welcome the Kleibers of 510 Milledge Circle with the first yard of 2012 to be certified as an official wildlife sanctuary. Pam Kleiber's home is located in the center of the historic 5-Points neighborhood in Athens. How "wild" can that be? Wild enough for deer, coyotes, and a variety of birds.

Pam's yard is dominated by mature oaks and pines, offering shade and cover for people and animals alike. She completed several additions to her home, taking care each time to preserve two gigantic American Beech trees. The water in a multilevel fountain splashes between two outdoor patios, while birds flit between several seed feeders. The yard is a pleasing combination of "wild" and "tame" areas, where tame gets mowed. The wild parts are natural areas with tall shrubs, green groundcovers and a charming stone wall, partly covered in vines. A rock pile serves as a focal point and provides enticing nooks where chipmunks and other small creatures can hide.

Pam knew just where to put her new Wildlife Sanctuary sign. She nestled it on the roots of a gigantic oak tree near the sidewalk. This way, neighbors see it as they stroll by.

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society promotes conservation by encouraging homeowners to think about and plan for ways to make their yards wildlife friendly. The concept is simple: provide year round water, food and shelter. You will attract butterflies, birds and a host of nature's citizens. For information about conservation friendly ideas or to obtain a Backyard Sanctuary application, visit our web site at www.oconeeriversaudubon.org and click on the link for "Education."

The Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary

by Alison Huff

Congratulations to New Certified ORAS Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Homeowners:

Cal and Clara Hasbrouk
Steve Holzman
Pam B. Kleiber
Richard Hall

As of May 29, 2012, nine homeowners completed the certification process for their property, totaling over forty acres in a three-county area. These homeowners provide year-round safe-havens for wildlife and are role-models for neighbors and friends to learn and share conservation ideas.

For more information: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org or, email: conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org

ORAS Small Grants Award for Fall 2012 – Call for Proposals *by Richard Hall*

ORAS wishes to support a student, teacher, individual, or group conducting research, designing outreach or educational activities, or undertaking habitat improvement to benefit birds and other native wildlife in the Athens area.

Awards are typically about \$300, but awards of up to \$500 may be considered. Successful applicants are expected to write a short report for our monthly newsletter and/or give an oral presentation—about thirty minutes to one hour—at one of our monthly speaker meetings.

The proposal should be 2-3 pages in length (single or 1.5 spaced) and should describe how the project will benefit birds, wildlife, and the Athens community. Also, the proposal should include an itemized list of supplies that will be purchased with the grant money.

Please email applications to ORAS President Richard Hall: president@oconeeriversaudubon.org.

(Deadline for receipt of these proposals is October 1, 2012).

President's Message *by Richard Hall*

The annual Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) retreat at Sandy Creek Nature Center was held on June 30. We discussed all aspects of the activities our chapter offers or supports. It is quite an impressive list, and something of which we should all be proud:

We organize outreach events, speaker meetings and field trips with the goal of connecting the public with birds, nature and wild outdoor spaces.

We are active in attending city hall meetings and letter-writing to ensure that local habitat is preserved, and damage through proposed new development is minimized.

We support students, teachers, conservation-minded citizens and local conservation organizations through our small grants, donations and our backyard wildlife sanctuary program.

None of this would be possible without the ongoing support of you, our membership—thank you so much!

I'm also immensely grateful for the hard work and support of the ORAS board and welcome our new board members: Steve Duke (membership), Linda Russell (conservation), Roger Nielsen (publicity), and Clark Jones (vice president).

We have another exciting program of events for you this year, kicking off with an extra-special speaker meeting to support Robert Gallardo in his goal of publishing the first ever field guide to the birds of Honduras. See you there!

Cowbird Conundrum *by Patricia McAlexander*

This past spring a cardinal built a neat little cup nest in the fork of a rosebush next to our back steps. When her eggs hatched, there were two tiny quivering nestlings—but a few days later there was only one. Had the missing bird been taken by a snake, raccoon, squirrel, jay, crow, or domestic or feral cat? Even more upsetting to me was the fact that the remaining nestling resembled a white-lipped nestling cowbird.

Perhaps from their peripatetic days of following herds of buffalo, then cows, to eat the accompanying insects (hence, I suppose, the name “cowbird”), these brown-headed, black-bodied birds—all gray-brown if female—have evolved to be nest parasites. The female cowbird lays her eggs in the nests of other birds. Then the host birds raise the cowbird along with their own offspring. Since the cowbird nestling is usually bigger and has a redder, more noticeable throat, it may get more than half the food the parents bring. Thus the “legitimate” offspring are subject to starvation. Some sources claim that cowbirds have been a major source of the decline of some songbirds in North America. According to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, cowbirds are “particularly harsh on cardinals,” whose eggs are very similar to theirs.

Since I now could make no in-nest comparisons, I was advised simply to watch the one remaining nestling as it matured and see what it “became.” Meanwhile, I pondered what I should do if it turned out to be a cowbird. Officially, removing a cowbird egg or nestling from a nest is illegal; cowbirds, being a native species, are protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Further, there were now no “siblings” to protect from starvation.

Ultimately the decision of what to do was taken out of my hands. After about a week, from the kitchen window I saw the young bird, eagerly thrusting its bill out for a tidbit, tumble out of the nest. Both parents fluttered about, chattering frantically. I had read that young cardinals leave the nest after 7-13 days, cowbirds after 8-13, so I hoped the young bird had been old enough to fledge. Later, I saw the parents flying in and out of the area and told myself they were probably feeding it; fledglings are fed by cardinal parents for at least 25 days.

A few days later, still thinking about that young bird and wondering whether I should have tried to put it back in the nest, I saw another fallen nestling in our driveway. When I leaned over it, a cacophony began in the tree above where birds scolded angrily. The young bird half-fluttered, half-scuttled speedily into the safety of a nearby flower bed. I then thought it even more likely that the other young bird—cowbird or cardinal—had been mature enough to survive.

Note: Pat has not seen any cowbirds in her yard, but the pair of cardinals still feed regularly at her feeder.

**Oconee Audubon Society
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Wildlife Sanctuary Class *by Kate Mowbray*

Sunday, August 26
2:00 – 5:00 pm
Kate Mowbray, Education Chair for ORAS
Visitor Center, Classroom 2
Member \$15; non-member \$18
Follow this link to register on line:
<http://botgarden.uga.edu/eduregister.html>

The Wildlife Sanctuary program is a conservation initiative sponsored by the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) to help protect and preserve birds, wildlife and plant species in the Athens area. Kate Mowbray will offer guidance on how to create a Wildlife Sanctuary in your own backyard by describing various plants and shelter for attracting wildlife. Bring a photo of your yard, and Kate will help identify some ways to improve your habitat.

Together, our backyards can become interconnected bird and wildlife havens.

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.

