



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

August/September 2017

Vol. 28, No. 7

Next Meeting:

Thursday, September 7, 6:00 p.m.
UGA's Odum School of Ecology

In September, Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) will meet on our usual first Thursday of each month. Our September 7 meeting location, however, will be in UGA's Odum School of Ecology auditorium for a presentation by Jim Cox, director of the Stoddard Lab at Tall Timbers Research Station.

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation (after a 6:00 p.m. reception):

Sex in the Sitta—The Unique Social Life of The Brown-headed Nuthatch

Jim Cox, director of the Stoddard Bird Lab at Tall Timbers Research Station, will discuss the lab's long-term research on the intriguing lives of Brown-headed Nuthatches. The Stoddard Bird Lab has studied these small birds for more than a decade.

Gram for gram, few birds pack as much interesting biology into their feathered frames as the Brown-headed Nuthatch. These fascinating critters are one of the only birds known to use tools and create nesting holes that are used by dozens of other animals.

On-campus parking is free and open after 5 p.m. in the S-07 lot off of West Green Street.

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

Exit 7 on College Station Road and turn west toward campus.
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).

Fall Bird Walks (in town)

Bird walks are from **8 a.m.-11a.m. or noon**. However, attendees may leave early. Dress for the weather and wear sturdy shoes. Bring water. (Please check ORAS announcements for any changes to this schedule and be aware that some new bird walks may be added later).

- Sept. 9: **Sandy Creek Nature Center (SCNC)**
- Sept. 16: **State Botanical Garden (Day Chapel)**
- Sept. 23: **Sandy Creek Park (Cook's Trail)***
- Sept. 24: **Lake Herrick (UGA campus)**
- Sept. 30: **Vulture Festival (Landfill)****
- Oct. 14: **State Botanical Garden (Day Chapel)**
- Oct. 21: **Whitehall (be on time for this walk)**
- Oct. 22: **Oconee Hill Cemetery**
- Oct. 28: **Sandy Creek Park (Campsite Dr.)**

* The SCNC Cook's Trail walk is also our Cook's Trail Cleanup trip. Please bring along a trash bag.

**ACC Vulture Festival" is Sat. Sept. 30 from 8:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. at the ACC Landfill 5700 Lexington Rd. This event celebrates nature's clean-up crew, the vulture, with family-friendly activities: bird walk, kids' games, recycling opportunities, landfill tour, and a visit from a captive vulture. Visit: www.athensclarkecounty.com/recycling

Fall Field Trip/GOS Meeting

Oct. 06-08: Georgia Ornithological Society Fall Meeting
The GOS fall meeting takes place on Jekyll Island. Birders of all abilities are welcome. For more information, visit: <http://www.gos.org/2017FallMeeting>

Oct. 15: 6:00 a.m. Cochran Shoals (More information on where to meet will be available in October).

A Message from the President

by *Catie Welch*

This past spring, I was elected to be the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society President. Many members have not met me yet, so I'd like to share some of my background here:

During the last three months, I studied some of the most interesting avian species for conservation research and education purposes. I observed the Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu's and Village Weavers that interact with free-range chickens in small homesteads in Kenya and taught UGA wildlife and veterinary students about the fascinating breeding behaviors displayed in White-collared Manakin leks in the Caribbean lowland rainforests of Costa Rica.

Since 2007, my passion for birds and their conservation increased after a coworker introduced me to birding. I grew up in Florida where I honed my field identification skills on some incredible South Florida bird species. I have driven, paddled, and hiked all over the state of Florida to "chase" rare birds, from the American Flamingos in Florida Bay to the Snowy Owl on Jacksonville Beach.

Professionally, I have had the opportunity to work closely with multiple Florida specialties, including Florida Scrub-Jays, Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, and Florida Grasshopper Sparrows (North America's most endangered bird). I spent many days counting migratory raptors in the Florida Keys and at Lucky Peak in Boise, Idaho.

I've also worked with the Hendry-Glades Audubon Society on the organization of the Big "O" Birding Festival and lead multiple birding trips.

My thesis research at the University of Georgia, which I completed in the spring of 2016, focused on the land use and movements of urbanized white ibises in South Florida. Since graduating, I was hired on as a research technician at UGA working on multiple projects including the White Ibis Project and the Epidemiology of Newcastle Disease Virus in Kenya.

I am honored to be part of the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society, and I plan to bring new perspectives and ideas to the group. I look forward to getting to know everyone, swapping bird stories and, above all, spreading our love of birds to the community!

The Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary

Become a Certified Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Homeowner by providing habitat for birds, wildlife, and native plants in our community!

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



Photo of Ed Maioriello (left) and Alison Huff, by Katy Manley, Memorial Park—June 1, 2017

Annual Potluck Picnic at Memorial Park

summary of June meeting by Liz Conroy

At our Annual Picnic on June 1 at Memorial Park, ORAS members voted for the slate of nominees: Catie Welch will be our President, Sam Merker—Vice President, Eugenia Thompson—Secretary, and Alison Huff will continue as Treasurer.

We also acknowledged long-time ORAS member, Ed Maioriello, for his decades of service to ORAS and declared him the third recipient of our Care And Service to the Environment (CASE) award. A good time was had by all!

Announcement of Fall Grants for 2017

by Ryan Chitwood

Fall is time for grant applications! We begin accepting grants on 9/6. The deadline is 10/18. Recipients can expect a decision by 11/1. We anticipate that 4 to 6 grants will be awarded. For more information, please visit our website: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/grant

SCNC Birdseed Sale Starts in September

Buy quality bird seed through SCNC, Inc. (the non-profit organization that supports the Nature Center). Drive through pick-up is Friday, Nov.10 from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. and Saturday, Nov.11 from 10a.m. to noon. Seniors and anyone with special needs in the Athens area can have their birdseed delivered for free. Pre-orders are accepted until Oct. 15.

Find order forms here:

<http://www.sandycreeknaturecenterinc.org/bird-seed-sale>

Or call Katie at [706-613-3615](tel:706-613-3615) Ext. 235

Tallassee Forest: Avian Gem in the Greenway Necklace *by Kathy Parker*

Early on a typical spring morning, Tallassee Forest is bursting with avian sounds—some raucous, others melodious. If you ramble through the forest, you are almost certain to hear the insistent *kee-aah* of the Red-shouldered Hawk as it soars overhead. If you're lucky, you might see an Ovenbird skulking about the leafy understory. You are more likely to hear its robust *teacher, teacher, teacher* reverberating throughout the forest. Most ovenbirds pass through our area to breed farther north, although some linger in large tracts of mature hardwood forest, like Tallassee, to breed.

These bird species and many more have been seen in Tallassee Forest. Censuses by members of ORAS during peak spring migration have reported 30-50 bird species. Birds that call Tallassee home vary with the seasons. For year-round residents, like the Red-shouldered Hawk, and migratory breeders, the forest is important breeding ground where birds rear young families. For species that winter in the tropics and breed farther north, Tallassee is an important stop-over during migration. In winter, it is home to species that breed in northern and western forests.

The breadth of environments within Tallassee Forest accounts for this remarkable avian diversity. Tallassee includes seven habitats that Georgia Department of Natural Resources feels merit particular conservation attention—including canebrakes. Its bottomland hardwood forests are extraordinary in their absence of Chinese privet thickets. A significant portion of the tract is old growth, with trees that are over 75 years old. Such large tracts of forest not only provide habitat for sensitive bird species like the Ovenbird, they are also more likely to allow landscape-scale processes, like flooding, to occur naturally. All of this makes Tallassee Forest a smorgasbord of habitats for resident and migratory birds that pass through our area.

Against a backdrop of rapidly changing environments, preservation of large tracts like Tallassee Forest becomes particularly critical. Recent research provides a snapshot of Georgia's breeding birds at the start of the 21st century. Over the preceding several decades, some species were able to adapt to the many environmental changes that occurred, while more vulnerable species were not. These changes included not only urbanization, but habitat loss and changes in food supplies that accompanied climate change. Future projections paint a similar picture—these trends are expected to continue.

Tallassee represents one of the few large, unfragmented forests that remain in rapidly developing Clarke County. Its habitat diversity and connection to other forests that are part of the Greenway make it easier for birds to fine-tune their distributions to adapt to future environmental change. In short, this relatively undisturbed tract is truly an ecological gem that is crucial to preserve.



Photo of Ovenbird by Kathy Parker, Sosebee Cove, Lumpkin County, Georgia—January 29, 2017

Dessert Before Supper (Part 1) *by Tim Homan*

Crags Campground, Lassen Volcanic National Park. The end of June in 2014 and the next to last night of a long camping trip to northernmost Arizona and California. After hiking and touring from early morning to mid-afternoon, Page and I returned to camp for rest and a little reading.

During the early evening we sat together on the picnic table—talking softly, writing in our trip journals, and planning the next day's hike. We wrote entries for a new aquatic chick sighting. While walking around a scenic front-country lake, Manzanita, we were treated to good looks, especially close on several occasions, at the fuzzy and fluffy young of the Pied-billed Grebe for the first time ever. The greblings were tricked out in black-and-white-stripes above the waterline. Their eyes and the bases of their bills were ringed in yellow. An intermittent halo of orange-red crowned their heads with an additional flourish of color.

Spotting and quickly identifying half a dozen grebe youngsters—the chicks of dabchicks—gave us a deeply satisfying sense of discovery, at least for a few moments. Both of us had studied the paintings of the zebra-patterned chicks over and over again, over multiple decades and editions of the *National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. Then one day that inanimate painting finally comes to willful life and living color. And that page in your bird guide is never quite the same. When you first look at the book-bound chick it is as still and static as ever. But if you close your eyes, the projected image of your mind—an amalgam of painting and memory—swims off the page into open water trailed by widening wakes.

When Planting Trees, Think Climate Change and Careful Spacing *by Liz Conroy*

The climate is changing as Earth's temperature rises, and as humans keep affecting the world. Throughout the Southeast, expect to experience more intense droughts and storms. Scientists predicted such trends, but changes are happening faster than even they anticipated. What does climate change mean for trees in Georgia? At a recent Athens Science Cafe talk, "Bugs, Fire, and Climate: Diagnosing Forest Health," Dr. David Coyle, forest health specialist for Southern Regional Extension Forestry and member of UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, discussed how trees, particularly pines, will be affected.

"Rain patterns are changing. In the past we might have six rainstorms with an inch of water in a month. In the future, we'll be more likely to have two rainstorms with three inches of water. Long story short: we're getting fewer rainfall events with more rain each time," Coyle said.

Drought is worrisome. "After a rain, every tree is 30 days away from a drought," he noted. Such conditions stress trees. Then they become more attractive to the native southern pine beetle and Ips bark beetles.

Southern pine beetles aggressively attack their favorite trees such as loblolly and slash pines. They don't favor longleaf pines and other pines. "But once these beetles get rolling, it doesn't matter; they'll go after any of them," Coyle said.

How do such small beetles kill big pines? They attack the "sleeve of life" of the tree. "They eat the phloem of the tree where nutrients and sugars from the leaves travel inside the tree's bark down to its root system. That's the energy for the tree. In short, the beetles cut off the tree's ability to feed itself." If it looks as if a beetle is infesting a pine, check the patterns on the inside of a section of tree bark. "S-shaped galleries [long grooves] indicate that it's the southern pine beetle infesting the tree," he said.

Tree owners can help protect their pine trees by not planting them too closely together. If they're already planted, thin them out to keep the remaining ones strong. "When there aren't enough resources for trees, they all get weak. Trees growing farther apart are more resistant to beetles since they have more light and water available to keep them stronger and better able to defend themselves."

Wind can be part of the defense, too. When pines are planted together too closely, the wind can't blow through them. "Pheromones [scents] put out by the beetles to attract their mates are dissipated by the wind. Then less successful mating occurs," he said. "Thin the trees that are growing too closely to let more air move through them. Too close together means greater risk of harm to the trees."

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Photo of inner bark damage from southern pine beetles, by David Coyle, Oconee National Forest, near Eatonton—August 18, 2017 Note the characteristic winding grooves (galleries)

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