



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

August/September 2018

Vol. 29, 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 each month. Our September 6 meeting location, however, will be in the University of Georgia's Odum School of Ecology auditorium for a presentation by Georgia Department of Natural Resource's biologist and Manomet ("Man-o-met") shorebird biologist who will discuss shorebirds and the importance of Georgia's coast.

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation (after a 6:30 p.m. reception):

Shorebird Ecology and Conservation

Tim Keyes and Abby Sterling will discuss shorebird ecology and conservation on the Georgia coast. The meeting will begin at 6:30 p.m. with wine, cheese, snacks, and a silent auction fundraiser.

Our featured speakers will begin their presentation at 7 p.m. The Georgia Coast is a region with incredible habitat for shorebirds, ranging from expansive marshes to barrier island beaches. Keyes and Sterling will discuss shorebird conservation and the recent designation of Georgia's barrier islands as a landscape of hemispheric importance.

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. 8: **Sandy Creek Nature Center (SCNC)**
- Sept. 15: **State Botanical Garden (Day Chapel)**
- Sept. 22: **Sandy Creek Park (Cook's Trail)***
- Sept. 23: **Lake Herrick (UGA campus)**
- Sept. 29 : **Whitehall (be on time for this walk)**
- Oct. 13: **Vulture Festival (Landfill)****
- Oct. 14: **State Botanical Garden (Day Chapel)**
- Oct. 21: **Whitehall (be on time for this walk)**
- Oct. 21: **Oconee Hill Cemetery**
- Oct. 27: **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. Oct. 13, 30 from 8:00 a.m. until noon at the ACC Landfill 5700 Lexington Rd. This free event celebrates nature's clean-up crew (the vultures) with family-friendly activities: bird walk, kids' games, recycling opportunities, landfill tour, and a visit from a captive vulture. Visit: www.accgov.com/recycling or call: 706.613.3512

Fall Field Trip/GOS Meeting

Oct. 05-08: Georgia Ornithological Society Fall Meeting
The GOS fall meeting takes place on Jekyll Island. Birders of all abilities are welcome. Visit: <https://www.gos.org/>

Oct. 20: 6:00 a.m. Cochran Shoals (More information on where to meet will be available in October).

Birding in Guinea, West Africa

by John Mark Simmons

The hot and humid summer months here in Athens, Georgia typically bring about a more sedated state of birding. Despite the flowers buzzing with hummingbirds and the pasture fences being covered in buntings and meadowlarks, sometimes one can get a little bored. For the past three summers normally one would find me working on bird research opportunities in the western U.S. This summer, however, I was presented with a unique chance to travel abroad and experience birds that other countries have to offer during May and June.

My older brother, Luke Simmons, has been a Peace Corps volunteer since 2016 and is placed in Guinea, West Africa. As an agro-forester in the village of Tindo, he takes on various tasks of malaria prevention, diversification of crops, and approaching old farming practices with fresh eyes. Since my summer plans were still up in the air earlier this year he suggested that I take the chance to come visit him on site and get my first taste of Africa. I quickly decided to go!

I spent two weeks in Guinea beginning in late May with a brief stop in Morocco on the way there. Conakry, the capitol city of Guinea, offered a handful of life birds for me which I observed from the roof of the Peace Corps transit house. I welcomed the chance to rest from my long journey and to spend time with other volunteers before I had to squish into an old rusty Guinean taxi for the bumpy ride to Tindo. Despite being worn down I still felt a warm exciting feeling when I started seeing birds that were completely new to me.

Upon arriving in Tindo after a nine hour taxi ride, I quickly surveyed the habitat to discern where I would start and what I might find there. Tindo is classified as “Guinea Savanna” meaning it’s a mix of open grassy yet rocky fields with mostly second-growth shrubs and trees. The majority of “the bush” was no taller than 20 feet with the exception of a few Baobab trees by the river that would dwarf a 100-year-old White Oak.

The villagers burn farmland every year to get the land ready to plant crops for next season. During a typical outing I would find about twenty-five species including firefinches, drongos, weavers, rollers, pigeons and doves, hornbills, turacos, kingfishers, shrikes, and sunbirds. My favorite group by far was the kingfishers! Not only did they have a beautiful assortment of colors, but they also behaved much differently than our Belted Kingfisher. Sometimes I would find kingfishers foraging on forest edge eating lizards and grasshoppers.

Birding in a completely different place can be intimidating, especially when the birds are also completely new, the languages are foreign, the only transportation is your feet, and the locals don’t quite understand what you’re up to when they run across you looking up into a tree in the bush. I did my best to put aside the difficulties of being in a foreign country and focus on what I knew—birding.

Many principles of birding are the same no matter where you go in the world. I found myself using the exact same skills I’ve used almost my entire life here in Georgia and in the process recorded 118 species during my two weeks in Guinea.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of it for me was actually going back to the basics. When I finished my morning birding I would sit in my brother’s mud hut with my guide and study it for hours until I figured out what I just saw. I was no longer a master birder when I stepped foot in Africa. In fact, I was very much the newbie with a shiny field guide and no idea about the identity of the slightest chirp. However, after staying in Tindo for a few days I started getting the hang of the local bird life and began discovering some of the mysterious sounds that left me baffled after coming so close to getting my binoculars on them.

I learned a few names of birds in the local language, Malinke, from Luke’s counterpart, Sekouba. Sekouba led me into the bush a few times and helped me find good spots to find certain birds and taught me a few of the local names which I could not attempt to spell in my wildest dreams.

Traveling to Guinea was a humbling experience for multiple aspects of my life including my passion of birding. Plenty of birds flew by that I will never identify, but for me that’s part of the fun.



Photo of Gray-headed Kingfisher by John Mark Simmons, Guinea, West Africa—June 1, 2018

Native Plants Help Wildlife by Liz Conroy

The first day of autumn is September 22. In Georgia, fall is a good time for planting. The cooler weather allows roots of trees and shrubs to become established without being stressed by heat. Native flowers, shrubs and trees provide food and shelter for our insects, birds and other wildlife and add beauty to the landscape.

What native host plants help butterflies? *Bringing Nature Home* by Douglas Tallamy includes suggestions: spicebush for Spicebush swallowtails, butterfly weed and milkweed for Monarchs, false indigo for Silver-spotted skippers and more.

October 4, 5, 6 and 11, 12, 13 are the dates for the State Botanical Garden’s “Connect to Protect” Native Plant Sale.

Coastal Connections *by Abby Sterling*

Summer means nesting shorebirds. This season, however, shorebird chicks aren't the only new additions to our coastal scenery. In May, the Georgia Barrier Islands received new recognition from the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) as a landscape of hemispheric importance and the 100th WHSRN site. This designation was granted because the Georgia coast supports more than 30% of the East Coast Red Knots, as well as at least 10% of the population of American Oystercatchers, Short-billed Dowitchers, and Black-bellied Plovers. It is also an important wintering site for the federally endangered Great Lakes breeding Piping Plovers.

The process for a site to join this network starts with consolidating all of the monitoring data that has been collected over the years and submitting an application to the WHSRN scientists. The application was prepared on behalf of the Georgia Shorebird Alliance by One Hundred Miles.

Because this site spans the entirety of the Georgia coast, partners such as the National Park Service, National Fish and Wildlife Service, the Nature Conservancy, and private island owners and managers such as St. Catherines Island, Little St. Simons Island, and Little Cumberland Island were all involved.

A dedication ceremony was held at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge. In addition to local attendees, guests spanning the hemisphere—from northern Canada to Mexico—came to celebrate the beautiful Georgia coast. For more information about the designation, please visit <https://www.whsrn.org/georgia-barrier-islands>

Another new development for shorebird conservation is the launch of Manomet's Georgia Bight Shorebird Conservation Initiative. This project, under the direction of Brad Winn, will be led by local shorebird biologist, Abby Sterling. By working with partners such as Tim Keyes at the Georgia Department of Natural Resource (DNR) and Felicia Sanders at the South Carolina-DNR, as well as engaging with local partners, private landowners, federal and state agencies, and other non-profits, we will help build collaborations to prioritize shorebird conservation in the Southeast.

The Georgia Bight, including coastal South Carolina, Georgia, and Northeast Florida, provides important habitat throughout the year to many shorebirds. Despite the ample resources it provides, however, there are numerous threats such as disturbance and loss of habitat that can be addressed by this collaborative approach. If you're interested in getting involved with our efforts, please feel free to contact me.

Finally, a summer update wouldn't be complete without some chick news. Reports from Keyes suggest a record breaking year for the number of fledged American Oystercatcher chicks. He has been busy banding them all summer and is still adding more to the tally, which is now approaching nearly 60 new chicks!

This Coastal Connections segment is intended to provide updates from Manomet's Georgia Bight Shorebird Conservation Initiative for birders throughout the state. Please visit: <https://www.manomet.org/project/shorebird-recovery/> or email Abby Sterling (Shorebird Biologist, Manomet) at asterling@manomet.org.



Photo of newly banded American Oystercatcher chicks by Tim Keyes, Cumberland Island, Georgia —May 30, 2018

Annual Potluck Picnic at Memorial Park

summary of June meeting by Liz Conroy

At our Annual Picnic on June 7 at Memorial Park, ORAS members voted for the slate of nominees: Catie Welch will continue as our President, Sam Merker—Vice President, Eugenia Thompson—Secretary, and Alison Huff—Treasurer.

We also acknowledged dedicated ORAS member, Richard Hall, for his outstanding service to ORAS and declared him the fourth recipient of our Care And Service to the Environment (CASE) award. A good time was had by all!

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.2 from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. and Saturday, Nov.3 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. Call Katie: [706-613-3615 Ext. 235](tel:706-613-3615) or get order forms here: <http://www.sandycreeknaturecenterinc.org/bird-seed-sale>

Announcements from the President

by *Catie Welch*

Supporting the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Amendment

This November, Georgia voters have the opportunity to vote YES for conservation! The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Amendment, if passed, will allot up to 80% of existing sales and use tax from outdoor sporting goods to conserve Georgia's water, land, and wildlife.

This dedication of funds will protect lands, acquire and improve parks and trails, maintain and improve access to wildlife management areas, and support Georgia's \$27 billion outdoor recreation industry, all without raising any taxes or creating new fees.

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) strongly supports this amendment and encourages all of our members to vote YES on the general election ballot in November. For more information, please visit www.georgiaoutdoorstewardship.org

Georgia Grows Native for Birds

This September is the inaugural Georgia Grows Native for Birds Month thanks to a recently signed proclamation from Governor Nathan Deal. Join us in celebrating the native plants of Georgia and role they play for birds and other wildlife.

In partnership with Atlanta Audubon Society, Augusta-Aiken Audubon Society, Coastal Georgia Audubon Society, Columbus Audubon Society, Ocmulgee Audubon Society, Ogeechee Audubon Society, and the Georgia Native Plant Society, Oconee Rivers Audubon Society is working to create a network of habitats filled with native plants across Georgia.

Habitat loss is the number one cause of decline in avian biodiversity. As we build our homes, shopping centers, schools, and hospitals that are fundamental to our society, we destroy natural habitats that are critical for the survival of many species of plants and animals. Urbanization is a global threat to biodiversity. We at ORAS want to help counteract the reduction of native habitat in urban areas. We do this by encouraging our friends and neighbors to create a backyard space where wildlife can thrive.

Our Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Certification Program sets a standard for backyards in urban areas, ensuring that wildlife have food, water, space, and shelter. You and your neighbors can create a green space for wildlife that will increase biodiversity, limit urban heat island effects, and create a beautiful oasis that you can enjoy year-round.

This September we will be hosting a presentation on our certification process so you can learn how to create a Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary, including what native plants to plant in your backyard. Remember that fall is an ideal time to plant trees and shrubs in Georgia.

ORAS and Wild Birds Unlimited will host a native plant & seed swap on Saturday, September 22 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Wild Birds Unlimited at 1850 Epps Bridge Pkwy, Ste. 203 in Athens.

At 11:00 am, ORAS will discuss how to get your yard certified as a Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary. Native plants are crucial for birds and other wildlife. Learn how you can provide better habitat for them by planting and nurturing native plants. Mark your calendars, and we hope to see you there!

Keep up to date on this and other Georgia Grows Native for Birds events by checking out our calendar on our website or on social media: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/sanctuary

Announcement of Fall Grants for 2018

Fall is also time for grant applications! We begin accepting grants on September 6. The final deadline is October 18. Recipients can expect a decision by November 1. We anticipate that four to six grants will be awarded. For more information, visit: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/grant

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Submit items to address above or e-mail *The Yellowthroat* editor Liz Conroy: yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org Articles, photos, notices, and sighting reports welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the first day 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.

