



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

February 2018

Vol. 29, No. 2

Next Meeting:
Thursday, February 1, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

ORAS Members' Night Show

Join Oconee Rivers Audubon Society for a fun, informative Member's Night. It's an entertaining evening involving local speakers sharing inspirational moments, new findings, and sometimes colorful surprises only found in nature.

The multi-talented members of the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society will share stories, photos, research, poems, and anything else bird related!

These special evenings have been popular in the past and are different each time. Bring friends who have never been to ORAS meetings, and they just might want to come back!

Want to present at this meeting? Please sign up here:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/14QbkP3hu7cKj-ln-eHrqSfmhhtmZiYBQCcsYbUZIS_Q

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 is a short way down the road on your right.

Grant Applications for Spring 2018

ORAS will accept grant applications beginning Thursday, February 1, 2018. (Grant amount: \$300 - \$600)

Application Period: February 1 - March 10, 2018

Application & Instructions: Applicants must complete the following steps:

1. Submit ORAS Conservation Grant [Application Form](#)
2. Submit an [Applicant Letter](#). Applicant Letters should be a total of three pages, and include a cover letter, budget, and CV/resume. All Applicant Letters must be mailed to president@oconeeriversaudubon.org (president "at" oconeeriversaudubon.org).
3. Have one Letter of Recommendation (1-page limit) emailed to president@oconeeriversaudubon.org (president "at" oconeeriversaudubon.org).

The links to the Application form and further instructions for the Applicant letter can be found on the ORAS website grants page: <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/grant>

Eligible Applicants: Any individual wishing to conduct research or complete a project with an emphasis on bird conservation, habitat improvement, or environmental education within Georgia. Applicants must be located in the Greater Athens-Clarke County region or have a connection to the Athens-Clarke County area. This includes students and employees of UGA or other local educational institutions.

Eligible Locations: All projects must have a connection to the greater Athens-Clarke County region and be conducted within the state of Georgia.

Grantee Requirements: Grantees are required to submit an article, photos, or project update to the *Yellowthroat*, the ORAS newsletter. Some applicants may also be asked to discuss their project at one of the ORAS Monthly Meetings. An ORAS board member will be in contact with each grantee to check progress throughout the duration of the project.

St. Catherine's Island Christmas Bird Count - mid-December 2017

by Patrick Maurice

On a sunny Friday afternoon in the middle of December, about three dozen birders gathered on a boat dock overlooking the salt marsh in Liberty County, Georgia. They were gathered for the 30th anniversary of the St. Catherine's Island Christmas Bird Count. This is an invitation-only count, and this year, I was invited to participate. Once everyone filled the boats with their belongings, and all the food needed for the next three days, we set off for the island.

The count was conducted on Saturday, December 16th. The island is divided into five areas that each had an area leader and six to eight team members per area. I spent the day in Area 3 led by Giff Beaton; we were separated into two groups birding different parts of the maritime forest in the morning.

After a chilly morning where we saw birds such as Blue-headed Vireos, Yellow-throated Warblers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, and more than 175 (!) Ruby-crowned Kinglets, we returned to the main building for lunch.

After lunch we headed back out to bird the beach. After we all loaded up into the small boat and made it about one hundred yards from the dock, the engine died on us! Luckily after about ten minutes we got help and we were towed back to the dock. While we sat on the water surrounded by salt marsh, we were able to pish up a Seaside Sparrow which was a nice consolation!

After finally making it out to the beach, my small group of Giff Beaton, Nathan Farnau, and I headed down the beach while occasionally stopping to scan the open water. A couple of nice highlights were watching an adult Parasitic Jaeger harassing Forster's Terns right off the beach, seeing a flock of ten Wilson's Plovers, and also finding a delicate, little Bonaparte's Gull mixed in with a large gull and tern flock.

The birding and the experience on one of Georgia's beautiful barrier islands was great, but I think the other birders made the count really worthwhile. It was great to reconnect with old friends and to make new ones in a wonderful place.

Eco-haiku by Robert E. Wyatt

The marshes of Glynn—
Cordgrass and rushes stand tall,
teeming with tidal life.

Fiery red and orange,
the sun sinks into the marsh.
Fiddler crabs scurry forth.



Photo of Hermit Thrush by Patrick Maurice on St. Catherine's Island, Liberty County, Georgia—
December 16, 2017



Photo of Ruddy Turnstone by Patrick Maurice on St. Catherine's Island, Liberty County, Georgia—
December 16, 2017



Photo of Wilson's Plovers by Patrick Maurice on St. Catherine's Island, Liberty County, Georgia—
December 16, 2017

Christmas in the Canopy *by Richard Hall*

I was lucky enough to spend the Christmas break at the spectacular Canopy Tower in Panama. This former U.S. Air Force radar station turned ecolodge, set atop a forested hill overlooking the Panama Canal, makes an ideal venue for coming eyeball-to-eyeball with tropical birds and mammals in the treetops.

On arrival, I huffed and puffed my way up four flights of steps to the observation deck to have a majestic King Vulture soar overhead—a lucky sighting that turned out to be the only one of the trip. In the afternoon we were co-opted into participating in the Panama Pacific Christmas Bird Count! We enjoyed a festive array of colorful tropical birds, but the icing on the cake was a beautiful male Blue Cotinga that graced us with its presence in the evening sun.

On Christmas Eve, I got up early to watch the sun rise over Panama City. I was joined by a vocal Keel-billed Toucan, and a three-toed sloth attempting slo-mo morning yoga while a Bay-breasted Warbler hopped around it—a reminder that many of ‘our’ North American birds make their winter homes in the tropics. Walking downhill from the tower produced an impressive array of birds and a close encounter with the strange but adorable Panamanian night monkey.

The unexpected highlight came during supper, when our whole group was startled by a large bat flying in through the window. Puzzled as to why it chose to join us for dinner, I walked over to the open window and was astonished to see a beautiful Black-and-White Owl staring back at me from no more than six feet away. Even better, the owl stayed through dinner, providing all the guests and staff with a wonderful early Christmas present.

Christmas morning was spent birding the iconic Pipeline Road, where five species of antbird, including the stunning Ocellated, all appeared cooperatively at the roadside. Choosing a favorite sighting of the day was a tough call, but an impressively camouflaged Great Potoo was a new family of birds that I’d always wanted to see, with the beautiful Rufous-crested Coquette—a tiny hummingbird with a striking orange Mohawk—running a close second. A troupe of howler monkeys made for raucous company over lunch.

Our last new bird of the trip—species no. 275—was a rare, close look at a Great Tinamou lumbering silently across the forest floor. Canopy Tower is a magical place to spend the holidays, and I can’t wait to return!

Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program

Become a Certified Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Homeowner by providing habitat for birds, wildlife, and native plants in our community! For more information: <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/sanctuary> Or email: oconeeriversaudubonsociety@gmail.com



Photo of Blue Cotinga by Richard Hall, Panama — December 23, 2017



Photo of Keel-billed Toucan by Richard Hall, Panama — December 24, 2017

The Important Role of Fire in Conservation Efforts

summary of the January meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to Shan Cammack, Georgia Department of Natural Resources (Georgia DNR) fire safety officer, for her talk on The Important Role of Fire in Conservation Efforts.

Cammack works in the Nongame Conservation Section which is within the Wildlife Resources Division. A major goal in her line of work is to help build resilient landscapes through the use of carefully managed fires (prescribed burns). An important management objective of prescribed burns is to enhance threatened and endangered species habitats.

She offered a brief historical perspective about how rural residents used to take it upon themselves to do burns. One older man told her how he'd just fling lit matches around the woods and go sit on this rocker to watch the fire spread across his property. "In those days, the habitats were not as fragmented by roads and less risky" she explained. "Today, prescribed fire is a safe way to apply natural processes to ensure ecosystem health and reduce wildfire risk."

Cammack listed some of the basic elements of a burn plan which begins with the question the leaders must ask, "What are we trying to achieve by doing this prescribed burn?" Important aspects to consider include what day is best and where the smoke will go. In all of this planning, the weather is the key. Yet, for a successful burn, there's still an important interplay of other factors, such as site conditions (wet or dry) and fuels (dry grasses, leaves, dead trees). She said, "Knowing how fire behavior is affected by the available fuels is super-important!"

There is also a Code of Ethics that should be followed by those engaged in prescribed burns. Cammack listed such requirements as receiving the necessary training, getting certified for those skills, and being able to prepare and follow a well-designed burn plan.

An important document known as "SWAP" (State Wildlife Action Plan) published July 31, 2015 by the GA DNR Wildlife Resources Division included the importance of fire in conservation efforts as one of the top themes. This publication is helpful for employees in different agencies since an "interagency burn team works together and does

better than if each agency is working in a vacuum." She added that using local workers gives power to people on the ground.

The question "How do we change our tactics with a changing climate?" came up near the end of the talk. Cammack noted, "Last season, we burned less, fewer days of the year and smaller areas with increased care." Still prescribed burns must continue for the health and safety of wildlife, plants and humans since fire exclusion approaches of the past had such destructive results with out-of-control fires.

"The South is going to burn. Either you choose the day or Mother Nature is going to choose the day," she cautioned.

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

President Catie Welch
President@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Vice-President Sam Merker
vp@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Treasurer Alison Huff
treasurer@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Secretary Eugenia Thompson
secretary@oconeeriversaudubon.org

The Yellowthroat
Published monthly by the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

Submit items to address above or e-mail *The Yellowthroat* editor Liz Conroy: yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org Articles, artwork, 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