



# The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

January 2019

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**Next Meeting:**  
**Thursday, January 3, 7:00 p.m.**  
**Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens**

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

## Recent Research on Viruses in Birds

Catie Welch, ORAS president and Research Technician at UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and USDA's Exotic and Emerging Avian Viral Disease Research Unit, will discuss Newcastle disease virus (NDV). In many countries, it occurs naturally and can quickly mutate and evolve.

NDV transmission at the agriculture-wildlife interface likely occurs between wild birds and backyard poultry at food and water stations. The effects of viruses transmitted to wild birds from domestic poultry are of major concern but not well documented. Collaborative research to better understand NDV in Kenya began in 2016. Together, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Museum of Kenya and Kenya's Wildlife Service, Agriculture and Livestock Research Organization, and Department of Veterinary Services collected biological samples from poultry and wild birds. Samples are currently being analyzed and preliminary results will be discussed.

**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 Education & Visitor Center building is a short way down the road on your right.

## Christmas Bird Count—Then and Now

*summary of December meeting by Carole Ludwig*

Thanks to Eugenia Thompson, a former president of ORAS, for presenting "Audubon's Christmas Bird Count: Tallying the Birds of the Americas for Over a Century."

The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) began at a time when feathers and dead birds were used extensively in ladies hats. Frank Chapman reported 540 examples of this practice in his magazine "Bird Lore." Shooting birds for sport and monetary gain on Christmas Day was common. But in 1900, 29 people counted birds instead of killing them. The practice eventually led to outdoor Christmas time counts throughout the world, although not on the continent of Antarctica.

Today, the protocol is that a 15-mile diameter circle in a given geographic area is divided into sectors and observers cover that area year after year, counting the numbers of birds and noting their species. This is a day-long activity in which counters gather at the end of the day and report their tallies, usually enjoying a potluck supper and exchanging stories.

The CBC is an early example of important citizen science. For instance, in 2012, count participants numbered 60,000 in 20 countries, with 64 million birds counted and 2,400 species seen. A summary of count results can be accessed online at the national Audubon website, and allows the user to search by count circle, date range, bird species, and more. Visit this site to search results:  
<http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/Historical/ResultsByCount.aspx>

Athens traces its participation in the CBC to 1972. Eugenia Thompson and Mary Case stepped up in 1998 to take over the helm, and have been at it ever since. The species totals for the count range from a low of 74 species in 2000 to a high of 92 species in 2014, a reflection of yearly changes in participation, weather, and changes in habitat.

Several ornithological entities use the information gained to check on the health and migrations routes of species. Such information has been crucial in helping the Bald Eagle recover from the threat of DDT. Future bird conservation work is largely based on such information.

## New Year's Resolution—Take Time with a Bird *by Sam Merker*

One April I was unexpectedly called home to New Hampshire, and although my reason for being there was sad, it had a few silver linings. It was a hectic visit, and I relished returning to Athens to do some spring birding. It wasn't until I returned home and checked out Ebird to see what was around that I saw that a pair of Black-bellied Whistling Ducks had been seen in Athens the day before and it turned out, right in my backyard!

I equipped myself with camera, binoculars, and windbreaker and headed out to Lake Herrick. They were gone. I kept birding anyway.

It was a classic spring day in Athens, cool, sunny, a breeze. I saw the usual suspects: Chickadees, Titmice, Yellow-rumped and Pine Warblers, a couple Pied-billed Grebes, a Great Blue Heron. Any listers reading this are probably already bored, but this heron, for whatever reason, sparked my interest. It was standing in the "wild" corner of Lake Herrick on a small stump and it was in direct sunlight. I decided, since there were no ducks to photograph, that I would sneak up on it and get a good picture of a heron. I was able to get within about 20 feet before the idea of wet feet stopped me. I sat, it stood. I watched, it watched.

We did nothing together for some time. Then it seemed to forget about me, or decided I wasn't a threat, because it started to preen itself. It preened left, it preened right, up, down, almost upside down, it shook, it wiggled, it flapped, it stretched. I saw colors on this Great Blue Heron that I had never seen before. I saw it move in ways I had never seen before.

That moment with that heron really brought me back to what I loved about birds (and most animals): What they do. The behavior of birds, the way they move, the way they can fly, the way they sound, is all fascinating.

I sat and photographed this bird's preening behavior for almost an hour. I wanted to share this photo with Oconee Rivers Audubon Society in hopes that it will remind everyone, like it reminds me, to spend a little extra time with each bird because you might see something cool.

## Eco-Haiku *by Nancy Hunter*

Didn't see him come,  
but huge wings took him away.  
Five koi down to three



Photo of Great Blue Heron by Sam Merker, Lake Herrick, UGA Campus, Clarke County, Georgia—April, 2016



Painting of Great Blue Heron, by Jessica Magnarella, Athens, Georgia—December, 2018

## Eco-Haiku *by Robert E. Wyatt*

Cattails bend near shore,  
lightly rippling the surface.  
Great blue heron strikes

## Landscape for Birds with Kids *by Liz Conroy*

An old Chinese proverb inspires parents with young children to create nature-friendly yards: “The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second best time is right now.” Children often stay connected to trees they helped to plant or which were planted for them.

Entomologist Doug Tallamy, who wrote *Bringing Nature Home*, witnessed such a connection. At Elachee Nature Science Center in Gainesville, he discussed the importance of nature-friendly yards. Native trees, shrubs and flowers help feed and shelter our birds and other wildlife, he said.

He then described a memorable time when he planted a young oak tree and measured it and his goddaughter’s height each year on her birthday to show how she and the tree both grew over time. She enjoyed the tradition. Her childhood joy of feeling connected to the newly planted tree became a lifetime of appreciation for trees.

Athens parent Skipper StipeMaas recommends planting trees with children as a way to remember certain events, including births and deaths of family members and pets. She and her family have planted maples, dogwoods and other trees in celebration and in memory of loved ones. They know that planting trees educates their children, beautifies the yard, and connects their family to nature.

StipeMaas explained: “Looking at trees, watching them grow, and immersing yourself into nature is healing. When you add the layer of having planted a tree with an emotional reason behind it, you have this lifetime of watching that tree grow and pausing and remembering the moment you planted it, what you were feeling, and all of the memories of that person or event.”

Parent, biologist and birder, Steve Holzman urges families who have space in their yards to consider planting trees early on—especially native fruit and seed-bearing trees which attract birds and other wildlife.

Native favorites include hollies, dogwood, sumacs, serviceberry and fringe trees. He recommends black cherry, crab apple, and red mulberry as good fruit trees for birds. “Be careful about planting certain trees by walkways,” he cautions. After all, falling fruit can be messy!

Indeed, finding the best site for any tree requires care: Think ahead to what the full grown height and width of a particular tree will be and ask: “Will anything up, down or nearby be in the way when it’s grown?”

No one wants tree branches brushing overhead wires or spreading roots buckling the pavement. Before selecting a site, observe how much sun an area regularly receives. If a potential site is too shady, a tree may not thrive there.

Once the best place for the tree is chosen, children can help with digging and enjoy getting dirty. Given the heavy, red clay in this area, it helps to loosen the soil ahead of time. Then youngsters can easily dig away.

Naturalist Kate Mowbray points out: “Children love to dig, so why not let them help dig the holes for the plants that need to go in the ground? At Sandy Creek Nature Center, we have children and their families help plant our veggie bed.”

Also, kids can get dirty when they help loosen the roots of a potted tree. Remove the young tree carefully from the container and energetically work the roots out of their circular pot-bound condition. Spread them out before placing the tree in the hole. Take care not to plant the tree too deep! Notice how trees in the forest have wider trunks near the forest floor. This is known as the “root flare” and should be above ground. Planting trees too deep may cause them to decline.

Putting mulch around the base of the tree is important, but don’t over-mulch! Use old leaves or pine straw and keep mulch away from the tree trunk to allow airflow around the bark. Mowbray adds: “Once the plants are in the ground, they still need TLC. Like taking care of a pet, plants need water, food, a blanket (of mulch), and kind words to help them grow.”

Create a chart that the children can follow about when to water and how much to water the young tree, she adds. Watering is an engaging chore for children. Watering must be done regularly, especially while the young tree is establishing its root system. Small children need help from adults to pour on just enough water on a regular basis.

Finally, if there’s not enough room for trees, consider native shrubs. They offer food, hiding places and nesting sites for birds and other wildlife. Holzman urges avoiding (and removing) the non-native shrub, *Nandina*. Its berries contain cyanide which kills birds. Instead, he recommends native shrubs such as beautyberry, viburnum, sparkleberry, wax myrtle and hawthorns.

Whether it’s trees, shrubs or flowers—the planting skills are similar. When kids are able to help, they connect with nature and learn how to give our birds and other wildlife a better chance to thrive!

## Eco-Haiku *by Jessica Magnarella*

The river ran high,  
brushed oat grass, touched mosses,  
tumbled on red with clay.

## Crider Cares for Cane by Karla O'Grady

Gary Crider continues the hard work of caring for the river cane at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia (SBG) with help from various volunteers and horticulture students. He has an amazing reputation for wiping out invasive, exotic plants throughout the Athens area; his efforts are on display at the river cane plantings.

The cane at was planted in memory of Bill O'Grady when ORAS teamed up with SBG to bring river cane back to the Middle Oconee River (see photo of the sign at SBG below).

Under Crider's watchful eye the once plentiful privet has not sneaked back in to grow in this area. Privet remains a problem due to its rapid growth which enables it to shade the river cane. The river cane needs full sun to thrive.



Photo of River Cane Restoration Project Sign by Karen Porter, State Botanical Garden of Georgia, Clarke County—February 17, 2018

## KACCB "Bring One for the Chipper"

Citizens may bring their **undecorated** Christmas Trees to "Bring One for the Chipper" sites Saturday, January 5- 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. for recycling in exchange for a tree seedling. Residents can recycle their Christmas tree and metal wreaths at any location and receive a free tree seedling (dogwoods, swamp chestnut oaks, and persimmons).

This year the Chipper sites will also accept your Christmas lights for recycling **DURING THE CHIPPER EVENT**. If you need to recycle lights before or after those times, they can be recycled at [CHaRM](#) Mondays & Wednesdays -10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. & Saturdays - 7:00 a.m. to noon.

Drop-off Locations: Cofers, Clarke Middle School, SCNC, Chase St. Elem. School, GA Square Mall Theater Parking Lot, Winterville Public Works Building, Lexington Road Tag Office. For more info: [www.keepathensbeautiful.org](http://www.keepathensbeautiful.org)

## "Journey through the Stars: Birds of the Night Sky" at Sandy Creek Nature Center on Saturday, January 19, 2019

"Birds of the Night Sky" is set for Saturday, January 19 from 10:00 – 11:00 a.m. The sky is like an aviary! See bird constellations of the night sky like Corvus the Crow, Aquila the Eagle and Cygnus the Swan and listen to their stories. You'll feel like an ornithologist as you learn tricks to identify the birds of the night sky.

The program fee is \$2 for an Athens-Clarke County and \$3 for a non-Athens-Clarke County per session. [Online registration is underway.](#)

This program has an admission fee and is not scholarship eligible. Pre-registration is required. All participants must register. No children under five years of age. Children must be accompanied by an adult. For more info, please call 706-613-3615.

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