



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

June/July 2012

Vol. 23 No. 6

Next Meeting: Thursday, June 3, 6:00 p.m. Annual June Potluck Picnic

Our Potluck Picnic begins at 6:00 p.m. at Memorial Park in picnic shelter number 1. Bring a covered dish and enjoy an evening of socializing in the outdoors. Also, the Election of Officers for the upcoming year takes place at this meeting. Following is the list of nominees:

- Richard Hall, President
- TBA, Vice-President
- Mary Case, Secretary
- Eugenia Thompson, Treasurer

To reach Memorial Park, go south on South Milledge Avenue from Five Points, and turn right on Gran Ellen Drive, just past Milledge Ave. Baptist Church. After a few blocks, Memorial Park will be on your left. The shelters are immediately to your left, down the hill. Drive carefully.

See You in September – Save this Date!

In September, ORAS will meet on our usual first Thursday of each month. Our September 6 meeting location will be the Odum School of Ecology for a talk by Honduran author and birder, Robert Gallardo. (More details later). Also, while we don't meet in July and August, stay current on bird sightings board at our webpage: <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/>

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

Tallassee Tract: An Important Resource

summary of May meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to Dr. Karen G. Porter for presenting the May program, **Tallassee Tract: An Important Resource**. She discussed the history of this pristine land, special features and why it is worth protecting. For example, steep terrain prevented intensive farming on this tract. Porter pointed out that a map from 1938 showed the area remained as hardwood forest while surrounding acres were planted extensively in cotton.

Several scientists have begun to do inventories of plants, trees, butterflies and more in this area. Also, ecologists have discovered biotic indicators of high quality streams there. "Some of the cleanest streams in Clarke County are in those ravines," Porter said. Another important aspect of the area is the lack of invasive species such as privet. "This shows how an intact ecological system can ward off invasives," Porter noted. Ancient artifacts have also been found in various places. The Creeks referred to this area as "The Beloved Land" due to the land's incredible resources and beauty.

Sightings Reported at May Meeting

Blue Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager, Madison County, Page Luttrell and Tim Homan

Whip-poor-will, Bogart, Alison Huff

Barn Owl, Athens Landfill, Vanessa Lane and Charlie Muise

Brown-headed Nuthatch with 5 young in nest box, Old Farmington Road, Carole Ludwig

Cowbirds (not seen before in our feeder), Tallassee Road, Jim and Karen Porter

Osprey, Morton Road, Eugenia Thompson

Long-billed Dowitchers (2), UGA Plant Sciences, Rachel Cass and Steve Holzman

Cliff Swallows, Middle Oconee River near Atlanta Highway, Steve Holzman

American Redstart, Blackpoll Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Cape May Warbler, Pine Warbler, Wood Thrush, Cedar Creek, Jim Hanna

Scarlet Tanagers (2), Barred Owl, Tallassee Road, Liz Conroy

April 2012 Clarke County eBird Sightings Summary *by Richard Hall*

162 species were reported to eBird for April 2012, compared with 159 in April 2011 and 150 in 2010.

The highlights are almost too numerous to mention, but include: the first county eBird records of Greater White-fronted Goose at Lake Herrick on 3rd (KG, RH, MJ, SM, JN), Upland Sandpiper (2) at Charlie Bolton Road on 9th (PP), the second eBird records of Forster's Tern (3) on 18th (MB, RH, SM) and Caspian Tern on 27th (RH, SM), both at Lake Chapman, and an Anhinga at the ACC landfill on 23rd (RH, JN).

Other unusual sightings included a flyover Common Loon at Whitehall Forest on 7th (ORAS walk), a Little Blue Heron at Lake Chapman on 10th (MB, RH), and a Lincoln's Sparrow at the ACC landfill on 25th (RH, MJ, SM).

New county high counts were recorded for the following: 12 Northern Shoveler at Lake Herrick on 1st (RH), 14 American Wigeon at Lake Chapman on 4th (RH, SM), 9 Black-and-White Warblers at Whitehall Forest on 7th (ORAS walk), 17 Hooded Warblers, 13 Louisiana Waterthrush and 23 White-eyed Vireos on Cook's Trail on 8th (MB, RH, SM), 5 Orange-crowned Warblers at the State Botanical Garden on 14th (PA), and 8 Solitary Sandpipers at the ACC landfill on 28th (RH).

New county early dates were set for Red-eyed Vireo at Sandy Creek Nature Center on 1st (RC), Solitary Sandpiper at Lake Herrick (KG, RH, MJ, SM, JN), Eastern Whip-poor-will in North Athens (SM) on 3rd, Bobolink on Charlie Bolton Road on 17th (MB, RH, SM), Lesser Yellowlegs on 19th (MB, RH, SM) and Eastern Wood-Pewee on 21st (JN) both at the ACC landfill, and Dickcissel at the South Milledge fields on 28th (RH).

At the State Botanical Garden, new county early dates were set for Swainson's and Kentucky Warblers on 2nd, Worm-eating Warbler on 3rd (RH), Great Crested Flycatcher, Ovenbird and Cape May Warbler on 4th (JH), and American Redstart on 7th (RH, JM).

New late departure dates were set for American Wigeon (14) at Lake Chapman on 4th (RH, SM), Northern Shoveler (7) at Lake Herrick on 26th (MB), Greater Scaup (2) at Lake Chapman on 18th (MB, RH, SM), Lesser Scaup (1) at Lake Herrick on 8th (RH, SM), Bufflehead (2) at Lake Chapman on 20th (RH), Horned Grebe at Lake Chapman on 18th (MB, RH, SM), Merlin at the State Botanical Garden on 25th (RH, MJ, SM), Greater Yellowlegs and Wilson's Snipe at the ACC landfill on 30th (RH), Lesser Yellowlegs (2) at Lake Herrick on 28th (RH), and American Pipit at the ACC landfill on 28th (RH).

It was a good month for scarce/former breeding birds in the county, with the first recent records of Northern Bobwhite

recorded from Morton Road on 15th (ET) and the ACC landfill on 19th-20th (MB, RH, NM, SM, JN) and Grasshopper Sparrow on territory on Charlie Bolton Road throughout the month (RH, SM).

A Barn Owl heard over the author's Five Points yard on 5th (RH, JM) was surprising, but much better news was the discovery of an incubating female in a nest box in the ACC landfill on 17th (VL, CM).

After a number of lean years, at least 4 Swainson's Warblers are on territory at the State Botanical Gardens, although the true number is hard to estimate after the discovery of a Hooded Warbler singing a perfect Swainson's song in the privet eradication area (CJ)!

Clarke County's first breeding colony of Cliff Swallows was discovered under the Atlanta Highway bridge over the Middle Oconee River on 30th (RH).

A pair of Mississippi Kites exhibited breeding behavior over BKOG's yard on 28th, and a Pine Siskin persisted at their feeders on the same day—it's not often that these two species overlap!

Observers: Patrick Addy, Mirko Basen, Rachel Cass, Krista Gridley, Richard Hall, Jim Hanna, Mitchell Jarrett, Clark Jones, Vanessa Lane, Simon Mitchell, Nic Moore, Charlie Muise, James Neves, Bill and Karla O'Grady, Patrick Phelps, and Eugenia Thompson.

Star Gazer: Venus: Last Transit for 100 Years Scheduled at Sandy Creek Park

What a view! Sandy Creek Park and the Athens Astronomical Association will host *Star Gazer: Venus: Last Transit for 100 Years* on Tues., June 5 from 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Participants will see the most spectacular astronomical event of 2012 as we will be viewing the last transit of Venus in front of the sun for more than a century. We will use solar filters and solar viewing spectacles to observe this event.

This program is for all ages. The fee is \$2 park admission. Sandy Creek Park annual permit holders may attend for FREE. No registration required. Telescopes are provided, but people are welcome to bring their own telescopes.

For more information, call (706) 613-3631 or visit www.athensclarkecounty.com/sandycreekpark.

Sandy Creek Park, located at 400 Bob Holman Road, is a facility of the Athens-Clarke County Department of Leisure Services.

Note: Please remember that the location for this event is Sandy Creek PARK; not Sandy Creek Nature Center.

Swan Song (So Long ORAS) by Vanessa Lane

Well, the day is finally here. After five years of living in Georgia and bouncing between jobs while trying to land a solid career, I have finally been offered an academic position. Unfortunately, that position is up in Minnesota, which will take me far from the land of the Georgia peach and into the realm of the Great Gray Owl.

These several years with the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society have been precious to me. I remember searching Google for birding clubs at various places I had applied to graduate school. When I learned of ORAS, I said to myself, “Yep, I can live there.” However, ORAS didn’t hold the only allure to the Southeast. I will admit that our beloved squeaky toy, the Brown-headed Nuthatch, played a significant role in my decision to come here as well.

ORAS helped me settle into the community during the first difficult year of adjusting to new people and a new place. The ORAS field walks gave me something enjoyable to do during otherwise lonely weekends. I clearly remember freezing my tail off on the infamous trips to Phinizy Swamp, which our field trip chair, Ed Maioriello, always managed to schedule on the coldest day of the year (we always had great birds though). Also, the monthly meetings were a lot of fun and everyone was always so welcoming.

When Edwige Damron—our former president—asked me if I could take her role, I was incredibly honored and worked hard to try to live up to her impressive reputation.

With help and guidance, the Board and I created ORAS’s first ever conservation grant program. This initiative provides starter funds for programs benefitting the local community and heightening awareness of the natural world. Together we also created ORAS’s first ever Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary program to recognize local landowners who strive to garden in a sustainable way and maintain portions of their property as wildlife habitat.

I am relieved and pleased to leave ORAS in the capable hands of Richard Hall. He is a phenomenal birder, a talented speaker, and a genuinely good person. He will serve ORAS well. In truth, there are too many people to thank for helping me grow as a wildlife biologist and as a person these past years. Each of you has played a precious role in my career and personal life. I am truly humbled and honored to have been a part of this fantastic, energetic, and welcoming group.

I won’t say goodbye; after all, there are quite a few of you who will see my leaving as an opportunity to crash on my couch to seek new worlds and new (bird) civilizations, and to boldly go where no birder has gone before.

I am sad to leave, but excited at the new possibilities that lie ahead. Remember that although distance may separate us, the birds are always a reminder that distance is nothing but an illusion: we may yet meet again on another migration.

Nurturing Our Native Trees by Liz Conroy

In 1949, Aldo Leopold wrote in *A Sand County Almanac*: “. . . over-abundant deer, when deprived of their natural enemies, have made it impossible for deer food plants to survive or reproduce. . . The composition of the flora, from wild flowers to forest trees, is gradually impoverished, and the deer in turn are dwarfed by malnutrition.” His words make sense to me as I look around my own neighborhood near Tallassee Road at the edge of Clarke County.

Many hungry deer roam here. The young dogwoods, redbuds and maples I have planted are always nibbled to toothpicks within a few days. Sometimes, a tree tries to come back, sprouting new leaves from its remnant. Then chomp! Deer eat it back to the ground. Eventually it dies.

A few years ago, I received a “worm tree,” a Catalpa—the host tree for Catalpa Sphinx Moth larvae—from the ACC Community Tree Council. It thrives in the turn-around at the end of my driveway and seems to be one of the few native trees that deer ignore. This made me both happy and curious. What “deer food plants” are not surviving in my area?

I searched my neighborhood for young, healthy, native understory trees. But I couldn’t find many. Paulownia (princess-tree), chinaberry and other exotics are doing fine and spreading rapidly. Native tulip trees, pines, persimmons and sweet gums are holding their own and reproducing. It’s the lack of young redbuds and dogwoods that concerns me. After all, many birds and other wildlife need “layers” in the woodlands and not just tall canopy trees. Shrubs and understory trees provide crucial protection and food for many wildlife species. It turns out that only mature dogwoods and redbuds are found around here. Yet, these older trees are unable to successfully reproduce due to the large population of herbivores overbrowsing all of the young seedlings to death.

A neighbor discovered that her native fringe trees attracted hungry deer, too. Her husband fenced them for protection. Now these beautiful, understory trees are thriving. When I caged the small dogwoods that I planted, they thrived too.

But I hesitate to remove the fencing, even though the wire is not attractive. Here’s why: there’s more than one way deer can kill a healthy tree. A few years ago, a buck rubbed his antlers on one of our favorite large dogwoods. His vigorous rubbing—to scrape the velvet from his antlers—removed so much bark that he “girdled” the tree. Girdling eventually kills a tree. It wasn’t long until our beloved dogwood died.

In *Bringing Nature Home*, author Doug Tallamy encourages homeowners to protect young native trees with fencing until they are tall enough to survive intense grazing. This simple act gives many of the beautiful natives, in our woods and around our homes, the chance to survive. With nature so out of balance—we need all the ways we can find to nurture our native trees.

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A Feathery Farewell to Vanessa Lane



Photo of former ORAS President and Vice-president
Vanessa Lane (with Clapper Rail)

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