



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

June/July 2016

Vol. 27, No. 6

Next Meeting:

Thursday, June 2, 6:00 p.m.

Annual Potluck Picnic at Memorial Park

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. (Dessert will be provided). Also, the Election of Officers for the upcoming year will take place.

Following is the list of nominees:

- Brian Cooke, President
- Katy Manley, Vice-President
- Mary Case, Secretary
- Alison Huff, Treasurer

To reach Memorial Park, go south on South Milledge Avenue, pass Lumpkin Street, and turn right on Gran Ellen Drive. Memorial Park will be on your left. The shelters are immediately to your left, down the hill. Drive slowly and be sure to bring binoculars to check out the birds in the area.

Please note that this is our last general meeting until Thursday, September 1. Topic and speaker to be announced. Save that date and watch for *The Yellowthroat* in August. Also, to read the newsletter online, please use this link: (<http://oconeeriversaudubon.org/newsletters>)

Sightings Reported at May Meeting

Swallow-tailed Kite, Camelot Dr. (backyard), Athens, Tammy Kemper, 4/25/16

Indigo Bunting, Lebanon Church Rd., Jackson County, Cynthia Boswell, 5/2/16

Common Loon, Bear Creek Reservoir, Jackson County, Liz Conroy, 4/24/16

Northern Harrier, Government Station Rd., Oconee County, Eugenia Thompson, Carolina Lane, Mary Case, 4/30/16

Hooded Merganser, Parker Creek Rd., Oconee County, Eugenia Thompson, Carolina Lane, Mary Case, 4/30/16

Eastern Bluebird, (four fledged), Oconee County, Steve Duke, 5/5/16

Wild Turkey, Forest Heights Dr., Athens, Dale Hoyt, 4/28/16

Give the Gift of Audubon!

For an introductory National Audubon Society membership

(which includes *Audubon* magazine and local membership to ORAS), mail this form with a \$20.00 check payable to **NAS** to:

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

Name _____
Street _____
City, State, Zip _____



Oconee Rivers
Audubon Society



Photo of Red-shouldered Hawk by John Whigham, Cochran Shoals, Georgia—Sept. 28, 2013

Citizens for South Jackson, Jackson County, and ORAS begin mapping for ORAS-funded bird education trail project at South Jackson Elementary School

by Babs McDonald

ORAS President Brian Cooke joined Jackson County GIS Director Joel Logan and Citizens for South Jackson (CSJ) Co-Director Babs McDonald to begin the GPS mapping of McCall's Trails at South Jackson Elementary School (SJES).

During their late morning excursion of the 3-plus miles of trails, Cooke either saw or heard at least 30 bird species. The trails traverse a variety of habitats and support a range of migratory and resident bird species across the school's 118 acres. Public access to the trails is limited to the weekends and after school hours on the week days.

The ORAS grant-funded education project will produce an accurate map of the trails and will include custom illustrations of 10 resident bird species. K-5 students will learn, at the appropriate educational level, to identify these 10 bird species and add them to their "life list." Students will also learn about bird diversity and adaptation, habitat, and how to observe birds. Lesson plans and teacher training will enhance this project's success. CSJ and ORAS are collecting donated binoculars so that students can learn how to use binoculars to enhance their observation of birds and nature.

The project will also create an illustrated trail map for the general public, and CSJ will provide a map distribution container at the trailhead. Some additional ORAS material may be placed at the trailhead for visiting community members.

Anyone interested in donating binoculars to this project may contact Ken Cordell at kencordell@gmail.com or Brian Cooke at president@oconeeriversaudubon.org.

For more information about the project, contact Babs McDonald at mcdonaldbabs@gmail.com and Brian Cooke at president@oconeeriversaudubon.org.

Eco-haiku by Robert Wyatt

English ivy climbs
high up in an old oak tree—
smothers it to death.

English Ivy is on the "Least Wanted" list of Plant Conservation Alliance, Alien Plant Working Group:
<https://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/hehe1.htm> – Ed.



Photo of Brian Cooke (left) and Joel Logan mapping trails, by Babs McDonald, SJES, Jackson County--April 14, 2016

Birds and Invasive Plants by *President of The Society for Conservation Biology at UGA – Allison Nelson*

Invasive plants are the unwelcome guests of ecology. When they spread into a new environment, whether it be by their own movements or by humans, they cause problems. Georgia is home to myriad invasive plants from Kudzu to Japanese Honeysuckle. These seemingly harmless guests are actually harming our native wildlife, especially birds.

When invasive plants take over an area where native plants used to grow, native birds no longer have access to the plants with which they coevolved. Their nesting sites may be more vulnerable to predation. For example, American Robins sometimes nest in Amur Honeysuckle (*Lonicera maakii*), an invasive vine introduced from China and Korea. The birds experience higher levels of nest predation as compared to those birds nesting in native shrubs. Also, birds may consume fruits from some invasive plants which offer less nutritional value than their native counterparts; this can affect a bird's fitness. Native insects—a major food source for nestlings—are affected by the toxicity of certain invasive plants and their populations may be reduced.

What can you do? After hiking or birding remove seeds stuck to clothes and equipment to prevent invasive plants from spreading. Plant native species, especially shrubs and trees which produce berries, such as blackberry, blueberry bushes and dogwood trees which will help native wildlife.

How Cats Affect Wildlife: Kitty Cam 2.0

summary of May meeting by Carolina H. Lane

Thanks to Sonia Hernandez, University of Georgia associate professor in the College of Veterinary Medicine for her presentation about the use of KittyCams (point-of-view cameras designed by National Geographic). She and fellow researchers used these special cameras to quantify the interactions of free-roaming pet cats in Athens and unowned cats managed in Trap-Neuter-Return colonies on Jekyll Island and wildlife. Her original degree as a veterinarian led to a PhD in Ecology at UGA and to exploring the interface of pets and wildlife disease transmission.

This ongoing research quantifies the impact that free-roaming cats have on birds and other native and migratory wildlife due to their hunting activities.

There are about 75 million cats in the USA, and 52% are unowned and roam free. A Trap-Neuter-Return [TNR] program has been set up in some places. However, this leads to a feeding focal point without efforts to control how cats hunt and feed in the surrounding areas.

What are some of the concerns? Free roaming cats can carry rabies, toxoplasmosis, plague, tularemia, and cat scratch fever. Also, the TNR program has not decreased the feral cat population.

Researchers put the tiny cameras on the cats in Athens to learn how they feed in the area. Within that population, Hernandez and her fellow researchers found that 44% of the cats were hunters and averaged 2.1 predations in a week. In this urban study, mostly reptiles were killed, then in decreasing order: small mammals, invertebrates and birds.

The second area of study with the cameras was on Jekyll Island, Georgia which has a diversity of habitats as well as TNR colonies. There the ratio of animals killed by cats was different. The overwhelming majority of animals killed and consumed was invertebrates—an important source of food for birds. In decreasing order of frequency were reptiles, small mammals and birds.

The TNR program is paid for by a multi-million dollar charity. Perhaps the results of this and similar research will help to educate more people who care about birds and other wildlife.

Is It Love or is it Lethal?

Thursday, June 2, 8:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center

Dr. Denis Benjamin will speak about mushroom edibility and the social aspects of mushroom foraging and consumption. Sponsored by Mushroom Club of Georgia and SCNC, Inc. Free and open to the public.

Message from the President –Thanks for a Great Year by Brian Cooke

Each time I arrive at a monthly general meeting, a board meeting, or a bird walk, I'm pleasantly surprised by how I'm surrounded by so many knowledgeable and dedicated Athenians. In my first year as President with Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS), there were endless possibilities, and there was so much to learn. Luckily, I've had the help of long-time board members and enthusiastic new members.

As this "year" comes to a close for ORAS, I want to thank everyone who makes the wheels turn for our organization. A hearty thanks to the many fine speakers, the writers and photographers, the volunteers, the partner organizations, the donors, and the grantees. Last, but not least, I want to thank the board members for their selfless contributions of time and energy.

As an organization, ORAS is in a great position to continue into the future as a reliable source of education, conservation, outdoor recreation, and camaraderie in the Athens area. I have no doubt we will continue to thrive. As Athens grows, we hope we can grow with it. Do you have a great idea? Share it with a board member. Do you have skill you think we could use? Let us know!

Try to stay cool as the dog days of summer arrive and start studying for fall migration. I hope to see you all on Thursday, September 1 at our kick-off meeting for a new year of Oconee Rivers Audubon Society!



Photo of Worm-eating Warbler by Liz Conroy, front deck, Athens, Clarke County—April 21, 2014

Summary of the Hernandez Lab “Urban Bird Appreciation” Outreach Event

by Shannon Curry

On April 1st, students in the Hernandez Wildlife Disease Research Lab at the University of Georgia (UGA) held an “urban bird appreciation” outreach event, funded by the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) Conservation Grant.

We partnered with the UGA student Wildlife Disease Association (a club comprised of students who research wildlife health and disease) to staff a table at the annual UGA Veterinary School Open House. We distributed items which were custom-printed with a logo (see photo) that directs people to online information about our organizations and about urban birds, via information resources including the Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s *Celebrate Urban Birds* and *All About Birds* websites.

We also distributed almost 200 printed tote bags, 200 pens, and 400 stickers. We hope that people will put their stickers on laptop cases, coolers, or water bottles. Hopefully, the items will help to remind them to visit the websites and learn more about local birds and best-practice bird feeding.

We offered bird-themed activities, including color-your-own field guides to selected urban birds and make-your-own disposable bird feeders. Most kids and some adults took a field guide home to color and to learn to identify the birds in their own backyards.

Some kids had time to make bird feeders; we showed them how to smear peanut butter on pine cones or recycled cardboard cut-outs, sprinkle a hearty amount of bird seed on top and tie natural twine to make a loop for hanging the feeder outside. By the end of the day, kids were appearing at our table demanding coloring books, and some adults came to our table specifically because they saw other people at the event with printed bags and wanted one of their own.

Most importantly, we gave everyone a flyer with instructions for making disposable bird feeders, and a reminder to throw away used feeders and CLEAN permanent feeders every two weeks (to minimize disease spread among birds). The flyer also listed websites with information about which foods are most appropriate for different bird species and how to get involved in Citizen Science by reporting observations of birds at home bird feeders. Many home-school parents told me they are currently studying birds with their kids, and the materials we provided will help to augment their lessons.

For more information: Cornell’s *All About Birds* website (<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/>). Get involved through *Celebrate Urban Birds* (<http://celebrateurbanbirds.org/>) or *Project Feeder Watch* (<http://feederwatch.org/>). Visit the Hernandez Lab website to learn about our research projects, including wading bird health research in urban South Florida.



Photo of the event logo and items used and distributed during the event by Shannon Curry, UGA, Athens—April 1, 2016

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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

