



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

May 2020

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May Meeting – Cancelled

All ORAS meetings are cancelled until further notice. Meanwhile, please take time to thank essential workers, including those involved in COVID-19 research.

As *Science* editor-in-chief, H.Holden Thorpe noted:

“ . . . This crisis is calling for extraordinary measures, and your supportive responses deserve recognition. Working from home will make it safer for those who must be in buildings and laboratories to do work related to the virus— fewer people in the hallways, lunchrooms, and other public areas will slow the spread of the virus so that work on COVID-19 can continue. If there is a way for you to assist without slowing these labs, volunteer to do so. If you have colleagues who are working on the virus, an offer of your time to keep an eye on their children or call upon their elderly relatives who are lonely can make a difference.

On so many fronts, this is a battle of a lifetime and a test of our responsibilities for each other and the strength of our compassion. For our part, *Science* will continue to report the news, and make research on COVID-19 freely available as quickly as possible, and we will also continue to support and advocate for the scientists around the world who are leading the charge. Let's maintain social distancing, but pull together, hard. We must. We will.”

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.

Spring Bird Walks and Field Trips – Cancelled

Please check ORAS announcements and website regarding these cancellations. Visit:

<http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/events>

If you have other questions please contact Ed Maioriello at:

fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Message from the President

by Lauren Gingerella

Social-distancing and quarantining for this length of time has created a variety of challenges for many households. If you are a family with children, you may already be running out of activities to keep your kids occupied.

Fortunately, the National Audubon Society has you covered. The [Audubon for Kids](#) page is filled with bird activities, such as crafting migration-friendly window decorations, videos showing how to draw various birds created by David Sibley, interactive migration games, and a homemade recycled bird feeder DIY project.

There are also classroom lessons designed by Audubon's team of environmental educators. Topics include bird basics, all about owls, and migration, just to name a few. All of the activities can be done at home or in your yard, which is perfect for our current stay-at-home situation. Next time you need an enjoyable kid's activity, check out Audubon for Kids to help your children stay connected with nature.

Citizen Science – Count Penguins!

“The nice thing is that anyone older than about five-years-old can contribute to penguin conservation. Choose whether you would like to count aerial photos or time lapse cameras. Be warned it is mildly addictive, but it's for a great cause!” This is a note from a researcher seeking answers on why penguin populations are in decline. Visit: PenguinWatch.org to find out how to help count penguins as a citizen scientist.

Nurturing Newly Planted 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 as I look more closely around my own neighborhood.

Hungry deer roam my yard, my neighbors’ lots and the woods and fields nearby. The young dogwoods, redbuds, and maples I planted are nibbled to toothpicks in 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 again. Eventually the young tree 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 at the end of my driveway and seems to be one of the native trees that deer ignore. This made me curious. Which native trees are not surviving in my area?

I searched my neighborhood for young, healthy, native understory trees. But I couldn’t find many. Paulownia, 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, fringe trees (old man’s beard), 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 birds and other wildlife.

It turns out that only mature dogwoods and redbuds are easily found around my area. These older trees don’t appear to be successfully reproducing because of the large population of herbivores overbrowsing all of the young seedlings to death.

A neighbor discovered that her native fringe tree attracted hungry deer, too. Her husband fenced it for protection. Now this beautiful, understory trees is thriving. When I caged the small dogwoods that I planted, they began thriving, too. At last, one dogwood finally grew to be more than six feet tall!

Now 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 my favorite, large dogwoods. His intense rubbing—to scrape the velvet from his antlers—removed so much bark that he “girdled” the tree. Girdling kills a tree when enough living bark is removed to prevent necessary nutrients from flowing within the tree. It wasn’t long until this beloved dogwood died.

In *Bringing Nature Home*, Doug Tallamy encourages everyone to protect young native trees with fencing until they are tall enough to survive intense grazing. This simple act gives many of the wonderful native plants, in the woods and around our homes, the chance to survive.

Many Athens-area residents received free native tree seedlings at “Bring One for the Chipper” from Keep Athens-Clarke County Beautiful in early January this year. (This event usually takes place on the first Saturday in January.) Or, area residents may have gotten free native tree seedlings at the 2020 Green Life Expo held at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia in late February.

Volunteers at these events provided helpful seedling care and planting instructions. But to protect the newly planted tree, remember to put fencing around it if there are deer in the area. After all, these herbivores regularly seek young plants to browse all year long. One friend even nicknamed them “pine goats” due to the intense browsing they did on her trees.

Fencing is not pretty, but it’s also not forever. Just give the young tree some time to grow, at least until it has a chance to survive a hungry “pine goat.” The taller tree will thank you for protecting it by providing many years of shade and beauty.



Buck rub by Liz Conroy, by driveway, near Tallassee Rd, Clarke County—Nov. 8, 2019



Turkey Vulture by Katherine Edison, Athens-Clarke County Landfill—Oct. 24, 2015

There Goes the Neighborhood!

by Suki Janssen and reviewed by Liz Conroy

In her new children’s book, *There Goes the Neighborhood*, author Suki Janssen (ACC Solid Waste Department Director) writes about Heap, a young vulture who has just moved to the landfill with his mother.

Sadly, they are not well received by their neighbors. It seems the entire bird world is critical of this young vulture! Throughout the story, Janssen weaves interesting facts about vulture behavior into the dialogue. For example, these birds keep cool by releasing their wastes onto their legs and may vomit when frightened. Emma Steigerwald used acrylic on watercolor paper for her colorful and accurate illustrations.

In the last section, readers will find ideas for creative projects related to vultures. Helpful photos by Richard Hall are included in this section, too. To order this self-published paperback book, email: heapthevulture@gmail.com (and pay through either Paypal or Venmo). Or please visit: <https://store.bookbaby.com/book/there-goes-the-neighborhood>



Turkey Vulture by Richard Hall, Whitehall Rd., Clarke County—Oct. 24, 2015

Georgia Big Day at Home *by Heather Levy*

The combination of a statewide stay-at-home order in effect coupled with many natural areas closing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 has made spring birding difficult. Many of us are experiencing something similar to what migratory birds feel right before starting their journeys – zugunruhe,” or migratory restlessness.

The idea of a big day at home started from an international Facebook group and was picked up by Steve Holzman, a member of the Georgia Ornithological Society. Coined the Georgia Big Day at Home (GABDAH), the goal is to see/hear as many species statewide from our respective homes from 12 am to 12 am on a designated day.

The birds can be off property, but the observer has to be on their own property. Species are recorded using an editable online spreadsheet, but this is also a great opportunity to keep a personal checklist. Using eBird is highly encouraged to keep track of your species, and eBird is even holding a contest for at-home birding!

Sunday, April 5, the first GABDAH took place. Statewide, we recorded 138 species! Birders contributed all the way from St. Mary’s on the coast north to Hiawassee in the foothills. Some migratory highlights of the count included Prothonotary Warbler, Wood Thrush, and Eastern Kingbird. There were several overwintering residents still present as well, such as Purple Finch and Vesper Sparrow.

GABDAH is a great way to stay connected with the birding community, stay safe, and to appreciate wildlife right in your backyard! One of the best aspects for birding is its accessibility - you never have to go far to see a bird. With the onset of spring migration and nesting season for many species, you never know what treasures you might find!

For updates on GABDAH, please subscribe to the Georgia Birders Online (GABO) listserv, or check the Georgia Ornithological Society Facebook page.

Congrats Heather Levy! *by Lauren Gingerella*

Heather Levy, ORAS board member and conservation chair, was recently awarded the 2020 E. L. Cheatum Award. The award is given exclusively to graduate students and recent graduates in the Graduate Wildlife Program within the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources who demonstrate exceptional academic achievements, personal qualities, and participation in professional affairs and public issues. Heather has served as an active ORAS board member since 2018, and substantially contributed to ORAS’ Plants for Birds Burke Grant proposal and native garden project. She established and coordinated Audubon’s Climate Watch surveys for the Athens area as well. Heather helped establish the new Audubon campus chapter, the Lilly Branch Audubon Society, at the University of Georgia, and later served as the chapter’s Vice President. Congrats, Heather!

Eco-Haiku – Cardinal Sins by Neal Priest

Sun-dappled, rank growth,
Glimpse of bright, red fluttering,
Cardinal peep show!



Northern Cardinal by Chuck Murphy, Laguna Seca Ranch, Edinburg, Texas—October 23, 2012

Eco-Haiku – Cardinal Virtues by Liz Conroy

Cardinals bring food
To large, demanding nestling.
It's a young cowbird!



Northern Cardinal by Gary Whiting, St. Johns County, Florida—May 16, 2016



Northern Cardinal nest by O.C. Dean, in yard, Clarke County—April 9, 2020

Eco-Haiku – Cardinal Duties by Manita Dean

Sentinel Papa,
Mama crafts home near my porch,
Cardinals nesting.

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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