



# The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

November 2018

Vol. 29, No. 9

## Next Meeting:

**Thursday, November 1, 7:00 p.m.  
Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens**

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

### ***A High Low Tide: The Revival of a Southern Oyster***

André Gallant is the author of *A High Low Tide: The Revival of a Southern Oyster*, a book-length work of narrative nonfiction about the Georgia oyster industry published by University of Georgia Press.

His new book details the process of aquaculture and programs implemented to cultivate the industry. He also chronicles a champion of aquaculture efforts, Justin Manley. In addition to writing the text, Gallant took all of the photographs in the book. (See book review on page 3.)

Copies of *A High Low Tide: The Revival of a Southern Oyster* will be available for sale at our November general ORAS meeting. (Look for them on the tables in the back of the meeting room.)

**Meetings are held . . .** the first Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m.

To get to Sandy Creek Nature Center: From the north side of the perimeter take exit 12 to go north on U.S. 441. After approximately one mile, 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.

## ***Chasing Coral* Receives Emmy Award**

The film, *Chasing Coral*, about the effects of climate change on coral reefs, was named Outstanding Nature Documentary at the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual News and Documentary Emmy Awards.

ORAS member and University of Georgia ecologist, James Porter, served as the Chief Scientific Advisor on the film and was a principal cast member. He was onstage among the film's cast and crew to accept the award on October 1 in NYC.

Porter, an emeritus professor in the UGA Odum School of Ecology, reported, "It was one of the most exciting events I have ever attended. Our team of scientists and film makers had worked hard and were proud of the film, but we were up against brilliant nature films such as *Yosemite* and *Blue Planet II*."

He added, "After we won, we used our time at the podium to call for immediate action on climate change. Dire predictions for the near-term collapse of coral reefs are currently making headlines; we feel that our message is getting out."

(Netflix bought *Chasing Coral*. It has already had more than 100,000 views.)

## **2018 Athens Christmas Bird Count (Mark Your Calendars for Dec. 15)**

The 2018 Athens Christmas Bird Count will be Saturday, December 15. We have fourteen sections in our circle, and we will need leaders with some expertise for each one.

We also need participants for all sections, so no matter what your level of expertise, please consider joining in on the fun.

For more information or to volunteer, contact Eugenia Thompson (email: [erobertthom@bellsouth.net](mailto:erobertthom@bellsouth.net)) or Mary Case (email: [mecase@uga.edu](mailto:mecase@uga.edu)) or talk to us at the November or December general ORAS meetings.

## Talk by Leilani Münter on Thursday, Nov. 8: “We are Racing Extinction”

Leilani Münter, professional race car driver and environmental activist will be giving a presentation entitled “We Are Racing Extinction” on Thursday, November 8 at 7:00 p.m. in the UGA Miller Learning Center—Room 102.

Named #1 Eco Athlete in the world by Discovery's Planet Green and one of the top 10 female race car drivers in the world by *Sports Illustrated*, Münter is an environmental activist and advocate for renewable energy, solar power, electric cars, plant-based diet, and animal rights.

Münter is active in lobbying for these causes and has been a guest at The White House and the United Nations. She is on the board of the Oceanic Preservation Society, a non-profit that creates films to inspire people to save the oceans. They won the Academy Award for their 2009 documentary “The Cove.” Münter is also featured in their 2015 documentary, “Racing Extinction,” a film about the sixth mass extinction which we are currently experiencing. Free and open to all!

(Sponsored by Speak Out for Species, UGA Office of Sustainability, University Housing Sustainability Office, Willson Center for Humanities & Arts, Pat and Neal Priest.)

## Thankful for the Birds in this World (1)

by Heather Levy

Birds are a key connection in drawing humans closer to the natural world and instilling values of conscientiousness, patience, and persistence. These remarkable creatures have evolved and adapted in incredible ways, occupying all corners of the globe.

Many of us spend a large proportion of our time following and observing them. Birding is more than keeping a checklist of individual species; it inherently brings awareness to the broader picture, the intricate role birds play in the larger complexity of ecosystems.

Much of the marvel of birding is the mystery of it. Of course nature tends to follow broad patterns, but we follow birds, not always knowing what we may see, what new environments we may discover, or what interactions may unfold before us. Through birds, we rouse our sense of exploration and discovery.

An important overarching theme of birds and birding for me is their accessibility and functional ability to bring nature into even the most urban of areas, acting as ornate spectacles in which we are able to briefly escape our own realities to enjoy and muse upon, whether it be in reflective solitude or in the company of others.

I am thankful for birds for all these reasons, but especially for the innate value birds have of being able to connect humans to nature, to ourselves, and to one another.

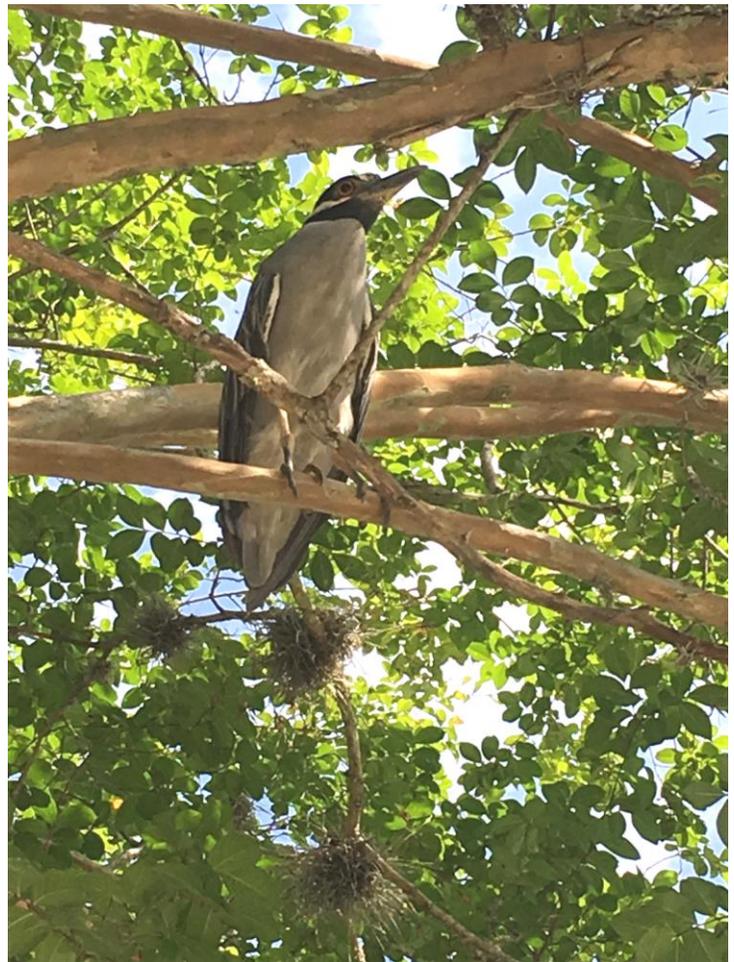


Photo of Yellow-crowned Night-Heron by Mike Conroy, Japanese Garden in Hermann Park Houston, Texas—July 23, 2018

## Thankful for the Birds in this World (2)

by Liz Conroy

This past July, my sister-in-law had hip replacement surgery. My husband Mike and I headed to Houston to stay with Betsy while she adjusted to her new hip. We discussed the places that our daughter Laura enjoyed in Houston when she had visited Betsy several years before her death. The Japanese Garden in Hermann Park had meant a lot to Laura. So we headed there.

The park was a lovely place to explore with its mature trees and long reflecting pools. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were a joy to watch. But it was when we passed through the tall gates of the Japanese Garden, that we understood what Laura loved there: the natural beauty with well-designed paths winding near flowing streams, pools, and large rocks.

In her memory, Mike sprinkled some of her ashes under a tree. Suddenly, a Yellow-crowned Night-Heron flew in and perched on a low branch to watch us with its large, orange eyes. We were grateful for its comforting presence and had to smile. Especially as we recalled that Laura's favorite colors were yellow and orange. What remarkable company!

## **Book Review: *A High Low Tide: The Revival of a Southern Oyster***

by André Joseph Gallant and reviewed by Liz Conroy

Local author André Gallant is an independent journalist who hails from a long line of Canadian shell fishermen. His grandfather and uncles were role models when he was a child growing up near the rugged Atlantic coast in Acadia.

While living in the southern U.S., he developed an attraction to the one hundred miles of Georgia's own Atlantic coast. "I learned about the oysters, the watermen who harvest them, and I saw the spirit of the Maritimes. It was a natural fit for me," he said about his interest in doing a book on this topic.

Georgia was once the home to a profitable oyster industry; an industry that has all but disappeared. Gallant knew about Georgia's rich estuaries along the coast and its great reputation for tasty oysters. His new book, *A High Low Tide: The Revival of a Southern Oyster* began with his search for the answer to the question: Why can't we get Georgia oysters at restaurants in our own state?

Gallant writes in his introduction about Georgia's coastline, "Between mainland bluffs and island edges is a salt marsh, the second largest in the United States. A maze of rivers and creeks skirts islets of mud and sand. There, fish, birds, and algae thrive. People too. Crabbers. Clammers. Oystermen. The marsh beckons them to reflective labor, where waning suns light butterscotch and chartreuse sea grasses." The marshes offer great beauty, indeed, but factories and big cities offer better pay and more reliable hours than oystering.

Gallant traveled the marshes in McIntosh, Liberty, Chatham, and Camden Counties on the boats of the remaining watermen (the name oystermen prefer). In particular, the story of one hard-working waterman—determined to make shellfishing his trade—served as the focus of this book. To Justin Manley, the Georgia coast is a prime oyster growing area. Gallant writes that Manley is ready, "to transform Georgia's ugly oysters into belles." After all, the wild Georgia oyster may be tasty, but they grow in muddy clusters and are unattractive on a platter. Cultured oysters offer more consistency in appearance which restaurant owners greatly prefer.

But this means that Georgia oystermen will have to start to farm. What are the challenges to this new way of bringing Georgia oysters to those of us hungry for their delicious taste? The stories in this book follow the drama of the lives of these rugged individuals attempting to hasten the return of the Georgia oyster.

*A High Low Tide: The Revival of a Southern Oyster* by André Joseph Gallant, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2018. 256pp.



**Photo of marsh and shell rake by Abby Sterling, Chatam County, Georgia—October 17, 2018**

## **Coastal Connections: An ISS Update (Part 1)** by Abby Sterling

As fall begins to sweep along the Georgia coast, our shorebird migration is winding down. All along the coast volunteers have been working with Tim Keyes of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Abby Sterling from Manomet, and other partners to collect data for the International Shorebird Survey (ISS).

In 1974 Manomet began the ISS with a goal of understanding more about all aspects of shorebird migration. Volunteers and professional biologists contribute to this long running monitoring network by counting shorebirds about every ten days at their favorite birding spots. All of the counts are analyzed to create greater understanding about migration timing, migration routes, population trends and habitat use. The main objective for observers is to get to specific sites during both the spring and fall and completely count all the shorebirds. As of 2017, over 100,000 ISS counts were collected by more than 800 volunteers at over 3,400 locations in 48 states and across 24 countries within the Western Hemisphere.

Through targeted workshops carried out by Manomet's Habitats for Shorebirds Project, more individuals throughout the Americas are getting involved with ISS surveys. This helps to increase coverage and will allow us to better understand shorebird populations across the hemisphere.

One of the most exciting aspects of ISS data is that it is being actively used to inform conservation, research, and create public outreach about the declining shorebird populations. ISS is really a citizen science project. For the past 44 years, it has been driven by the passion of volunteers interested in donating their time to help collect these valuable shorebird data. (Next month, read more about what our final survey included in Part 2.)

## Importance of ACC Sustainability Office

summary of October meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to Athens-Clarke County (ACC) Sustainability Officer, Andrew Saunders, who discussed the work being done by the ACC Sustainability Office and its importance to Athens area residents.

The Sustainability Office opened in July 2017. Their work involves working with various government and community entities in Athens-Clarke County to improve the environment, grow the economy, and enhance lives. They involve other stake-holders in government projects through shared collaboration and planning.

Saunders said the staff at the Sustainability Office includes two full-time and one half-time positions. They receive assistance from other ACC departments (including the ACC Fire Department) at certain times as well.

Areas of interest for Saunders include diverting more waste from the landfill into recycling, ongoing support of our tree canopy, greenspace protection, improving air quality and water conservation, and expanding our effective water conservation program. "We have the lowest water use per capita in all of the counties in Georgia," he noted. "We also have a very solid tree ordinance."

Another important area of interest for the Sustainability Office involves the conservation of energy. Already, significant actions have taken place in and around government structures: outdoor lighting retrofits, LEED building policy, energy audits, increase use of renewable energy (such as more solar panel installations, even at the water plants).

Regarding the area of greenspace protection, Saunders explained how land acquisitions begin by soliciting nominations from property owners. The Sustainability Office then screens and ranks the properties before negotiating any agreements between the ACC government and the land owners.

Property stewardship involves cleaning up any dump sites and working to restore native habitat by removing invasive plants such as privet and kudzu. Sometimes the use of prescribed fires helps, too.

Next, he talked about the planning process for the Tallassee Forest. The current discussion calls for protection of the area—and its ecologically important bird and wildlife habitat—by allowing limited public use of the land.

Upcoming projects for the Sustainability Office may include an Athens bike share program and MLK Greenway native plant restoration and invasive plant removal.

When asked what other cities were considered as models for the Sustainability Office, Saunders listed Knoxville, Tennessee; Asheville, North Carolina; and especially Fayetteville, Arkansas. "We were impressed by how little resources they had in Fayetteville," Saunders added at the conclusion of his talk. "Yet they've done so much."

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