



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

Spring 2021

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ORAS Meetings: First Thursday (each month) 7:00 p.m. Virtual Presentations

The Oconee Rivers Audubon Society's (ORAS) general meetings take place on the first Thursday of the month. Due to COVID-19 concerns, these will continue to be virtual meetings. For information about the topic of a presentation, visit: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org or watch for ORAS announcements on social media.

GOS Fall Meeting – October 2021

by GOS President Larry Carlile

The GOS Fall Meeting 2021 will be held on Jekyll Island, October 8-11 at Villas by the Sea. Meeting details will be posted on www.gos.org



Paddling in a canoe by Katie White, Okefenokee Swamp, Georgia—December 14, 2020

The Okefenokee Swamp: A Birding Adventure

by Chris Bertrand

The Okefenokee Swamp is one of Georgia's seven natural wonders and happens to be a birder's paradise. Five hours away from Athens, we have access to one of the biggest swamps in North America. The Okefenokee is 700 square miles with more than 200 species of birds. It's also one of the largest wilderness areas in the East. As noted in The Wilderness Act of 1964, a wilderness area is “. . . an area where the earth and community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

I visited the Okefenokee Swamp on a three-day canoe adventure, hoping to see a Sandhill Crane. My friend and I spent the night at Traders Hill Campground before renting canoes from Okefenokee Adventures and embarking into the swamp. As we paddled into the wilderness, I was a bit apprehensive about having an alligator encounter. Around 13,000 alligators call the swamp their home, and overnight paddlers will undoubtedly meet a few of them.¹

We canoed down the Suwannee Canal; a canal dug in the 1890s as an attempt to drain the Okefenokee. Alligators rested on the banks of the canal, and some slid into the water in front of us. Whenever we passed an area where an alligator had submerged, I quickened my paddle strokes in an attempt to speedily pass over the underwater gator. We ended up seeing more than 20 alligators, and my initial fears were unfounded. In fact, there have been no alligator attacks since the swamp became protected as a national wildlife refuge in 1937.

As we paddled away from the canal and into the swamp prairie, I began to notice the great bird diversity of the Okefenokee. I was psyched to see multiple Sandhill Cranes and saw my first American Bitterns foraging in the tall grasses of the swamp prairie. White Ibises waded through the lily pads and the hooded pitcher plants (one of Georgia's native carnivorous plants). We saw numerous birds on our three-day adventure, but I most enjoyed watching the Sandhill Cranes flying across the sky at sunset calling out like dinosaurs.

¹ Okefenokee and Osceola National Forest is also home to around 800 American black bears!

A Heartfelt Goodbye to Bob Cooper

by Bob Sargent, Ph.D. UGA/Warnell School Class of '96

I'm sure sorry to see Bob retire. The Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources was most fortunate to recruit him, as he brought to the school an uncommon blend of ornithological and quantitative skills.

I've encountered many of his students in the field, and all of them have raved about his teaching passion and gifts. He has made so many invaluable contributions to ornithology in Georgia and throughout the Southeast. The most visible aspect of those contributions can be seen in the small army of graduate students he has mentored, most of whom are now accomplished professionals in the wildlife profession. They are carrying on his legacy.

St. Marks Snark

by Clark Jones, Ph.D. UGA/Warnell Class of '13 and Anna Joy Lehmiche, Ph.D. UGA/Warnell Class of '14

While Bob Cooper would definitely call himself a birder, he has, on occasion, been one to deliberately needle the southern birder gentry. Once, on an ornithology class field trip to St. Mark's National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, we were birding as a group in the presence of one other birder.

It was early, the students were still groggy and everyone was quietly looking through their binoculars at a small flock of nondescript-wintering warblers. Before anyone had a chance to identify the birds or point out field marks to the students, the proud birder exclaimed, "The Yellow-rumped Warblers are ubiquitous." To which Bob retorted without hesitation, "Yeah! And they're everywhere too!"

Bob Cooper's Surprising Shoe Story

by Brady Mattson, Ph.D. UGA/Warnell School Class '06

One of the most memorable Ornithology trips that I TA'd with Bob Cooper was when we went down to the Mississippi coast to witness the landfall of songbird migrants making their way from Central America back to their breeding grounds.

It was my first "landfall trip," so I didn't know what to expect. Birds falling from the sky? Amazing yet terrifying? Well, it turned out to be more of the former.

This event happened almost 20 years ago, yet I can still remember when a male Scarlet Tanager landed on top of Bob's shoe. He stood still observing the emaciated and brightly plumaged songbird and then said, "This is a Zen moment." It was the birder's version of stopping to smell a rose and a soul recharge.

Here's to you Bob – congrats on your retirement and wishing you many Zen moments in your transition to Professor Emeritus of Wildlife Ecology and Biometrics!

Bob Cooper – An Inspirational Teacher

by Nico Dauphine, Ph.D. UGA/Warnell School Class of '08

My introduction to Bob was through his ornithology class where he announced he was going to try to convince us that "birds are the coolest organisms on the planet." As someone long fascinated by birds, my initial reaction was, "I'm already convinced!" But Bob's teaching showed me how much more amazing birds were than I had ever imagined – in their physiology and anatomy, their navigation and long-distance migration abilities, their songs and life histories, there was so much to learn and discover. I wondered: if I could study birds for a living, why would I do anything else?

Soon thereafter I got my first bird job working with Bob's PhD student Brady Mattsson, who was researching the Louisiana Waterthrush, a forest bird with an elaborate, beautiful song. I spent nearly every day that spring and summer monitoring Louisiana Waterthrushes and their nests and chicks, and by the time they headed south that fall, I switched departments to do a PhD in ornithology. That was 17 years ago, and since then I have worked with birds all over the world, based on the foundation I got working with Bob.

I did my PhD research in Peru but continued to go on field trips with Bob's ornithology class, including one where we were watching for newly arrived spring migrants on the Mississippi coast, and saw an Indigo Bunting come in from crossing the Gulf of Mexico, only to be attacked by a flock of Laughing Gulls. Despite his state of total exhaustion, the Indigo Bunting found the strength, speed, and strategy to outmaneuver the mob out for his blood and escaped!

This bird was an inspiration, and so is Bob. Long after I finished my PhD, Bob has remained one of the most important mentors in my life and has been like a father to me in many ways. Now in Sweden, I was surprised at the Stockholm airport recently by a familiar song. An art exhibit featuring living plants and an indoor waterfall was accompanied by a recording of eastern North American forest birds, and the star of the show was the Louisiana Waterthrush. I sent a recording to Bob when I was back in the US, who replied "I guess it's like us listening to ABBA!" Hearing one of my favorite Georgia bird songs in a Swedish airport also brought to mind something I heard Bob say the first year I met him: "it's OK to interrupt a conversation for a bird."

The Patience of Bob

by Scott Rush, Ph.D. UGA/Warnell School Class of '09

I have fond memories of tromping through the marshes of coastal Mississippi with Dr. Bob Cooper. I will always think of him as a teacher imbued with pure kindness and a patience that is exceptional. While still working to develop this level of patience, I believe that the little bit that I have assimilated from Bob has helped me to be a better parent and mentor.

The Unflappable Bob Cooper

*by Mason Cline, Ph.D. UGA/Warnell Class of '15 and
Joanna Hatt, M.S. UGA/Warnell School Class of '13*

Among the many good times shared and life lessons imparted, Bob Cooper taught us early on that "rules are just guidelines." Though we are sure that Bob is "by-the-book" when it is important, his laid-back style and lack of concern about conformity was inspiring. Even if things were falling apart, his feathers only ever seemed slightly out of place. His calm demeanor helped to produce self-motivated and grounded students, many with whom we were fortunate to share a lab and develop lifelong friendships.

As his mentees, we certainly benefited from the culture he created and aspire to emulate his relaxed nature in our own work and play. As his friends, we hope that he has many full days in retirement and continues to push boundaries and inspire others to do the same. Happy retirement, Dr. Cooper! All the best, Mason and Joanna

Being Serenaded by Dr. Bob Cooper

by Brett Maley, M.S. UGA/Warnell School Class of '10

Congratulations on your retirement! You're a great mentor and teacher, and I'm very lucky to have been one of your students. I recall on a birding trip to Mississippi (when I was taking your ornithology class), the memorable trip back from an excellent BBQ restaurant. You decided to serenade all of us in the van with this little gem:

"The sailors say, 'Brandy, you're a fine girl' (you're a fine girl) What a good wife you would be (such a fine girl) Yeah, your eyes could steal a sailor from the sea.' "

The Squeaky Wheel and Bob Cooper

by Kirk Stodola, Ph.D. UGA/Warnell School Class of '11

One thing that made working with Bob special is how much he cared about his students. In fact, I'll bet that every one of his students heard Bob apologize for not being able to help out more in the field. He'd often say how he felt bad, but then he'd add, "The squeaky wheel always gets the grease."

I always thought it was interesting that my project up in the mountains of North Carolina was a great place to be working just as the temperature and humidity in Athens started to become unbearable. I must have squeaked enough to be able to work there. I want Bob to know that all of his students really appreciate and recognize the grease we got!

Bob Cooper – Both Friend and Mentor

*by Jennifer DeCecco, M.S. U. of Memphis, Class of '97 and
Matthew Marshall, Ph.D. UGA/Warnell, Class of '01*

I worked for Bob from 1993-2001, as a grad student and in his lab at UGA. I really can't express enough how much the time working for Bob meant to me, and how much my husband (Matt Marshall, also a grad student) and I owe him for where we are now.

Both my husband and I worked on his West Virginia project for many years and I graduated from the University of Memphis in 1997 and my husband from UGA in 2001. During those years that we worked for him, he was always such an incredible mentor, friend and provided a wonderful environment to go to school and work. I learned so much from him and the other grad students that he hired, and it really changed my life going forward. Although I no longer work in the field, I now work for Penn State, which would not have been possible without my master's degree. Matt started working for the National Park Service in 2004 and also teaches a class for Penn State similar to one Bob taught at UGA.

In addition, both he and Susan invited our fellow grad students over to their house many times for dinner over the years and treated us all as respectful colleagues and friends. He wasn't just our boss, but someone we truly enjoyed being with and one of the reasons we were with him for eight years. It's rare to come across people who make such a positive impact during your lifetime, but Bob was one of those people.



**Sandhill Crane by Patrick Maurice, Sweetwater Wetlands Park, Alachua County, Florida—
December 19, 2020.**

Message from the President – Spring ‘21

by Lauren Gingerella

It seems the light is at the end of the tunnel with the coronavirus pandemic. Like many of you, I am ready to emerge from my house and travel to all the places I have been wanderlusting over during lockdown.

When I travel to new destinations, I always have my binoculars in hand, ready to add birds to my life list. I always check out [eBird](#), to see which species I might observe on my visit, or note any particular areas which I should bird. If you are unfamiliar with using eBird to maximize your birding adventures, here are some tips on how to explore the database.

Hotspots: Hotspots are public birding locations, and checklists from that location are compiled and viewable. Hotspots are created by eBird users, and are often the best places to bird. The Hotspot Explorer opens to a map of the world, with broad areas shaded from yellow to red. As you zoom in, the shading transitions to points for individual hotspots, with shades of red being the most avian diverse locations. The Hotspot Explorer feature will help you locate the most bird diverse areas, but also find new birding spots that may be less traveled.

Bar Charts: Say you are planning a trip to the Georgia coast during the month of May, and want to know what species you are likely to see in the region. In Bar Charts, you can filter results by country (United States), state (Georgia), and subregion, such as counties, hotspots, or Important Bird Areas. You are able to select up to 15 counties at a time, which is helpful if you are traveling around the coast. The bar charts represent bird observations submitted by eBird users, with the thicker bars representing a greater amount of observations. You'll learn that in Georgia there are shorebirds which are common throughout the month of May, such as Ruddy Turnstone, Black-bellied Plover, and Least Sandpiper, and others that are likely only during the beginning of the month rather than the end, such as Piping Plover and Solitary Sandpiper.

Species Maps: Is there a particular bird you really, really want to see while on vacation? Enter the species name in the species map searchbar, and, *voilà*, you can see where the species has been reported. At a broad scale, the darker purple shading represents a greater frequency of sightings. Zoom in on the map to see individual hotspots and personal locations where other birders reported a particular species on their checklist. You can also sort and view sightings based on date. For example, if you would like to see an American Dipper during a summer west coast vacation, you can set the date range to only show July observations. This will help guide you to the best spots to find a dipper during your travel window.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird by Mark Magnarella, front yard, Clarke County, Georgia—August 18, 2019

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