



# The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the  
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

January 2011

Vol. 22 No. 1

## Next Meeting Thursday, January 6, at 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center

**Sonia M. Hernandez**, Assistant Professor of Wildlife Diseases in a shared position between the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources and the Southeastern Wildlife Disease Cooperative Study, will discuss "**How human-associated activities affect avian morbidity and mortality.**" This talk will detail the focus of four research projects that investigate the relationship between specific human activities and disease dynamics, or sources of morbidity and mortality for birds, with a focus on work performed in Costa Rica, Florida, and Georgia.

Dr. Hernandez has a DVM from LSU and a PhD in Ecology from UGA. The Hernandez Wildlife Disease Lab at UGA is interested in all aspects of wildlife disease. Recent research explores how pathogens affect wildlife populations, communities and ecosystems, from an applied perspective. Researchers attempt to understand how anthropogenic changes to the landscape affect wildlife disease dynamics. Such research encompasses the intersection of human, animal and wildlife health and integrates ecological principles to inform the field of conservation medicine.

For additional information, see  
<http://www.hernandezlab.uga.edu/Home.html>

**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.

## Great Backyard Bird Count

<http://birds.audubon.org/great-backyard-bird-count>

The GBBC is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent and in Hawaii.

The 14th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will be held from February 18 - 21, 2011. The GBBC is an annual four-day event that engages bird watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent and in Hawaii. Please visit the official website at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) for more information.

Each checklist submitted by these "citizen scientists" helps researchers at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society learn more about how the birds are doing—and how to protect them and the environment we share. Last year, participants turned in more than 97,200 checklists online, creating the continent's largest instantaneous snapshot of bird populations ever recorded.

Anyone can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, from novice bird watchers to experts. Participants count birds for as little as 15 minutes (or as long as they wish) on one or more days of the event and report their sightings online at [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org).

Bird populations are always shifting and changing. For example, 2009 GBBC data highlighted a huge southern invasion of Pine Siskins across much of the eastern United States. Participants counted 279,469 Pine Siskins on 18,528 checklists, as compared to the previous high of 38,977 birds on 4,069 checklists in 2005. Failure of seed crops farther north caused the siskins to move south to find their favorite food.

Read about additional highlights from the 2010 GBBC at <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/science-stories/2010-results/>

## Sightings

Reported at the December meeting:

- **Common Goldeneye**, juvenile, Edisto Beach, Alison Huff, 11/27/10
- **Snow Goose**, Lake Chapman, Joel McNeal, 12/01/10
- **Orchard Oriole**, Lake Herrick, Richard Hall, 12/01/10
- **Eastern Screech Owl**, Oconee National Forest, Vanessa Lane, 11/20/10

## November sightings summary

by Richard Hall



photo by Richard Hall

103 species were reported to eBird in Clarke County this November (compared with 87 in 2009). Much of this difference can be attributed to regular coverage of Lake Chapman during this peak time for waterfowl migration. A **Redhead** and **American Wigeon** on 18<sup>th</sup> were followed by a **Lesser Scaup** on 19<sup>th</sup>, the county high count for **Wood Duck** (36) on 20<sup>th</sup>, the first county **Greater Scaup** and second record of **Red-breasted Merganser** (3) on 28<sup>th</sup>. On 30<sup>th</sup> bad weather grounded an impressive flock of 55 **Red-breasted Mergansers** and a **Horned Grebe**, and the same weather system brought 17 flyover **Sandhill Cranes** to the State Botanical Garden. **American Black Ducks** returned to the Oxbow Lake on 20<sup>th</sup>. Interesting waterbirds at Lake Herrick included a female **Bufflehead** on 21<sup>st</sup>, a **Red-breasted Merganser** on 30<sup>th</sup> and a **Great Egret** that lingered until Thanksgiving. **American Kestrels** and **Northern Harriers** were reported multiple times from rural parts of the county.

A **Loggerhead Shrike** first spotted by James Neves on 10<sup>th</sup> at the S Milledge fields became very reliable, and at times confiding, towards month end. **Vesper** and **Grasshopper Sparrows** continued through the first half of the month, and a new **Lincoln's Sparrow** was found in the Botanical Garden on 4<sup>th</sup>. The first **Fox Sparrow** of the winter was found at Little Lake Herrick on 27<sup>th</sup>. There were multiple reports of scarce winter visitors including **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Rusty Blackbirds**, **Purple Finches** and **Pine Siskins**, while Joel McNeal set new state high counts in eBird for **Hermit Thrush** (38), **Golden-crowned Kinglet** (49) and **Winter Wren** (53) along Cook's Trail on November 7<sup>th</sup>. The **Orchard Oriole** continued at Little Lake Herrick all month, and the appearance of new black feathers on the throat and orange in the breast confirmed that it is a male. These birds typically molt on their wintering grounds, so hopefully it will remain until the Christmas Bird Count. Two **Orange-crowned Warblers** and 1 **Common Yellowthroat** also look set to spend the winter here.

## The Christmas Caroler of Birds

by Sigrid Sanders, <http://birdingnotes.sigridsanders.com/>

December 3rd, 2010

The cold, pale mornings of late November and early December here begin with the song of a Carolina Wren, a familiar, very common small brown bird with an upturned tail, a dusky-orange breast and a pale stripe over its eye, often singing from a perch among the dry, rustling brown leaves that still cling to the oaks outside our bedroom windows. In contrast to the muted colors of the trees and shrubs all around, the bright, musical song of the wren is as colorful and warm as a Christmas carol – not the only bird singing at this time of year, but one of the few, and the one most in tune with the holiday season.

A male Carolina Wren welcomes even the coldest, dreariest late-fall morning with a bold *teakettle, teakettle, teakettle* – or heard a different way maybe, *merrily, merrily, merrily* – answered by a female's long, ringing, trilled *cheer*.

The singing continues off and on all day, in a variety of different patterns of two or three phrases, as well as trills, bumbles, buzzes, chitters, bleeps and other calls. I don't know how often one particular Carolina Wren might sing at this time of year, but there are many scattered throughout the neighborhood, so their songs and calls are heard from shrubs, trees, thickets, fields and woods – and now and then from inside a garage that's been left open. Often two or three males seem to be singing back and forth to each other, repeating the same songs. At other times, I've stood and listened to four or five different wrens singing in different directions, all singing a different kind of song. A Carolina Wren may have a repertoire of more than 50 different songs, though around 30 is said to be the average. And while each song is distinct, the full-throated, confident tone is always recognizable.

One of their most frequent vocalizations at this time of year is something that sounds to me like a burble. It's a fast, repeated, sort of bouncing *purp-purp-purp-purp* that they seem to utter most often when moving around, a traveling chatter.

Though so common and familiar they're often overlooked, Carolina Wrens are remarkable singers and ingenious, curious, feisty, entertaining little birds – and this time of year is a good time to appreciate the beauty and spirit they bring to everyday life in a suburban yard. Things would be a lot less interesting around here without them.

Around our house, a Carolina Wren is a frequent visitor to both feeders and birdbaths. They cling to a feeder for several minutes at a time, eating seeds, nuts or fruit. There's almost always one or two under the bushes out front, and usually another one or two around the back deck or in the edge of the woods. This morning I looked out the kitchen window and a Carolina Wren was perched on the deck rail, bobbing up and down as it sang a few bars, then it searched along the rail and down on the deck among the piles of fallen leaves for hidden spiders or larvae or something, burbling as it went.

One morning in late November, on a cold but sunny day, I watched as a Carolina Wren took a bath in the birdbath out front. The water was shallow, with a thick layer of soggy dark-brown fallen leaves, but seemed to suit the wren's purposes, as it dipped in, fluttering its wings and submerged completely. Then it popped out to perch on the rim and look around sharply for a few seconds before hopping back into the water to wash itself again, splashing as it dipped its head under and turned itself around. Each time it came up to perch on the rim, it sat in a ray of sunlight, which made its breast glow rosy brown. It did this four or five times, and then, after the last one, flew to one of the feeders and immediately began to eat. Some days, life is good.

## Wildlife Diversity and Conservation in Argentina

summarized by Maggie Nettles

Dr. Michael Conroy spoke to a crowded ORAS December meeting about what he has been doing recently in Argentina. With a fine blend of introducing us to the country and providing an overview to some of the scientific studies he has been participating in, Dr. Conroy took us on a tour of three widely differing eco-regions: Iguazu (on a latitude similar to Miami), Pampas (latitude similar to Atlanta), and Patagonia (latitude similar to Mackinac Island, MI). He also talked about their key cities, which were established during the 1500s.

Mike participated in numerous workshops using a Structural Decision Approach to work toward potential resolutions of problems. One problem he discussed involves the conflict between superabundant eared doves and the management of the forest. Explosive growth in the last four years has resulted in crop damage and unrest among farmers. One partial solution might involve promoting dove hunting as a new economic phenomenon.

## Heads-up Notice on Upcoming Speakers

February 3: Dr. **Samantha Joye** on her experiences in the Gulf of Mexico.

March 3: Dr. **James Porter** on the ecology of war.

## Birders Getting Through Winter

a post from BirdChat by Al Schirmacher, Minnesota

For most of us, bird numbers have greatly dwindled, plumages have diminished, songs are occasional or fragmented. How do you find satisfaction in your birding hobby (or passion, or obsession) during the December to February timeframe?

Here's a summary of the 41 responses (with apologies to those who were eloquent):

- Christmas Bird Counts! (many times).
- Chase boreal birds and gulls in the north country.
- Develop a passion for winter, from backpacking to quiet evenings to enjoying winter birds.
- Wait until January, start new lists.
- Work on county listing of winter birds.
- Go south young man! Florida, Texas, Arizona, Mexico, Central & South America.
- "I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is played. This one note or a silent beat, or any moment of silence, comforts me."
- Search for owls in the fir stands.
- Study behaviors. Move more slowly. "It becomes a study of depth not breadth...details not numbers..."
- Just appreciate all the more those birds that winter with us. Accept what is offered, make the best of it.
- Feed & water them.
- Live in Canada!
- Savor the unusual birds.
- Cut back on the birding a bit, rest.
- Lutefisk.
- Enjoy the cold, silent walks. Update your birding records.
- Read birding books, listen to birding CD's.
- " We get great pleasure out of training the chickadees and red-breasted nuthatches to eat sunflower seeds out of our hands."
- "Winter makes each individual bird that much more precious."

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Oconee Rivers Audubon Society  
PO Box 81082  
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Name \_\_\_\_\_

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### Wildlife Winter Treats

#### Birdie Bagels

- 1 bag of bagels
- 1 jar of plain peanut butter
- 1 bag of birdseed
- 1 roll of string

Split bagels lengthwise and let harden overnight. Tie lengths of string through each bagel hole. Spread peanut butter onto the flat side of the bagel. Pour birdseed onto a plate. Press peanut butter side of bagel firmly into the birdseed. Hang bagels throughout your yard and enjoy watching the birds!

### Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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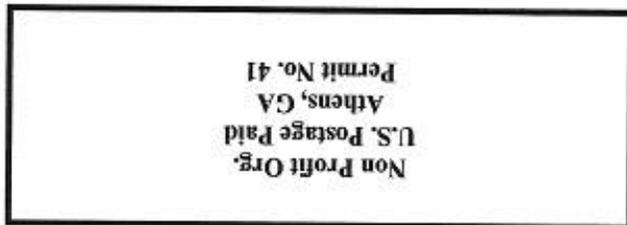
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Submit information to the address above or by e-mail to yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org. Articles, artwork, notices, and sighting reports welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the first Thursday of each month. All articles and artwork are 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 Society.



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