



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

June 2010

Vol. 21 No. 6

Next Meeting Thursday, June 3, 6:00 p.m. Memorial Park

Annual June Potluck Picnic

Our Potluck Picnic will take place at Memorial Park, picnic shelter number 1, beginning at 6:00 p.m. Please note the time change and the location change. Bring a dish of your favorite recipe, and join us for an evening of socializing in the outdoors!

Election of Officers for the upcoming year will also take place during the June meeting. Following is the list of nominees:

- **Vanessa Lane**, President
- **Edwige Damron**, Vice-president
- **Mary Case**, Secretary
- **Eugenia Thompson**, Treasurer

To reach Memorial Park, go south on South Milledge Ave, Pass Lumkin Street, Turn right on Gran Ellen Drive, Memorial Park will be on your left. The shelters are immediately to your left, down the hill.

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 will be a short way down the road on your right.

A big thanks! to all the local birders who led field trips for the GOS meeting here in April. Ed Maioriello (who also coordinated all the trips), Mark Freeman, Paul Sykes, Vanessa Lane, Jonathan Gray, Joel McNeal, Steve Holzman, Alison Huff, and James Neves -- your hard work was much appreciated!

Sightings Reported at May Meeting

- **White-rumped Sandpiper**, Bostwick Sod Farm, Vanessa Lane, 05/3
- **Lincoln's Sparrow**, Lake Herrick, Alison Huff
- **Common Nighthawks returned**, South Campus, Mary Case, 05/3
- **Bobolinks, Grasshopper Sparrows**, Old Farmington Rd, Mark Freeman
- **Purple Martins**, Old Farmington Rd, Carole Ludwig
- **Great Blue Heron**, flying over the ENSAT parking lot just before the ORAS meeting, Liz Conroy, Eugenia Thompson, Florence Robertson, 05/6
- **Mississippi Kites**, pair mating, Blackwater Creek, FL, Tim Homan & Page Luttrell
- **Swainson's Thrush singing**, near intersection of Lexington Rd. & Morton Rd., Eugenia Thompson, 04/29
- **Cape May Warbler**, Shoal Creek Farms (off Morton Rd.), Eugenia Thompson, all during the last week of April
- **Summer Tanager**, Oglethorpe County, Linda Russell
- **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, Watkinsville, **Wilson's Snipe**, Oconee Co. Utility Dept. pond, Lorene Winter
- **Barred Owls**, singing an exciting serenade all throughout the day on SCNC trails, Kate Mowbray
- **Chuck-will's-widow**, calling ½ mile from 5 Pts. intersection, Sue Wilde, (first time she's heard one in 10 years of living there)
- **Summer Tanager**, Rock & Shoals Natural Area, Linda Chafin, 04/13
- **Southern Lapwing** (Andina area), **Humboldt Penguins** (Isla Choros, Isla Pares), **pelicans, cormorants, eagles, gannets, albatrosses**, all seen on a trip to Chile, O. C. & Manita Dean

Don't Miss The Summer Retreat!

We are looking forward to a day of fun with you! Join us July 24 from 10 to 2 at **Sandy Creek Park**, shelter #1. Agenda: short business meeting, potluck lunch, and fun, fun, fun... Don't forget to bring your binoculars and bathing suit. Boat rentals will also be available.

Loon Story: Additional Notes, Part III

by Tim Homan



The common loon exhibits a wide and highly nuanced array of vocalizations, ranging from peep, yelp, mew call, and hoot (at least two types) to the far-carrying calls—yodel, wail, tremolo, and tremolo-wail. These black-and-white waterbirds are far more vocal during their entire northcountry breeding season than they are on their winter range. They are also much more vocal early in the breeding season, especially before the eggs hatch, than they are in late summer. These piscatory birds call primarily at night, with a peak intensity during the hour before midnight. Most daytime calls are tremolos—either flight calls, or calls directed at people disturbing them, not other loons.

The yodel, known as the song of the loon, is the territorial call given only by the male. As audio spectrographs have conclusively shown, each male loon broadcasts a distinctive yodel, one that does not change over time and provides researchers with the voiceprint equivalent of a bird band. Sigurd T. Olson describes the yodel, which can carry up to 10 miles, as “the weirdest and wildest of calls ... beautiful and thrilling ... maniacal and blood curdling.”

Known as the night call, the plaintive wail is probably the favorite call of contemporary loon watchers. Most frequently utilized at night, the wail often expresses a wish for closer contact with a mate, to re-establish contact or to reduce the distance between the pair. The initial calls mean something like “where are you” or “come here”; the replies mean something like “I’m over here” or “coming dear.” This vocalization is the call of choice when the nest-sitter wants to exchange places with its mate. The wail is also commonly used in night chorusing, often opening and closing the concert, and in answering the tremolos of loons speeding overhead.

Researchers have identified three distinct wail calls, intensity gradients ranging from simple to more complex. Lowest in intensity, the first type is a relatively unchanging tone usually lasting only a couple of seconds. Types 2 and 3 last longer and include tonal jumps. Normally wails are produced in a series of five to twenty.

Known as the flight call or laughing call, the tremolo is an all purpose vocalization signaling alarm, annoyance, worry, or greeting. Ornithologists have isolated three different tremolo types. And they have also discovered differences within call types, subtle shadings that suggest the tremolo—the only call the common loon is capable of blasting out while on the wing—provides a graded system of communication. The lowest frequency call, Type 1, indicates a low level of anxiety or intensity, while the highest frequency tremolo, Type 3, reflects a much greater sense of urgency. All three tremolo types usually signify a tendency to flee.

Apparently loons can send very different messages by increasing the duration and frequency of their tremolos. Type 1 is used by pair members during their antiphonal duet calling. Type 2 is the most versatile call, accounting for over half of all tremolos. Type 2 calls can express greater or lesser alarm. A low frequency Type 2 call might mean “let’s get out of here,” while a high frequency Type 2 might mean “lets get out of here now.” This species’ ability to modify the meaning of a single call is rare among birds and other animals.

Loons selectively give flight-call tremolos to communicate while flying, to determine the presence of territory holders. Loons winging their way over loon-empty lakes usually remain silent, but when they cruise over lakes inhabited by birds of their own feather, they usually shout out.

The hybrid tremolo-wail, which begins as a tremolo and ends as a wail, is employed primarily within the breeding territory, especially near threatened nests or young. The tremolo-wail is by far the least utilized call in the common loon language. Its function is unknown.

In late spring, especially from mid-May to mid-June, these crimson-eyed vocalists play their parts in North America’s loudest and largest musical—the renowned, way-off Broadway production known as the night chorus. During this time, in the early nesting season, every lake large enough to hold common loons becomes a stage for *Gavia immer*’s full repertoire of loud calls, emphatically projected with a frenzied frequency for most of the night from dusk to dawn. Directed by darkened sky and the will toward continuance, the chorus usually begins with wails, followed by an extravagant concert of tremolos, duetting tremolos, yodels, more wails, more of everything until the air is saturated with wild loon music ringing far and wide.

The sparse but appreciative audience pays for the long-running show with forced portage and lost sleep. The only ushers are map and compass. There are no programs, no protocols for applause. Dusk pulls the curtains apart; sunrise draws them to a close.

Territorial night chorusing sweeps over great swaths of still-wild lake country, over millions of acres and thousands of square miles. For instance, if you were camped on any loon-bearing lake within the roughly 2.1-million acres of the contiguous Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness-Quetico Provincial Park in northeastern Minnesota and southwestern Ontario, a chaos of common loon calls would rise into the night, spreading in ripple-rings of pulsing sound like a primal force. The same thrilling magic—loon music surging at you from every direction and every distance within your circle of hearing—would also happen within Ontario’s nearly 1.7-million-acre outdoor theater, Algonquin Provincial Park. In fact, this same surround-sound phenomenon—life loud and resolute in its living, life loud in its insistence upon fulfilling evolution’s legacy—occurs wherever wild lakes and nesting loons are densely concentrated.

Birding on the Cheap

by Carole Ludwig

A few years ago I'd have thought nothing of blowing a few hundred dollars on a horse-show trip, with the prospect of bringing home a rosette or two. Prompted by my new obsession of paying off the farm mortgage early, all that has changed. In both of my pastimes, horse-showing and birding, I have become a tightwad. I now calculate the "cost" of each lifer on the trips Mark and I take.

We recently went to Albany, Ga to bird the Cobb Owl Fields and the Albany Nursery WMA. Our plan was to meet Clive Rainey late on Friday to go for Short-eared and Barn Owls, after stopping by the WMA to try for a LeConte's sparrow. Thanks to Alan Ashley at the WMA, we got good looks at the target sparrow in short order, and went up the road to meet Clive. He first took us to Standard Elevator Road to see a cooperative Barn Owl, then on to the Cobb fields, over which a Northern Harrier soared. We stopped for a long look, then picked our way diagonally across the weedy expanse where mixed blackbird flocks fed. Suddenly up flushed a Short-eared Owl about 75 yards ahead, then another harrier, then a second S-E owl. A Merlin flapped into the mix while we enjoyed the spectacle of soaring owls, a perched Red-tailed Hawk and a Red-winged Blackbird singing atop a low bush, the late afternoon sun making his epaulets brilliant. After this spectacle it was time to quit for the day. So far we were out about \$33, counting gas and lunch. Now it gets interesting. On the more up-scale side of Albany, motels ran about \$70 after the extra charge for our Greyhound. So we drove to the other side of town, and found a cheaper chain motel, whose name I won't reveal, but will say it rhymes with Hotel Nix. \$33 was the price, and no charge for the 'small dog'. (Well, she does have a small attention span.) Great!

Near the motel was a tattoo parlor, a bail bondsman and a pawn shop. That tells you we were in the down-scale part of town, but never mind, we were saving money. After a sumptuous meal at Waffle House (\$15), we returned to our room and entertained ourselves swatting roaches off the walls, and looking for images of the Madonna in the carpet stains. We got a great night's sleep after the boom-box in the next room was turned off about 2 AM, and were awakened the next morning by flashing blue lights in the parking lot. Someone had too much fun the night before and passed out at the wheel. Only a car was damaged. After a run through Mickey D's (\$8) we stopped on a forest road on our way to the Albany Nursery WMA and found singing Bachman's Sparrows. At the WMA, we again met Alan Ashley. Like a good pointer on a quail hunt, he found a beautiful Henslow's Sparrow for the whole group of birders. We also had good looks at Song, Chipping, and Vesper Sparrows. What a great morning!

On the way home, we spent another \$30 for gas and lunch, so the total for my 4 lifers came to \$119, or \$30 CPL (cost per lifer), saving me enough money to increase my insurance coverage I'll need for the by-pass surgery from all the fast food I ate on this trip.

Mission ~~Im~~Possible

summary of May Meeting by Eugenia Thompson



When the Weed Warriors – Linda Chafin, Sue Wilde, and Dorothy O'Niell – first considered what it would take to eradicate the invasive plants and to restore the 'originals' at Memorial Park, they were not sure they could do it without winning the lottery or getting the help of a crew of convicts.

But as Linda explained in her talk to our May meeting, they persevered and with the help of Ed Wilde, Leslie Boby, our own ORAS member Gary Crider, and a slew of other volunteers, eradication began and was soon noticeable.

Under a canopy of native trees, approximately 90% of the biomass consisted of invasive, exotic shrubs and woody vines. English Ivy was the #1 offender, covering the ground as well as climbing trees. Other common offenders were Bush Honeysuckle, Chinese Privet, *Elaeagnus*, and Monkey Grass.

The eradication effort started in October 2009, at a "seepage wetland" just off Gran Ellen Drive. In November volunteers poured in, coordinated by Leslie Boby; horticulture students from David Berle's class at UGA, UGA's pre-vet club members, "Friends of 5 Points", service fraternities from UGA, and Athens-Clarke County Community Service workers all helped. On Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, volunteers came from as far away as Covington, Toccoa, Alto, Gwinnett County, and Franklin County.

They soon moved out of the wetland area and into the Birchmore Trail area. By the end of the winter, they had cleared 3.5 acres.

As spring unfolded, native plants began to emerge. Painted Buckeye, Grape Fern, Wild Geranium, Carrion Flower, Perfoliate Bellflower, Purple Toadshade, Bloodroot, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Rattlesnake Fern, and Royal Fern all came up, and many began to bloom.

With grant money matched by funds from ACC, the Weed Warriors purchased plants that are native to the eastern Piedmont section of Georgia. Some native plants were also donated. They especially looked for plants that support birds in one way or another, plants that create public interest (e. g., showy flowers or berries), and plants that would spread. Now, in addition to the native plants that managed to survive under the invasives for years, newly-planted Oconee Azalea, Joe Pye Weed, Buttonbush, Possum Haw, Spicebush, Winterberry, Leathery Rush, Virginia Willow, and Christmas Ferns grace the newly cleared areas. ACC donated mulch for all areas subject to erosion.

Among the many things the Weed Warriors have learned is that volunteers make all the difference! With 69 acres remaining to be cleared in this park, work will resume in October, 2010. The already-cleared and replanted areas also will have to be monitored as the years go by. To volunteer your time and effort, check out their Facebook page or call Leslie Boby at Memorial Park.

Give the Gift of Audubon!

For an introductory National Audubon Society membership (which includes *Audubon* magazine, local membership, and a subscription to *The Yellowthroat*), 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 _____

What They Can't See

Learn how to prevent bird collisions with windows in this free and downloadable brochure by the American Bird Conservancy:

<http://www.abcbirds.org/newsandreports/releases/100325.html>

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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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