



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

March 2011

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Next Meeting at UGA Odum School of Ecology Thursday, March 3, at 7:00 p.m.

Dr. James Porter, Associate Dean of the Odum School of Ecology at the University of Georgia, will talk about "**The Ecology of War**" at the March 3 meeting.

Dr. Porter's interest in the ecology of war started with investigations on the effects of naval bombardment of coral reefs on Vieques, Puerto Rico, which had been used for gunnery practice since 1943. In part based on his team's research, some areas of Vieques were declared an EPA Superfund Site in 2005, but to date none of these underwater areas have been cleared of their unexploded ordnance (UWUXO).

The team found that reefs with the highest concentrations of bombs and bomb fragments have the lowest indices of coral reef health. All animals close to leaking bombs tested positive for contamination. While commercially edible creatures such as fish and lobster were within U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards of safe consumption, several marine species tested have very high concentrations of known carcinogens.

The situation in Vieques exists elsewhere, too. UWUXO is found in rivers, lakes, and oceans all over the world. His team has invented, and Dr. Porter will show videos of, a device that picks up bombs underwater and removes them non-destructively from the reef.

Spring Bird Walks & Field Trips

Have you heard the birds starting to sing? It's time to get outdoors and join the Saturday spring bird walks, which ORAS sponsors jointly with Sandy Creek Nature Center. Whether you are an experienced birder or a beginner, come join us as we witness the miracle of the northward migration.

- 3/19/2011 State Botanical Garden: 8:00 a.m.
Meet at the upper parking lot by Day Chapel.
- 3/26/2011 Sandy Creek Park - North Cook's Trail: 8:00 a.m. Meet at the last parking lot on Campsite Drive across the dam.
- 4/02/2011 Sandy Creek Nature Center: 8:00 a.m.
Meet at the Allen House parking lot (the 1st lot on the left).
- 4/09/2011 Whitehall Forest: 8:00 a.m.
Meet in the driveway at the end of South Milledge Road (go through T-junction with Whitehall Road into Whitehall Forest).
- 4/16/2011 State Botanical Garden: 8:00 a.m.
Meet at the upper parking lot by Day Chapel.
- 4/23/2011 Sandy Creek Nature Center - Cook's Trail Cleanup
- 4/30/2011 Kennesaw Mountain
- 5/07/2011 USDA-AR

Meeting place changed due to SCNC construction.

Directions to Odum School of Ecology from bypass:

- Exit on College Station Road and turn west toward campus.
- Follow College Station Road to East Campus Road (the first signal-light intersection after the railroad tracks) and turn right.
- Drive north on East Campus Road.
- Turn left at second red light onto W. Green Street.
- Turn right into the S-07 parking lot (open after 5:00 p.m.).
- The Ecology building is on the north side of the parking lot behind a row of trees.
- A sidewalk on the far side of the parking lot leads to the Ecology Building.



Aflockalypse

Cornell Lab eNews, January 24, 2011

Ever since blackbirds fell from the sky in Arkansas on New Year's Eve, the Cornell Lab has continued to receive numerous inquiries from the media and the concerned public about the significance of that event and other reports of dead birds at locations around the world. These isolated events, although dramatic, are not highly unusual in frequency or scale. Within the United States, for example, the USGS has recorded 188 events during the past 10 years involving more than 1,000 birds per incident--about 18 events per year on average, or more than one per month, attributed to disease and other causes.

Should we be worried about an "aflockalypse?" Yes, but not about the media coverage focusing on isolated events that affect only a few hundred or thousand birds at a time. It's the constant, chronic losses from habitat destruction and other causes that should truly concern us. Consider that 100 million birds are estimated to die from window collisions in the United States alone each year. That's more than 270,000 per day on average. Cats are estimated to kill another 100 million per year. And that's just the tip of the iceberg; habitat loss and degradation are the largest causes of massive declines in the numbers of birds.

Although we cannot witness these declines on a given day, citizen-science participants have contributed decades of data that point to truly alarming declines. Data from the Breeding Bird Survey show that Rusty Blackbirds, for example, have declined by 95% since the 1960s, indicating a loss of tens of millions of birds. Data from Project FeederWatch show that Evening Grosbeaks have also declined rangewide since the 1980s.

Don't underestimate the power of bird watchers to "witness" and document the large-scale declines that might otherwise go undetected until it's too late. With your help, the Cornell Lab and other organizations are working hard to monitor bird species and address the root causes of decline. Send your data to eBird, Project FeederWatch, or the Great Backyard Bird Count

Upcoming May Meeting Notice

Due to commitments at UGA, Dr. Samantha Joye had to postpone her February talk on her experiences in the Gulf of Mexico and the oil spill. She has rescheduled to May 5.

Clarke County sightings January 2011

by Richard Hall

91 species were entered into eBird for Clarke County in January 2011 (the highest January total recorded so far). A record-breaking snowfall early in the month left many birders housebound, and as a result scarce species such as Fox Sparrows and Purple Finches were reported from several backyards. The O'Gradys recorded an impressive 150 Pine Siskins at their feeders, while a fine male Baltimore Oriole added a welcome splash of color in Ed Maioriello's backyard. Two Least Sandpipers were found at Lake Herrick by Mirko Basen on 11th, remaining until the 17th and often giving incredibly close views. Mirko and I braved a snowy Lake Chapman on 13th and were rewarded with a new county high count of 39 Hooded Mergansers, 2 each of Gadwall and American Black Duck and best of all, a confiding Merlin that posed for several minutes in a tree above us. The South Milledge fields yielded interesting observations throughout the month, including the continuing Loggerhead Shrike (last seen on 2nd), 2 flyover Horned Larks on 17th, a Vesper Sparrow first seen on 19th and Northern Harrier on 23rd. Lucky Jim Hanna had a flyover Bald Eagle at the Botanical Garden the next day. Unfortunately, no reports of Rusty Blackbirds were received. By month end things were warming up, and Eugenia Thompson reported her neighborhood Red-shouldered Hawks already back on the nest.



Merlin photo by Richard Hall

Backyard Wildlife on a Budget

by Robin Woodroof, Conservation Chair / Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program

Want to enjoy wildlife in your backyard but think you can't afford it? It's easy to feel that way when there are so many fancy outdoor items for sale with large price tags. Although those items can be enjoyable, they are not a necessity. You don't have to spend a lot to enjoy wildlife, and the more natural an area is, the more likely wildlife will feel at home. Here are a few ideas that will attract birds, amphibians, insects, reptiles, small mammals, and probably a few welcomed surprises.

Cost Saving Ideas:

- Ask friends if they have any plants, clippings, pots, garden tools, bird feeders, or other supplies they would like to get rid of or donate to you.
- Make your own bird feeder, bird house, bat house, or butterfly house.
- Create an in-ground or above-ground water bath from a plant saucer, garbage can lid, snow disc or other saucer-shaped item and line with small rocks or pebbles (using non-toxic glue).
- Plant trees, shrubs, vines, annuals and perennials that provide natural food so less supplemental bird seed will be needed.
- Black oil sunflower seed supplies high quality food to the majority of backyard bird species.
- Chisel out the top one to three inches of an old stump for a birdbath.
- Make your own suet by re-using the plastic containers from previously purchased suet.
- Create toad abodes from old or broken pots.
- Shop thrift stores, garage sales, and check clearance shelves at name brand stores.
- Create rock gardens from rocks found on your property.
- Use water from downspouts, rainwater, rain barrels, and air-conditioning drips to refill birdbaths.
- Landscape with tree limbs and leave dead trees to provide food and shelter.
- Create brush piles from pruned trees, shrubs and vines
- Look for ideas in garden and bird magazines.
- Check out field guides and wildlife books from local libraries or borrow some from a friend.
- Search the web for information and images on wildlife, bird, plant and garden topics.
- Decorate an old chair or bench and enjoy watching the wildlife that visit!

Sightings Reported at February Meeting

- **American Woodcock**, Vanessa Lane, S. Milledge
- **Fox Sparrows**, a pair, Alison Huff, Bogart
- **American Robins, Goldfinches**, Brad Hogue, Ansonborough
- **White-winged Scoter, Northern Pintail**, Mark Freeman, North Greene County
- **American Woodcock**, displaying, Eugenia Thompson, near Morton Rd.
- **Cedar Waxwings**, 75-100, Eugenia Thompson, City Hall
- **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, Eugenia Thompson, Lexington Rd. & Morton Rd. intersection
- **Pine Siskin, Downy Woodpecker**, Sarah Evans, Barnett Shoals Rd.

February Meeting Notes

by Maggie Nettles

Randy Smith, Sandy Creek Nature Center Facility Supervisor, provided Audubon members with an enthusiastic and detailed update on the construction going on at the ENSAT building:

- the Urban Interactive Learning Center,
- the Woodland Interactive Learning Center,
- the Agricultural Interactive Learning Center,
- the Sky Center with a planetarium dome.

Kate Mowbray, SCNC Naturalist, teamed up with Randy to brainstorm on ways Audubon members could participate in the evolving plans for the nature center.

International Migratory Bird Day

Environment for the Americas (EFTA) is a non-profit organization that provides information and materials about birds, bird conservation, and bird education from Canada to South America.

International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD), the signature program of EFTA, is the only international education program that highlights and celebrates the migration of nearly 350 species of migratory birds between nesting habitats in North America and non-breeding grounds in Latin America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Each year IMBD explores a different aspect of migratory birds and their conservation. For details, see <http://www.birdday.org/>

Correction: In the "Aransas National Wildlife Refuge" article in the February 2011 issue, the Whooping Cranes fly 2500 miles from Canada to Texas (and not 25000). Please excuse this typo.

2010 Athens CBC Report

by Eugenia Thompson

Thirty-seven intrepid birders braved the chilly, rainy weather (low 38F, high 39F) to count local birds on Dec. 18, and three more counted at their feeders. Ninety species showed up on the day of the count, and eleven more showed up for count week (the three days on either side of the count). Highlights of count day were Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck, Wild Turkey, Wilson's Snipe, American Woodcock, Ring-billed Gull, owls (Barn, Eastern Screech, Great Horned, Barred), Red-headed Woodpecker, Loggerhead Shrike, House Wren, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Gray Catbird, Orange-crowned Warbler, Palm Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Vesper Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Dickcissel, Rusty Blackbird, and Purple Finch. Fish Crow did not show up on count day but did appear for count week along with Gadwall, American Black Duck, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Horned Grebe, American Coot, Common Yellowthroat, and Pine Siskin. This year's Athens Christmas Bird Count will be on December 17, 2011; mark your calendar!

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

President Vanessa Lane
President@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Vice-President
vp@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Treasurer Eugenia Thompson
treasurer@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Secretary Mary Case
secretary@oconeeriversaudubon.org

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PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

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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Oconee Audubon Society
P.O. Box 81082
Athens, Georgia 30608-1082
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