



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

April 2018

Vol. 29, No. 4

**Next Meeting:
Thursday, April 5, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Secretive Marsh Birds

Betsy Kurimo-Beechuk, UG Research Coordinator, will present her research on marsh bird ecology.

Marsh birds do not vocalize often and typically inhabit dense, wetland habitat that is difficult for people to access. Yet researchers concerned with conserving these unique species have dedicated much effort to learning about these secretive birds. She will discuss the life history of marsh birds and the conservation challenges they face.

Kurimo-Beechuk earned a degree in veterinary technology and has worked as a registered technician since 2004 in various private practices and at UGA's veterinary teaching hospital. It was at UGA that she discovered her passion for birds, so she returned to school to obtain a Bachelor's degree in Forest Resources with a Wildlife Sciences emphasis. She later completed a Master's degree in Wildlife Ecology and Management, where she focused her research on Clapper Rails in northeastern Florida.

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.

Spring Bird Walks – Think Spring!

Bird walks are from **8 a.m.-11a.m. or noon**. However, attendees may leave early. Please dress for the weather, wear practical shoes, hats and bring insect repellent, snacks and water as desired. (Please check ORAS announcements and website for any last minute changes to this schedule.)

If you have other questions please contact Ed Maioriello at: fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org

- Mar. 31: **Sandy Creek Park**
- Apr. 07: **Lake Herrick/Oconee Forest Park**
- Apr. 08: **Sandy Creek Nature Center (SCNC)**
- Apr. 14: **Beech Haven**
- Apr. 15: **Whitehall Forest***
- Apr. 22: **Botanical Garden**
- Apr. 28: **SCP-Cook's Trail (clean-up)**
- Apr. 29: **ACC Landfill**
- May 06: **Hardigree Wildlife Sanctuary**

*(Attendees for the Whitehall walk must be on time).

Spring Field Trips (out of town) *

Apr. 21 6:00 a.m. Kennesaw Mountain
May 05 7:00 a.m. Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center

* Please check ORAS announcements for any late changes.

Nocturnal Chorus of the Common Loon

by *Tim Homan*

During the breeding season (May-August), but especially from mid-May to mid-June, these high-volume vocalists play their parts in North America's loudest and largest musical: the renowned, way-off Broadway production known as the Nocturnal Chorus.

During this time, in the early nesting season, every suitable lake becomes a stage for *Gavia immer*'s full repertoire of resounding calls, periodically projected with a frenzied frequency for most of the night from dusk till dawn.

Directed by the wheeling constellations and the will toward continuance, this choral uproar usually warms up with wails, followed by an extravagant, landscape-scale acappella concert of tremolos, duetting tremolos, yodels, more wails, more of everything until the air reverberates with a chaos of cries from the dark.

The Nocturnal Chorus is more commonly heard on lakes in close proximity or on larger lakes with multiple pairs of loons. The sparse but appreciative audience pays for the long-running show with portage, bug bite, and lost sleep. The silent ushers are the same old ones: map, compass, common sense. While the chorus continues throughout the night, it frequently peaks at around two in the morning.

There are no programs, no protocols for applause. Dusk pulls the curtains apart; dawn draws them to a close. There are absolutely no applause-driven encores after daylight. You can give *Gavia immer* a standing ovation, clap as loud and long as you like, but the Common Loons will not come back to curtsy or bow. The show doesn't run every night, so don't bother with reservations.

The function of this loud cacophony of loon music is unclear. It may aid in pair bonding and territorial reinforcement during nights when visual contact is limited, or it may allow for neighbor recognition. Whatever the reason, territorial chorusing still sweeps over great swaths of wild lake country, over millions of acres and thousands upon thousands of square miles. For instance, if you were camped on any loon-lucky lake within the 2.1-million acres of the contiguous Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness-Quetico Provincial Park (Minnesota-Ontario), loon calls would drench the darkness with overlapping ripple-rings of living, pulsing sound.

The same thrilling magic—loon music surging at you from every lake within your circle of hearing—would also arise within Ontario's nearly 1.7-million-acre theater-in-the-all-around, Algonquin Provincial Park. In fact, this same surround-sound phenomenon—a throbbing assertion of life—fills the night with an ancient and utterly primeval force wherever wild lakes and nesting loons remain.

Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program

Become a Certified Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Homeowner by providing habitat for birds, wildlife, and native plants in our community! For more information: <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/sanctuary> Or email: oconeeriversaudubonsociety@gmail.com

Directions to The O'Grady Bird Habitat (River Cane) Restoration Area

by *State Botanical Garden of Georgia staff*

Thanks ORAS members for spreading the word about the river cane restoration! Here are directions to the site:

From the main entrance to the State Botanical Garden, continue along the entrance road following the signs for the Mimsie Lanier Center for Native Plant Studies (this amounts to taking a right whenever the road forks).

Before you reach the Mimsie Lanier Center, you will cross an open power line. There is a small parking lot with a picnic table on your left, adjacent to the power line.

Park there and follow the trail that leads from the parking lot, along the power line, to the Middle Oconee River. Just before you reach the river, look to the right of the path to see the tall stand of river cane.

If you continue a little further along the path all the way to the margin of the river and then take a right, you will see recently planted, smaller river cane plants to the right of the path. They will probably be marked with orange flags.



Photo of Cane brake skipper* by James W. Porter, Tallassee Forest, Clarke County —collected May 31, 2010

*(Note: this skipper is dependent upon river cane for all stages in its life cycle.)

The O'Grady Bird Habitat (River Cane) Restoration Program *by Karla O'Grady*

I hope everyone will go to see the native river cane planted in the State Botanical Garden of Georgia (the Garden), 2450 S. Milledge Ave. in Athens. It's on the White Trail by the river.

As Dr. Richard Hall (past president of the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society) noted in a recent email about the importance of river cane (*Arundinaria* spp): "It was historically a dominant feature of the understory along rivers, an important nesting habitat for migratory songbirds and native bees, and a larval food plant for butterflies such as the Creole Pearly-eye. It also was a plant of cultural significance to native Americans."

When my late husband, Bill O'Grady, and I used to go birding there, we dreamed of restoring the native river cane to the banks of the Middle Oconee River which forms the southern edge of the Garden.

When the U.S. Forest Service arrived and cleared the Chinese privet, we hoped that the cleared area would be maintained, but instead we watched in horror as the privet returned.

Bill and I scheduled a meeting with someone in a leadership position at the Garden who discouraged us. Crestfallen we went back to dreaming.

After my husband passed away in 2015, I was uplifted when Richard Hall mentioned a river cane planting as a possibility for a memorial. At that point there was new leadership at the Garden. Director Wilf Nichols showed much enthusiasm and interest in this project.

With the help of Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) members and others, we were able to raise money and begin the habitat restoration. River cane is not an exciting plant to view, but it is necessary habitat for many native animals.

Fortunately, the Garden's current director, Jennifer Cruse-Sanders, also shares enthusiasm for this project; the river cane habitat restoration continues under her direction.

I recall Bill's excitement about finding a nesting pair of Swainson's Warblers in the Garden was tempered by their departure. The pair moved on as a result of the privet removal. When the habitat is restored, however, the Garden may one day be home to one of the Southeast's most elusive and rare warblers. Perhaps this pair will nest successfully.

There's still time to contribute to the O'Grady Bird Habitat Restoration Program. For more info on the project and how to donate, go to the following link on the ORAS website: <http://oconeeriversaudubon.org/node/370>



Photo of Karla O'Grady and son Brian by Eric Rhinestone, at O'Grady Bird Habitat Restoration area in the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, Clarke County—November 19, 2017

River Cane Restoration in Progress

In memory of longtime bird advocate Bill O'Grady, Oconee Rivers Audubon Society is teaming up with the State Botanical Garden of Georgia to bring river cane back to the lowlands of the Middle Oconee River.

River canes (*Arundinaria* spp.) are plants in the bamboo family native to North America. Early explorers in the South described vast stands of river cane, called "canebrakes," growing near rivers. Canebrakes are important to many bird and insect species, as well as local Native American communities. Today, scientists estimate nearly 98 percent of canebrakes have been lost to clearing, farming, lack of fire, and invasion by non-native plants.

What are we doing?

- * Removing non-native plants
- * Planting river cane
- * Transplanting healthy river cane from nearby populations

What are the next steps?

- * Weeding and watering river cane
- * Expanding the canebrake
- * Maintaining nearby river cane

Lend us a hand! Restoring a canebrake takes time. Oconee Rivers Audubon Society organizes volunteer efforts regularly and is continually accepting donations in support of this important restoration project.

For more information about this project, scan the QR code or visit: <http://oconeeriversaudubon.org/>

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
State Botanical Garden of Georgia
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Photo of River Cane Restoration Project Sign by Karen Porter, State Botanical Garden of Georgia, Clarke County—February 17, 2018

An Introduction to Wild Bees of Georgia

summary of the March meeting by Tammy Kemper

Thanks to Christine Fortuin, Ph.D. student at UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, who discussed the importance of wild bees.* Native and wild bees are often neglected in research but are important contributors to forest ecosystems and agriculture.

Honey bees are not native to the U.S., but were imported from Europe. There are more than 4,000 native bee species in the U.S. Native bees pollinate many important crops such as blueberries, squash, and tomatoes and are responsible for the bulk of pollination in forests and natural areas

Fortuin is doing research on how forest management affects native bee habitat. Bees need different types of nesting habitat such as soil, wood, holes, leaf piles, and a duff layer.

She described the difference between fly mimics and bees; flies have only one set of wings and short antennae, while bees have two sets of wings and long antennae. She shared pictures and discussed ways to identify several types of bees:

* **Sweat bees** – shiny or metallic and ground nesters

* **Leaf Cutter bees** – excellent pollinators due to hairy abdomens (esp. for alfalfa which is needed for cows and thus ice cream), and are cavity nesters

* **Long-horned bees** – the males have long antennae, pollinate squash, ground nesters, and are solitary

* **Bumblebees** – social and pollinate tomatoes and peppers

* **Carpenter bees** – have a dot on their back, are general pollinators, and make their own nesting holes

* **Digger or Mining bees** – there are a hundred types, ground nesters and dig tunnels, are solitary but congregate, pollinate onions and sunflowers, and many males have yellow noses and females have white eyebrows

* **Mason bees** – solitary, cavity nesting, and excellent pollinators for orchards, blueberries, and roses. They are 120 times greater pollinators than honey bees due to their hairy abdomens, and are among the easiest to raise.

To raise bees, be sure to provide appropriate habitat and understand the life cycle of the type of bee you want to raise. You can order mason bee cocoons and nesting supplies from www.crownbees.com or www.brushymountainbeefarm.com. Keep them in the refrigerator and release them when it is the proper time and temperature for that type of bee.

Mason bees need 8 mm holes for their nest boxes. In the spring the males mate and die, the females lay eggs, fill nests with food, seal the nests with mud and die. They need a source of mud near the nest or else they will not stay in the area. In late summer the eggs become larva and then pupate into adults in fall, but stay in their cocoons, and overwinter

in the nests and emerge in the spring, when the temperature is about 55 degrees, to start all over again.

Leaf cutter bees need 6 mm holes for their nest boxes. Their life cycle is similar to the Mason bees, but they over-winter as larva, and emerge around June, when the temperature is about 80 degrees.

Bumble bee queens come out in the spring, after all the other bees have died, and look for a nest. They collect pollen for about two weeks and lay eggs. About 12 weeks later, the worker bees hatch and the queen makes more eggs as the workers provision the nest.

In fall the colony makes new queens, which take flight, mate, and then find a place to hibernate for the winter. The rest of the colony dies, and in spring the hibernating queens emerge and start the process all over again. If pesticides are used in early spring the queen might be killed. Nesting boxes for bumble bees have a low (about 3%) success rate.

* Additional note from Christine Fortuin: "A wild bee is any bee species that is not habitually managed or kept (i.e. domesticated), which in the U.S. includes all bee species except for the European honeybee. Wild bees in the U.S. are mostly native, but there are a few introduced species that are non-native but wild. There are over 4,000 species of native bees in the U.S. and all of them are wild, while there are only a handful of non-native wild species.

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The Yellowthroat
Published monthly by the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
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Submit items to address above or e-mail *The Yellowthroat* editor Liz Conroy: yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org. Articles, artwork, notices, and sighting reports welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the first day 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

