



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

April 2014

Vol. 25, No. 4

**Next Meeting:
Thursday, April 3, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Do Cheaters Always Prosper? (the costs and benefits of extra-pair paternity in birds)

While most birds appear to stay with the same mate during the breeding season or even for life, recent advances in molecular genetics have allowed researchers to discover that appearances can be deceiving.

Among the vast majority of seemingly monogamous species, dalliances outside of the pair bond are surprisingly common. In this talk, Anna Joy Lehmiche will discuss the potential costs and benefits of “straying” using evidence from her own research on Seaside Sparrows. Also, she will present other scandalous examples from previous scientific studies.

Lehmiche recently completed her PhD at UGA’s Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources. She has been working with birds ever since her freshman year in college and became interested in genetics during a conservation genetics class while at Warnell.

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 Education & Visitor Center 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 and snacks/water as desired. (Also, 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

- April 5: **Herrick/Oconee Forest Park**
- April 6: **The Sandy Creek Nature Center**
- April 12: **Whitehall Forest**
- April 13: **Athens-Clarke County Landfill** (We will meet about a quarter mile inside the gate off of Lexington Road. Please make sure to arrive on time, as the folks at the landfill may need to lock the gate behind us.)
- April 19: **The State Botanical Garden**
- May 03: **SCNC-Cook’s Trail (clean-up)**

(Attendees for Cook’s Trail walk are asked to bring trash bags for picking up litter on the way out while still birding).

Spring Field Trips (out of town) *

- Apr. 26 6:00 a.m. Kennesaw Mountain
- May 10 7:00 a.m. Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center

* Please check listserv announcements for any changes in times and/or where to meet to carpool.

River Rendezvous – Sat. April 12

by Sandy Creek Nature Center staff

Volunteers are needed on Sat. April 12 from 9:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. to collect samples from streams in our area to help determine the health of our waterways. No experience is needed but do dress to get wet and dirty.

This even is hosted by Upper Oconee Watershed Network and Sandy Creek Nature Center. There will be a brief orientation which includes light breakfast and coffee at 9 a.m. Children’s activities are ongoing from 10:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m. Please call: 706-613-3615 for more information about River Rendezvous. This event is free and open to the public.

February 2014 Clarke County eBird Sightings Summary *by Clark Jones*

One hundred species were reported to eBird during the month of Feb. from 264 checklists. This was down from last year when 107 species were reported from 339 lists.

Ducks were again the highlight during Feb. with one of the highlights being Canvasback that continued to have a good showing at Sandy Creek Park (SCP) on Lake Chapman (JN), and Lake Herrick (MB, JH, BC, MS). Large numbers of Redheads were reported from Morton Rd. with a monthly high count of 95 occurring on Feb. 19 (JN) and Ring-necked Ducks with over 100 individuals reported on Lake Chapman on Feb. 2 (MB). Several Greater Scaup were also present on Lake Chapman for several days and seen by many observers (CJ, BL, RH, JF, JH, JN, KG) and first reported by MS.

Blue-headed Vireos were scarce, with only a handful of reports from the State Botanical Garden (JN) and Sandy Creek Nature Center (BL, KG). Brown Creepers were seen in several places during Feb. including SCP (JN), a private residence on the northeast side of Clarke County (SS), Lake Herrick (JH), and in Watkinsville (RL). American Pipits were still relatively abundant in the region with numerous reports coming from several locations including SCP (CJ, RH, KG), Huntington Place Horse Fields (JN), UGA fields on S. Milledge (JN), Government Station Rd. in Watkinsville (RL), and other locations in and around Watkinsville (JW, MF, R&SH, RL, SH)

A few migrants have returned with the sighting of Tree Swallow on 2/16 by BM and the first sighting of Northern Rough-winged Swallow on 2/27 by MB.

Several warbler species of note were also reported to eBird and included sightings of Black-and-white Warbler at Sandy Creek Nature Center (B&KO), the State Botanical Garden (JN), and Whippoorwill Rd. in Oconee County (RL). A single Palm Warbler was reported on the N. Oconee Access Rd. (JN). Common Yellowthroat was seen at four separate locations including Sandy Creek Nature Center (KC), along Morningside Dr. in Athens (RS), in Highland Hills (BD), and a private residence near Watkinsville (JMS).

An all time high count of Chipping Sparrows was recorded on the N. Oconee Access Road (200, JN) as well as a single Vesper Sparrow and a Grasshopper Sparrow (RH, DB). Fox Sparrows continued to be scarce but were seen in several locations including some private residences (B&KO, BW, CJ, SW), and the UGA fields on S. Milledge (JN).

BC-Brian Cooke, BD-Barbara Dolezal, B&KO-Bill&Karla O'Grady, BL-Bill Lotz, BM-Brandon Mckeen, BW-Ben Williams, CJ-Clark Jones, DB-David Blount, JF-James Flynn, JH-Jim Hanna, JN-James Neeves, JMS-John Mark Simmons, JW-John Whigham, KC-Kelly Colegrove, KG-Krista Gridley, MB - Mirko Basen, MF-Mark Freeman, MS-Matthew Schenk, RH-Richard Hall, R&SH-Rachel&Steve Holzman, RL-R Lavender, RS-Richard Schepmoes, SS-Sabrina Sewell, SW- Sally Walker

The Brown-headed Nuthatch *by Victoria Smith*

This past fall, I heard my first “squeaky-toy” noises around our new backyard in Mississippi. “The best way to find Brown-headed Nuthatches is by sound,” says Jason Hoeksema, associate professor of biology at U. Miss. Perky and fast, this bird gives itself away easily, with its constant squeaky calls and rapidly-repeated, high *knee knee knee* nasal notes.

Hoeksema says that they are a resident bird wherever they are found: “If they are around, they are breeding.” An oak snag in the empty lot beside our house got my attention. Brown-headed nuthatches take advantage of existing cavities in such trees for their nests, excavating softer bark to enlarge the nest, deepening it nine or more inches in depth.

With the onset of winter, I heard the nuthatches keeping company with pine warblers, chickadees and titmice. Brown-headed Nuthatches need seed from pinecones for a winter food supply. It took bitter cold temperatures to bring them to our feeders, where I finally glimpsed the Brown-headed Nuthatches’ dull-brown faces and napes, and contrasting blue-gray backs.

Fairly localized in Northern Mississippi, they are the most abundant nuthatch species in the state. “We’re at the northern edge of their range, here in Oxford,” Hoeksema says. No doubt this tiny bird was much more abundant before the longleaf pine forests of the Southeast were so drastically cleared. Perhaps because of its association with this habitat, the Brown-headed Nuthatch is endemic to the southeast U.S. and rarely seen outside this area.

At under an ounce, the tiny Brown-headed Nuthatch is the eastern counterpart to the West’s tiny Pygmy Nuthatch. Their size, Hoeksma explains, allows each to feed on the smallest branches and pine cones in their respective habitats. The intermediate-sized White-breasted Nuthatch is also a resident here, while the Red-breasted Nuthatch is only observed here some winters. Bigger species forage close to the bark on the largest branches and tree trunks. All of them are well-known for their distinct way of walking down tree trunks and brick walls, head-first.

By March and April, look for their elliptical shaped entrances in tree trunks and snags. Watch for young males assisting breeding couples in gathering nest materials: spider cocoons, slender grasses, moss, feathers and the wings of pine seeds. These unpaired males will also help in feeding their next-season’s “siblings.” As tool users, they take a chip of bark and use it to pry up a larger scale of bark, to access the grubs and insects underneath. This is the best food for their young, which are often raised communally.

Keep your ears tuned for “rubber-ducky” squeaks. These birds tend to get comfortable with people who are patient, calm, and observant.

Spring is the Perfect Time for Completing a Backyard Habitat

by Kate Mowbray

After being cooped up inside during the winter snow and ice, we are all ready for spring. It brings us seasonal rains, blooming plants, and love in the air. What better time to get your backyard habitat ready for certification?

When creating your habitat, make sure you include food, water, shelter and places to raise young. If your yard provides fine dining, a place to take a dip and a love shack for all those love birds, you are ready for the certification process.

Fill out an application and we will visit your yard to see what you have done. Having a backyard habitat will provide hours of entertainment as you watch your new neighbors move in.

We are also in need of certifiers. If you are familiar with plants or birds, please join us. It is a great way to get ideas for your own backyard habitat!

Contact Kate Mowbray at kateemowbray@gmail.com for more information or to discuss getting your yard certified.

Become a Frog Watcher this Year!

by Kate Mowbray

Sandy Creek Nature Center is starting a FrogWatch USA chapter in Athens. All around the country, volunteers and scientists are joining forces to keep an eye on our frog and toad populations.

Like many citizen science projects, monitoring can be done at or near your home and a designated site like SCNC. Our goal is to put together a FrogWatch team of volunteers that will monitor twice a week from February-August each year. Monitoring takes place 30 minutes after sunset for about 10 minutes. Volunteers will listen for calling frogs and toads to learn what species are present and when they are at their peak.

All interested people, including families, are invited to participate in the FrogWatch program. We will be setting up training dates throughout the spring.

Contact Kate Mowbray at SCNC for more information or to sign up. Email: Kate.Mowbray@athensclarkecounty.com or call: (706) 613-3615 X 231.



Photo of Rosemary Woodel, January 2014, Bishop, Georgia

How to “Birdscape” Your Own Yard

summary of March meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to Steve Holzman for his “Birdscaping” presentation at the ORAS meeting in March. He began the talk with an old Chinese proverb: “The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second best time is right now.”

Holzman ruefully recalled focusing on flowers and small plants in his yard when he first moved to his current house. Now, he recommends that homeowners consider planting trees early on—especially native fruit and seed-bearing trees which attract wildlife. Lovely native favorites include the dogwood, sumacs and fringe trees. He also mentioned the black cherry, crab apple and red mulberry as good fruit bearing trees. “Be careful about planting certain trees by walkways,” he cautioned. His warning relates to potential messes made from ripe fruit dropping on hard pavement.

Shrubs as well as trees provide food, hiding places and nesting sites for birds and other wildlife. He listed many native shrubs such as beautyberry, sparkleberry, wax myrtle and hawthorn and more.

Useful flowers include: black-eyed Susan, purple coneflower, zinnias and the sunflowers with all of their delicious seeds. Many of the photos shown during the talk were taken by Rachel Holzman; they showed numerous birds attracted to the plants that Steve Holzman suggested.

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**Photo of Eastern Bluebirds by Chuck Murphy,
Jackson County (backyard), February 2014**

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