



# The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

April 2019

Vol. 30, No.4

## Next Meeting: Thursday, April 4, 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

### Controlling Invasive Plants in our Area

Lauren Muller, director of the Northeast GA Invasive Plant Cooperative, will discuss the state of invasive plants in the Georgia Piedmont, tried and true management strategies, and how the Northeast GA Invasive Plant Cooperative aims to reduce the impact of invasive plants in Athens and the surrounding counties.

Muller joined the Athens Land Trust after graduating from UGA with a Master of Science in Horticulture. Her previous work at the State Botanical Garden focused on the role of horticulture in plant conservation.

Her current role as Invasive Plant Management Coordinator allows her to preserve the integrity of Georgia Piedmont forests and grasslands by increasing removal of invasive plant species on public and private land. Muller also promotes community engagement through outreach, education, and youth program development.

**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, snacks and water as desired. Also, please check ORAS announcements and website for any last minute changes to this schedule: <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/events>

If you have other questions please contact Ed Maioriello at: [fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org)

- Apr. 07: **Sandy Creek Nature Center (SCNC)**
- Apr. 13: **Lake Herrick/Oconee Forest Park**
- Apr. 14: **Whitehall Forest\***
- Apr. 27: **SCNC-Cook's Trail (clean-up)**
- Apr. 28: **State Botanical Garden**
- May 05: **A-CC Landfill**

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

## Spring Field Trips (out of town) \*

- Apr. 06 6:00 a.m. Piedmont NWR
- Apr. 20 6:00 a.m. Kennesaw Mountain
- May 04 7:00 a.m. Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center
- May 11 6:00 a.m. Ivy Log Gap Road/Sosebee Cove

\* Please check ORAS announcements for any late changes.

## River Rendezvous—Sat. April 6

On Saturday, April 6 at 9:00 a.m.--1:00 p.m. Upper Oconee Watershed Network (UOWN) hosts River Rendezvous for volunteers to help clean up our streams. No experience needed but wear clothes and shoes that can get wet and dirty. For more information: [www.uown.org](http://www.uown.org) Free

## The Eastern Wild Turkeys of Georgia

*summary of March meeting by Liz Conroy*

Thanks to Ashley Lohr, Master of Science at the Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources who discussed her research on how differences in the behavior of individual turkeys can influence reproductive success. The complete title of her talk was: “Reproductive Ecology of Female Eastern Wild Turkeys in the Piedmont Region of Georgia”

Lohr noted how turkey populations began greatly declining [in the years following arrival of European settlers] due to overharvesting and deforestation. By the late 1930’s, population declines in the Southeastern U.S. alarmed conservationists and intense reintroduction programs began.

Pen reared birds died since they lacked knowledge to survive so translocation methods were used. Wild turkeys captured in other places were moved to areas in need. These programs worked and are considered a conservation success story.

Turkeys are an important game species and government programs exist to help them: Pittman-Robinson Act’s excise tax on firearms and other hunting equipment directs funds to wildlife agencies. The Federal Duck Stamp Act requires wildfowl hunters to purchase stamps; 98 cents from each dollar goes toward the purchase of habitat. Lohr encouraged birders and others to buy Duck Stamps, too. Hunting license purchases also mean more money for the state. In Georgia alone, there are about 68,000 hunters. But Lohr pointed out all is not well for wild turkeys.

Despite being an important game species, turkey populations are declining in the Southeastern U.S. The declines are thought to be linked to reduced reproductive success. Her research focuses on how differences in decisions made by individual turkeys may influence their reproductive success and the size of turkey populations.

Turkeys are the largest native gallinaceous (chicken-like) bird in the U.S. and are “generalists” eating seeds, nuts (acorns), fruit, invertebrates, and vegetation. They have sexual dimorphism. Males (toms) are larger, heavier, and more colorful than females (hens) and have caruncles, snoods, spurs, and beards. They are also polygamous (the tom mates with many hens). Turkeys are uniparental: all incubation and brood care is done by female who lays a clutch size of 10-12 eggs. Lohr noted that all turkeys roost in trees, but incubating females (females raising a clutch) and brooding females will roost on the ground (they brood on the ground for about 14 to 28 days).

Nesting ecology involves the hen laying an egg each day and roosting in a tree away from the nest until all her eggs are laid. Then she incubates them for 25-30 days.

Hens’ recess movements are when they leave the nest to forage, defecate, or get water. Nests are vulnerable to predation at such times and possible nest parasitism by other hens. (Common in waterfowl but isn’t certain for turkeys.)

Brooding ecology involves precocial young (fluffy and able to eat on their own). Lohr noted that they can walk around in

a short period of time; they are mobile in less than 24 hours. After 24 hours, the hen moves her poults elsewhere to avoid predation since the nest is smelly. For two weeks, the poults can’t fly and stay under the hen’s wing at night. Poults need invertebrate protein and seek insects in fields, forest openings and along road edges.

Lohr used three main study sites (central GA, SC, and LA) to achieve preliminary results on nesting success and brood survival. Her study involved trapping, banding, and radio tagging individuals to track their movements and survival. She studied hens’ recess periods (distance and duration), and is now applying Bayesian data analysis to her data. Her research shows how females nest for four months of the year and are highly susceptible to predation due to risky behavior.

There is only a 50% chance for female survival and their nesting success is low; therefore, wild turkey productivity is low. Anecdotal evidence during rainy periods in Georgia also reveals that more juvenile males than females survive. Male poults are much more aggressive and able to get under the mother’s wing cover than the females who are vulnerable to cold, wet, and harsh conditions from the rain.



**Ashley Lohr and female wild turkey (prior to release) by Patrick Wightman, Jasper County, Georgia—2018**

## The Belted Kingfisher that Got Fished

by Bob Gadd

On a chilly, drizzly Sunday afternoon in February, I went for a walk with my dog Lolo at Lake Herrick. I parked at the tennis courts, and as we were walking down the boardwalk toward the bridge I noticed a guy named Patrick looking over in some bushes along the shoreline. So I asked, "whatcha looking at?" He replied there was a bird with a fishing lure stuck in its wing, and he'd been trying to catch it for the last 30 minutes. He also said it couldn't fly so it was just flapping around in the lake exhausting itself.

Now I don't claim to be even an average birder, but I did recognize this one right off; it was a big, beautiful Belted Kingfisher!!

I called the UGA Vet School and told them about the situation. They said they'd be happy to treat the bird, but they didn't have the resources to come get it. After making some more calls to fellow birders, Linda and Page, to make a game plan, the kingfisher flapped its way across to the opposite shoreline.

Short of risking hypothermia by jumping in the lake or driving home to get my canoe and a net, I tried one more time to catch the poor suffering creature. Patrick had left, so Lolo and I began walking through the swampy shoreline.

Suddenly, Lolo bolted and jumped into the lake swimming toward the kingfisher. Now get this . . . by the time I could make it through the brush, Lolo had retrieved the bird and was swimming back to me where she dropped it at my feet!

What's surprising is that Lolo is a Chow mix and has never come close to this type of behavior. I guess she has some Chesapeake Bay retriever somewhere in her gene pool.

I picked up the bird to examine it. The kingfisher was awake and alert enough to bite my thumb. That was a great sign! To transport the little guy, I wrapped him up in a towel with his head sticking out. Now if I'd attended Ashley Lohr's talk about wild turkeys before all this happened, I'd have known to cover his head like she did with the turkeys.

That said, it did fine on the passenger floor in my truck and rested while Lolo sat in the passenger seat. I think it was just happy not to be flapping around in the water anymore. After a short drive to campus, I turned the injured bird over to the good folks at the UGA Emergency Vet Clinic.

A couple of days later I went back to the clinic and found out the hook had been removed, and the bird had successfully recovered. They had already released the kingfisher back to its territory at Lake Herrick!

The next time you're out there and hear the chattering cry of a Belted Kingfisher, think of my sweet dog Lolo and how she saved the day.



**Lolo in her doghouse by Bob Gadd, Winterville, Oglethorpe County, Georgia—February 8, 2019**



**Belted Kingfisher by Bob Gadd, Lake Herrick, Clarke County, Georgia—February 17, 2019**

## Plantapalooza Plant Sale—Sat. April 13

To purchase plants that thrive in the Southeast (think natives), visit the State Botanical Garden of Georgia on 2450 S. Milledge Ave., The Trial Gardens at UGA on 220 W. Green St., and The UGA Horticulture Club at the intersection of Riverbend and College Station Roads .

All three locations offer a wide variety of plants for sale, and volunteers will be on hand to help with selections and to answer questions: Sat. April 13 from 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

## ***Gardenland: Nature, Fantasy, and Everyday Practice***

by Jennifer Wren Atkinson and reviewed by Liz Conroy

*Gardenland* is a book for readers passionate about American history and literature as well as gardening. The author, Jennifer Wren Atkinson, is a senior lecturer in literature and environmental studies at the University of Washington, and writes from experience and great depth of knowledge.

She exhibits her skills as a weaver of myriad viewpoints as she incorporates words of famous American writers such as Henry David Thoreau, John Steinbeck, and others from the past. Yet, she includes ideas from well-known modern writers such as Michael Pollan, who famously focuses on gardens, plants, mushrooms and the impact of industrialized farming on the environment.

Atkinson also writes about the hopes and human ideals of being a positive player within the web of life. She writes: “And yet as an expression of the sheer desire to live and eat in full consciousness of the vast circuits and actors involved, the garden remains a powerful ideal today. . . .”

Although this is a slender book, it’s not a fast read. Each page is packed with quotes and concepts from the distant past as well as from modern times. But it is thoughtfully and painstakingly written by someone who cares about gardening and recognizes the importance of human contact with nature: “. . . even the most meticulously controlled gardens are ever subject to nature’s process and unpredictability. Entangled with a multitude of living, organic things that are not human, gardens shift, flow, and transform in astonishing ways.”

*Gardenland*: UGA Press, August 2018

## **Sandy Creek Nature Center: Skull and Bones Open House—Sat. April 27**

On Saturday, April 27 at 1:00--4:00 p.m. SCNC hosts an event for visitors to learn about the common skulls and bones found in the Georgia woods. Displays show bones from mammals, amphibians, and reptiles. Activity tables include games and lessons on how to age deer by their teeth. Nature’s Trading Post will be open; anyone can bring bones they’ve found to be identified and traded if desired. Free.

## **Eco-Haiku (riddle)** by Manita Dean

Hear tap, see a flit.  
Yellow belly, bib bright red,  
Winter guest seeks sap.

(Yellow-bellied Sapsucker)



**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker by John Whigham, backyard, Oconee County—October 25, 2018**

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