



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

April 2020

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April Meeting is Cancelled

After considering the health and well-being of Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) members and visitors to our monthly speaker meeting, the ORAS board has determined that indoor meetings must be cancelled until further notice.*

This action may help reduce the number of potential infections and deaths to CO-VID. Please continue to listen to CDC and other health experts who recommend limited contact with others.

As California Governor Gavin Newsome noted:
"Each of us has extraordinary power to slow the spread of this disease. Not holding that concert or community event can have cascading effects—saving dozens of lives and preserving critical health care resources that your family may need a month from now. The people in our lives who are most at risk—seniors and those with underlying health conditions—are depending on all of us to make the right choices."

*Bird walks are planned to take place in May, but please watch announcements for any changes or cancellations.

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 planned to take place in May and are from **8a.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.

Be sure to check ORAS announcements and website for any last minute cancellations or other changes to this schedule. Visit: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/events

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

- May 03: **A-CC Landfill**
- May 09: **A-CC Greenway**

*Attendees for the Whitehall walk must be on time.

Spring Field Trips (out of town)*

May 02, 7:00 a.m. Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center

May 15–17, GOS Spring Meeting (Hiawassee)

* Please check ORAS announcements for any late changes.

Eco-Hai “Coo” by Manita Dean

Two perched doves, spring rain,
Ruffled feathers, one wing high.
I laugh; shower bath!

Protecting Wilson's Plovers

summary of March meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to Lauren Gingerella for her talk on “Hatching a Plan for Plover Conservation: Effect of Predator Exclosures on Wilson’s Plovers (*Charadrius wilsonia*) Nest Success and Productivity.”

She described her work on Little St. Simon’s Island (LSSI) developing a conservation strategy for Wilson’s Plovers. They are listed as a “Species of High Concern” on the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan.

These shorebirds face several serious challenges on their breeding grounds, such as:

Predators (who eat the eggs or chicks), human disturbances, habitat loss from development and climate change, and lack of knowledge (by humans about their life span and how to manage the surviving populations well).

Leading cause of beach nesting birds’ nest failures not only included predation and coast development, but also artificial population growth due to association with humans (feeding them), and tidal overwash (especially as sea levels rise).

Predators were the main focus of her research, as they limit the success of nests, leading to a decrease in the number of chicks produced each year. Predator management by lethal control has certain issues. She noted the controversy surrounding it, cost, and the fact that it’s time consuming. Instead, she conducted research to determine if nest exclosures increase successful hatch numbers. After all, predator exclosures are non-lethal, designed to increase reproductive success, exclude apex predators (coyotes) as well as meso predators (possums).

Many exclosures are ineffective at increasing precocial chick survival, especially if predators become attracted to such structures. Gingerella found, however, that exclosures were successful at preventing mammal and bird predators from eating eggs or destroying nests. Ghost crabs still entered.

Wilson’s Plovers (WIPL) nest on sparsely vegetated coastal areas and salt flats. The male rubs his hind end on the ground to make a scrape where the female lays cryptic eggs. Then they may decorate the nest with sticks. Once found in Virginia and Maryland, they now are rarely seen north of Virginia.

Gingerella reiterated that the goal of her study was to learn the effect of predator exclosures on WIPL on LSSI. She noted that the island has 11 thousand acres and seven miles of beaches. There is minimal human disturbance on this island and is only accessible to people by boat. Best of all, the plentiful habitat includes wrack lines, overwash flats, and areas of sea oats. Predators, however, are plentiful as well and she listed mammals (coyotes – in 2016 then eradicated), raccoons, avian (Fish Crows, Boat-tailed Grackles, Laughing Gulls), and crustaceans (ghost crabs) among the most worrisome predators.

After the process of nest searching and establishing the nest age by floating eggs, she assessed if the nest was suitable for an exclosure. Then, she found an area with flat ground and set protective circles of netting (which include mesh netting on top of each one) in different beach units.

Each unit had fencing buried eight inches into the ground to prohibit digging predators. Nest checks were done every one to three days, and each nest failure was documented with the cause of the failure.

As chicks began hatching, Gingerella and her team took their hatch day measurements and banded each one. After 36 days, the fledglings took flight.

In this two-year-long study, 335 nests were found and 41 were exclosed while 68 were left unexclosed. In 2016, exclosures were accepted by the adults at a rate of 95% while in 2017, acceptance rate was 68%. The reason for the change in acceptance is unclear. The exciting news was that more nests in exclosures hatched rather than failed. Ghost crabs did enter some enclosures, but overall, there was significant increase in hatch numbers by use of these structures. (Nest survival was always lower when ghost crabs were present in the vicinity of the nests.)

In short, the exclosures are clearly effective at increasing WIPL nest success! Gingerella recommended more research be done on WIPL demography, annual adult survival rate, annual juvenile survival rate, and life spans, as well as banding more individuals.



Wilson’s Plover Chicks by Lauren Gingerella, Little St. Simons Island, Glynn County—June 6, 2016

Fireflies, Glow-worms, and Lightning Bugs

by Lynn Frierson Faust and reviewed by Liz Conroy

“Yesterday a child came out to wonder
Caught a dragonfly inside a jar. . . .”

The beginning lines to Joni Mitchell’s song “Circle Game” help us recall chasing fireflies as youngsters. It was a time when many of us began to think more about insects, birds, and the other wildlife around us.

In her book, *Fireflies, Glow-worms, and Lightning Bugs: Identification and Natural History of the Fireflies of the Eastern and Central United States*, author and independent firefly researcher, Lynn Frierson Faust, writes passionately about these beetles whose larvae all have an ability to glow. “Fireflies provide many unseen benefits: magical evenings when we leave behind our electronic devices and air-conditioning to venture back into the natural world with friends, family, and lovers; times of inspiration for naturalists, scientists, artists, photographers, writers. . . .”

Colorful photos throughout the book provide clear views of the beetles’ distinguishing characteristics. Faust also describes the habitats, seasonality, and common names of the different fireflies in this durable, flexi-bound book that can take a beating in backpacks or in the hands of small kids.

She also suggests that anyone who enjoys fireflies might consider becoming a citizen scientist on the Boston Museum of Natural History’s Firefly Watch website (<https://legacy.mos.org/fireflywatch>) “First try to learn the different genera of our fireflies. Get used to your own local flashers, when and where they appear, year after year. . . .” Appreciatively, Faust adds, “Many of you will further our understanding and encourage the conservation of this magical, treasured *amenity insect*, the firefly.”

GA Museum of Natural History Blum Lecture: Lynn Frierson Faust “Lightning Bug Lady” – (postponed)

Lynn Frierson Faust, the Lightning Bug Lady, will give a presentation in the Ecology Building Auditorium at a date to be announced (stay tuned).

She is the author of the recent comprehensive field-guide *Fireflies, Glow-worms, and Lightning Bugs*, published by the University of Georgia Press. Faust is also a world-recognized firefly scientist and has worked with a variety of groups including university faculty and graduate students, natural resource managers and film companies. Her lecture will be followed by a reception and book signing.

The Odum School of Ecology Auditorium is located on UGA’s South Campus: 140 Green St. Athens, GA 30602

State Botanical Garden Co-sponsors “Give Wildlife a Chance” Poster Contest: Georgia Bogs

Any student enrolled in grades K–5 is eligible to participate. Artwork must portray Georgia nongame wildlife (species not legally hunted, trapped or fished) and plants. This year the focus is on artwork related to Georgia bogs and the plants and animals that live in and around them.

Entries are judged at the local school level in four divisions: Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades, 3rd and 4th grades, and 5th grade. Entries must be received by Friday, April 10, 2020 for inclusion in the state level judging. For 2020 poster contest rules, please call: 706-583-0894.

Visit: www.georgiawildlife.com/PosterContest

Woods at Dusk by Liz Conroy

Hiking at twilight,
A sudden snort makes me jump!
Deer alarms work well.

Protect the Okefenokee: Comment by April 12 submitted by Gary Crider (Protect Georgia)

While most of the country is trying to cope with the spread of COVID-19, the company that plans on building a massive heavy minerals sand mine next to the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge quietly presses on. An Alabama-based company, Twin Pines Minerals, LLC, wants to mine 12,000 acres of Trail Ridge where it forms the eastern border of the Okefenokee Swamp. Among the concerns of mining so close to one of the largest wilderness areas east of the Mississippi is that hydrologic and water quality changes will damage the Swamp, as well as the St. Marys and Suwannee Rivers that flow from its beautiful, placid waters. After the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers told the company that a full environmental impact statement (EIS) would be required to evaluate the adverse impacts of the mine, Twin Pines withdrew its application. Twin Pines has now resubmitted an application for the first phase of the mine as a “demonstration project” spanning 898 acres in the hopes of avoiding the scientific scrutiny and public comments that go with an EIS.

The Corps now needs to hear from you – again – to save the threatened Okefenokee. Submit your concerns to the Corps and ask them to deny Twin Pines a toehold on Trail Ridge and request a full environmental impact statement that includes a peer-reviewed groundwater flow model of the Swamp and the mining site itself. Comments are currently due by April 12, 2020. Visit www.protectgeorgia.org and scroll down to “Protect the Okefenokee.”

Message from the President

by Lauren Gingerella

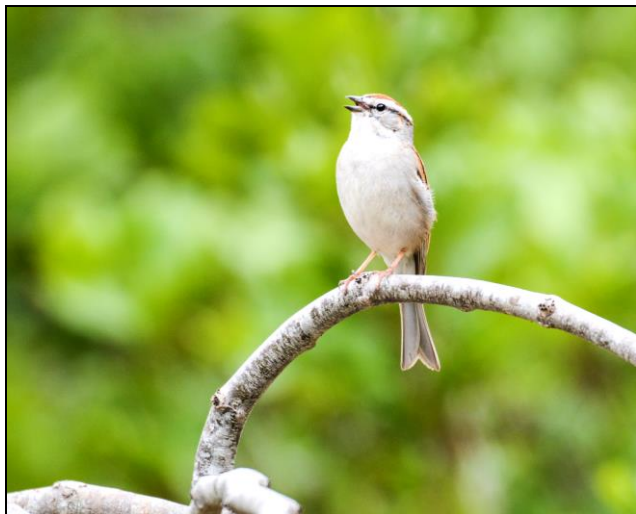
We are truly living through unusual times. The COVID-19 emergency has abruptly halted our normal daily routines and forced many of us to work, take classes, or just shelter at home. Athens-Clarke County passed emergency measures to limit the spread of coronavirus in our community, including a ban on gatherings of ten or more people, required social distancing of at least six feet, and a 24/7 shelter-in-place ordinance aside from essential activities.

For the health and safety of our members, we have cancelled our April monthly meeting and all group bird walks through April. We will reassess at a later date if more events need to be postponed.

The coronavirus outbreak has us stressed and concerned. Meanwhile self-isolating at home can be detrimental to our mental health. Fortunately, birding is the perfect activity to allow us a positive outlet to our reclusive lives. Some studies show that connecting with nature can calm us and relieve anxiety. It is easy to social distance while birding, especially if you are watching a backyard feeder or walking around your neighborhood. I think it is refreshing to observe birds continue with their normal lives and know that migration is occurring, as it always has, for millions of years.

Now that we are confined to our homes, it's also a good time to learn a new skill. Have you always wanted to learn how to use eBird, or improve your bird song and call identification? There are a ton of resources online to help you! Give it a try.

Please take the COVID-19 outbreak seriously, and follow all CDC recommendations. By doing so, we can slow the spread of the virus and save lives. We hope to see you at an Audubon event soon. Stay well.



Chipping Sparrow by Patrick Maurice, State Botanical Garden, Clarke County—April 4, 2018



Eastern Bluebird by Katherine Edison, home feeder in yard, Clarke County—March 12, 2018

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