



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

December 2015

Vol. 26, No. 10

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

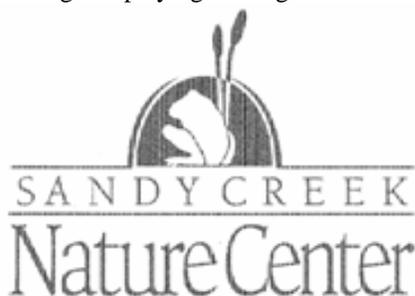
For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

The Ecology and Health of the White Ibis in Urban Florida

Postdoctoral research associate Maureen Murray and graduate research associate Shannon Curry will give an overview of UGA's White Ibis Project, an interdisciplinary research initiative led by Sonia Hernandez, an associate professor with the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources.

The White Ibis, a medium-size wading bird, increasingly is finding places to live in urbanized regions of south Florida. City habitats offer abundant food resources for these birds, but urban life may affect their health through stress, crowding, lower-quality food and exposure to novel pathogens. Researchers with UGA's Hernandez Wildlife Disease Lab have been examining the movements, diet and health of these birds in the White Ibis Project since 2009; Murray and Curry will provide an update on research results and give a status report on the expanded current phase of the project.

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.

Hungry Osprey on Cabretta *by Manita Dean*

The Golden Isles of Georgia do it again! A camping trip on Sapelo/Cabretta offered its wealth of natural intrigue over Halloween weekend.

One adventure evolved when the campground host shuttled three of us to the Reynolds Mansion. Thus began our five-mile trek along the beach, returning to the campground. First stop was the ghost of a huge greenhouse. Hidden behind it, a grapefruit tree was laden with yellow orbs, and a tung oil tree sported non-edible, fig-shaped fruit.

At Nannygoat Beach, we spied two young dolphins fishing in the shallows. Then, a couple of miles northward, awaiting low tide to allow a necessary hip-deep wade across a tidal inlet, an Osprey soared into view. With a silvery prize in its talons, it boasted a huge fish.

Back at camp, we read in the Sibley field guide that the Osprey is the only hawk that dives into the water, grabbing prey in its talons rather than in the beak. Conveniently, it can rotate an outer toe to make an opposable grip, two talons in front and two in back. In flight then, it can reduce wind resistance by lining up the fish, head first. We cheered this remarkable demonstration that beat enduring attendance at a certain football game occurring on the same weekend!



Photo of Osprey by Mark Ralston on Cabretta Island—November 1, 2015

The Last Penguin: How Extinction is Changing Humanity *summary of November meeting* by Liz Conroy

Thanks to UGA professor Mark Farmer, director of UGA's Division of Biological Sciences, for his November 5 talk. He described how, in the past, the concept that a species could disappear from the earth was quite controversial. For example, even though the Irish Elk had been exterminated, some people believed the elk must be surviving somewhere. After all, the world is so big!

President Thomas Jefferson believed it was impossible for a species to go extinct and even instructed Lewis and Clark to look for living mammoths in America on their famous expedition from Missouri to the Pacific Northwest (1804-1806). The concept of extinction was not widely accepted even among intellectuals. Gradually, humans began to realize that extinction was real. Farmer quoted conservationist Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), "For one species to mourn the death of another is a new thing under the sun."

Farmer listed several causes of extinction: habitat loss, changes in temperature, pollution, over-harvesting, and non-native species invading an area. He explained that evolution correlates with environmental changes, yet the fate of a species depends upon how quickly those environmental changes occur and how well adapted an organism is for those particular changes. For example, if a species is able to move to other areas or has innate genetic diversity, it has a better chance for survival.

Humans are an "introduced species" in most areas of the world and are the cause of food supply loss, climate change, disease and competition for many native species. There is a one-to-one correlation of human migration with loss of mammals around the world. Farmer gave examples of birds and mammals exterminated by humans: Steller's Sea Cow, Moa, Dodo, Passenger Pigeon. He then displayed a chart showing how increased human population results in increased extinction rates in wild animals.

The oceans are in peril as well. The more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere results directly in more carbonic acid in the oceans. Farmer described a volcanic island off of the coast of Naples, Italy where natural carbon dioxide has acidified the water to a pH 7.8-7.9, and only sea grass can grow there. Yet, only a few hundred meters away, the pH 8.1-8.2 means that corals, fish and other sea creatures can thrive.

Another example of the damaging effects of ocean acidification is the effect on oyster reproduction in Washington State. Since 2005, due to acidification, the oysters there have not been able to reproduce on their own.

For 25 million years the ocean pH ranged from 8.0-8.3. Now the oceans are changing so rapidly that we are entering an unknown territory of marine ecosystem changes. Farmer said we are experiencing "The Sixth Extinction" and recommended the book by that name by Elizabeth Kolbert.



Photo of Gentoo Penguins by Chuck Murphy in Paradise Harbor, Antarctica—January 23, 2005,

Hungry Red-shouldered Hawk in Athens by Karla O'Grady

Our family joined us for the holidays when my eldest grandchild, Dylan, was five-years old. He was a kind, sensitive child who became upset when one of the insects in his terrarium ate another one.

One afternoon, he and my husband were sitting in the family room watching the birds in the backyard. A male House Finch landed on the roof of the feeder. Suddenly a Red-shouldered Hawk swooped in and grabbed the House Finch in his talons. Worried about Dylan witnessing this violence, Bill pondered on how to explain it to his soft-hearted grandson. Before he could come up with an explanation, Dylan piped up, "Grandaddy, did you see that? That was so cool!"



Photo of Red-shouldered Hawk by John Whigham at the Botanical Garden—November 5, 2011



Photo of Turkey Vulture from North GA Zoo by Cerna Wallace at ACC Landfill—October 24, 2015

Vulture Festival Fun for All *by Ryan Chitwood*

The second annual Athens-Clarke County Vulture festival was a huge success! ORAS partnered with ACC Recycling and Bear Hollow Zoo to offer one of Athens' best family-friendly conservation events. ORAS's Ed Maioriello led a fun bird walk on the landfill grounds with good views of late fall migrants like a Northern Parula and Tennessee Warbler, flyovers of two pugnacious Cooper's Hawks, and, of course, numerous Black and Turkey Vultures.

The fun continued: Parents, children, and others participated in a vulture-centric scavenger hunt with stations ranging from the wacky and wild "Vulture Vomit Toss" to the intriguing "Vulture Biofacts" which placed emphasis on the ecology and conservation of our scavenging friends.

Athens' own costumed mascot, Veto the Vulture, made an appearance, but perhaps more impressive was the live vulture provided by the North Georgia Zoo. Also, Bear Hollow Zoo brought other animals such as a quirky opossum and beautiful Barn Owl. Views of the owl were especially prized, as even avid birders rarely get a good look at the highly enigmatic Barn Owl, especially in plain daylight.

All in all the ACC Vulture Festival was a real success with 50% more donations collected than the previous year to support the International Vulture Awareness Day Foundation. A special thanks to all who attended, especially those that volunteered. For those that couldn't make it, you won't want to miss it next year!

Hungry Bald Eagle in Arnoldsville

by Jeff Jackson

Saturday, September 12 in Arnoldsville, Georgia, I saw a large, dark brown raptor with a white head and tail swoop low over the highway to seize a squashed, road-killed armadillo. Could it be...? Yes, it was a Bald Eagle! This was within about 50 yards of the old Butts General Store, now known as No. 3 Railroad Street.

To witness such a Bald Eagle in flight here in Oglethorpe County is uncommon now, but a half a lifetime ago it would have been almost impossible. Bald Eagle populations had declined to a fraction of what they had once been. Many populations of birds of prey have rebounded from when they were in decline due to shooting and the use of chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides (such as DDT) which found their way into their food chain.

It might seem beneath the dignity of our noble symbol of the United States of America to be scavenging on roadkill. Bald Eagles often take dead animals for food, especially dead or injured fish from the water's surface. Once I saw a Bald Eagle feeding on a dead pig on the beach of one of our coastal islands.

In Georgia, Bald Eagle numbers have rebounded, and each year now there are active nests in the state.



Photo of Bald Eagle by John Whigham at Hok Si La Park, Minnesota—May 9, 2015

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Return Service Requested

Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program Nest Box Promotion *by Ryan Chitwood*

Become a Certified Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Homeowner by providing habitat for birds, wildlife, and native plants in our community! Submit an application by the end of the year and receive a bonus nuthatch nest box pending your yard's certification. For more information: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org Or please email: conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Winter Birding Opportunity: The Athens Area Christmas Bird Count!

by Mary Case

Please join a group for the Athens area Christmas Bird Count on Saturday Dec. 19, 2015.

This is a nationwide event during the period between December 14th and Jan 5th 2016. We have 14 leaders to cover the Athens area. You do not have to be an expert birder to count.

Please call or e-mail to join a group Mary Case (705-548-3848 or mecase@uga.edu) or Eugenia Thompson (erobertthom@bellsouth.net).

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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