



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

December 2017

Vol. 28, No. 10

Next Meeting:

**Thursday, December 7, 6:15 p.m.
State Botanical Garden of Georgia**

In December, Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) will meet on our usual first Thursday of each month. Our December 7 meeting location, however, will be in The Gardenside Room in the Visitor Center at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia (SBG) for a presentation by Dr. Jennifer Cruse-Sanders, director of the SBG.

Snacks and socializing will begin at 6:15 p.m. and the presentation will begin at 7 p.m. on Thursday, December 7, in the Gardenside Room at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia.

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation (after a 6:15 p.m. reception):

Dr. Jennifer Cruse-Sanders will discuss how botanic gardens can help create networks for effective plant conservation. Botanic gardens and arboreta serve as effective partners for conserving plant species diversity and restoring natural communities. Capacity for restoration and conservation at botanic gardens comes directly from staff expertise in horticulture and research and from the role that gardens can take as good partners. Gardens are in a position to communicate information about rare plant species to owners and managers of public and private lands. They can also be instrumental in creating networks for effective conservation action. Not only are botanic gardens achieving successes in plant conservation, but through networked partnerships, they are setting priorities for conserving at-risk plants species.

Parking is free and open to the public. The address is State Botanical Garden of Georgia 2450 S. Milledge Ave. Athens.

Directions to SBG from the Loop 10 By-pass:

Exit onto Milledge Ave. and turn east away from campus.

Turn right into SBG gates after the UGA Soccer fields.

Turn left after the gatehouse to park in the upper lots

The Visitor Center is down the steps from the upper parking lot on your right.

2017 Athens Christmas Bird Count (Mark Your Calendars for Dec. 16)

The 2017 Athens Christmas Bird Count will be Saturday, December 16. We have fourteen sections in our circle, and we will need leaders with some expertise for each. We also need participants for all sections, so no matter what your level of expertise, please consider joining in on the fun.

For more information or to volunteer, contact Eugenia Thompson (email: erobertthom@bellsouth.net) or Mary Case (email: mecase@uga.edu) or talk to us at the December general ORAS meeting.



Photo of Trumpeter Swans by Mike Conroy, Seney National Wildlife Refuge, Michigan—Sept. 23, 2017

Christmas Bird Count for Youth

Do you know any 8-16 year olds who are interested in or starting out birding? Georgia DNR is organizing a Youth Christmas Bird count at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center on Saturday, Dec. 9. This event lasts 2.5 hours. Binoculars and lunches are provided for youth participants. For details of the event, and who to contact if you are interested, visit: <http://www.gos.org/YouthChristmasBirdCount2017.pdf>

Announcement: Georgia Ornithological Society Scholarships for Teens (15-18)

The Georgia Ornithological Society is once again providing scholarships for two teenagers (ages 15-18 years old) to attend the American Birding Association's (ABA) Camp Colorado on June 23-29, 2018, and one teenager (age 15-18 years old) to attend ABA's Camp Avocet in Delaware July 28- August 3, 2018. The scholarships will cover the full cost of the campus as well as \$500 in travel expenses. The deadline for applications is on December 8, 2017.

For more information: <http://events.aba.org/aba-young-birder-camps/>

For the application form and instructions (to be posted soon): <http://www.gos.org/YoungBirderScholarship>

Falling in Love with Grasslands: Paintings from Prairie to Páramo

summary of November meeting by Carole Ludwig

Thanks to Philip Juras, a Georgia landscape artist, who discussed his explorations of grasslands from the Southeastern U.S., to the high elevation páramo of the Andes, and his paintings inspired from his travels both near and far.

Juras was awarded the Georgia Author of the Year for his book "Paintings on Bartram's Travels." His works are widely exhibited both nationally and internationally.

Among grasslands paintings shown at the meeting were those of various areas in Georgia, including scenic places in: Clarke County, Thomasville, Moody Forest and several from Little St. Simon's Island.

Scenes of Illinois tracts were also beautiful and interesting. Those scenes replicated pre-settlement vistas which have been re-created and maintained by volunteers.

One of my personal favorites was the painting of a prairie in Keowee Valley, S.C. The painting revealed various shades of green along with a sparkling river and blue, low mountains in the background. Several works depicted active fires which are important in helping to maintain the grasslands. So realistic were these paintings of fire that this viewer could almost feel their heat and smell the smoke.

Juras traveled to Colombia, South America and exhibited works he did in the Chingaza National Park cloud forest. It's an area which gets no rain, but it does receive moisture from the high altitude air. These paintings presented a very different look, some with plants resembling cacti. They contrasted sharply from our North American prairies.

At the end, Juras walked us through imaginary grassland where grasses brushed one's legs, and gnarled trees obstructed one's progress. Editor's Note: This event was a joint meeting of ORAS and UGA's Spotlight on the Arts.

Message from the Vice President

by Sam Merker

Twenty seventeen has been a year of new beginnings for me. This year, I finished my Master's degree and started a PhD program. But this year is the first year I have officially participated in the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS). It was probably long overdue considering I've lived in Athens for more than three years now. Of course, I didn't really expect to be an ORAS board member right off the bat, but here I am! Now it's time to introduce myself:

I grew up in Vermont and New Hampshire and have, for the most part, been interested in birds since about the age of 5. My dad is an avid birder and bird bander. When he had to watch me as a child, I'd sit with him at our kitchen table and band black-capped chickadees from our bird feeder. Is there a better way to get a kid into birds? To this day I'm not sure I have found one.

Skipping 20 years ahead I found myself still interested in birds and began to work as a field technician all over the U.S. and other countries. My work took me to California, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, and then further abroad to Jamaica and Ecuador. I eventually found myself here in Athens in a graduate program at UGA working with songbirds in North Carolina.

I find my work very rewarding, but sometimes it misses the mark in terms spreading appreciation for birds. I think this is why joining ORAS was so appealing: joining others to connect with the greater community and trying to pass on that spark of interest that my dad passed on to me.

Our recent STEMzone event—trying to reach out to tailgating Dawgs fans—really exemplified the idea that interest in the natural world starts a young age, because about 90% of our most enthusiastic booth participants were kids.

While I am not sure making a peanut butter pine cone bird feeder is quite the same as my experience, at least it's a start. And even the brightest future might start with the light of a tiny spark.

Eco-haiku *by Robert Wyatt*

Smoke hangs over the field,
where yesterday's battle raged.
A passing crow caws.

Melting snow reveals
ugly scars and blemishes--
fleeting forgotten.

Raven's Renditions (Part 2)

by Tim Homan

Years later, park-pass-eligible geezers now in the summer of 2015, we arrived at Yellowstone's Bridge Bay Campground early afternoon in late July. While we are staking out our portable bedroom—a large tent roughly the size and shape of a Conestoga wagon without its wheels—we hear a loud and comical gurgling chuckle we have never heard before. The vocalizations are novel, pleasing, a joy to hear. They bring quick smiles to our travel weary faces. We don't know what creature is creating these magical sounds, but now wiser in the ways of mimic corvids, we suspect the maker of the uncommon utterance is the Common Raven. We lay down hammer and sturdy metal stakes and listen to the forest. The cone-shaped conifers sing out the same gurgling chuckles all around, but none of our benefactors are in sight.

We walk out onto the road and look up into the tree tops while making a 360-degree pivot. Three ravens perched atop the evergreen steeples are busy giving voice to the sounds, over and over again. They look like they are having as much fun as kids imitating fart noises. Perhaps the gurgle was a new mimicry circulating through the corvid camp for the sheer entertainment of copy-catting.

Our campsite is situated a few hundred yards from the shore of Yellowstone Lake as a raven flies. We guessed they were imitating, mimicking, the sound of mountain water—rapids on the nearby Yellowstone River or, more likely, the waves that break against the rocky lakeshore every windy afternoon.

If their renditions of breaking waves were the smiling yin of kindness, their morning screeches, harsh and loud, were the scowling yang of curse. Every morning as the day gained the first few lumens of early light, the raucous obsidian-colored songbirds made strafing runs up and down the campground roads, shrieking at the top of their lungs as only corvids can. No need for alarm clocks, no point in trying to go back to sleep. I asked Page what the birder term was for a group of ravens. "An unkindness of ravens," she replied.

Third morning, we hear cursing oaths full of rage and promised retribution coming loud and clear from a neighboring tent. The man must have been in the Navy. If we were not in a national park, I am sure a few of the campers would be adding small-arms fire to the din. I have no scientific proof, but I swear those ravens were rousting us out of bed. I swear those bird brains had learned that campers rose and began cooking earlier when awakened by the piercing cries of their all natural, organic, avian alarm clocks. A clear cause and effect scenario: apes up, apes cook, apes leave, we swoop.

Ravens are not only the largest passerines in North America, but they are also the smartest of the bright and aggressive Corvidae family. They are both mega and Mensa songbirds, plenty brainy enough to understand that there are no grits

and bacon bits (our breakfast) until the cloth-covered apes are upright and moving around the picnic tables.

Later in the summer, while hiking up high in a near sub-alpine environment, we become reacquainted with Clark's Nutcrackers and their discordant corvid calls. We sit down for a snack break and hear a nearby nutcracker. We look around, can't find the conspicuous bird—a foot long, all white, black, and gray. We are perplexed. There is absolutely nowhere for a big and nearby bird to hide. We hear the nutcracker again, home in on the source of the sound. We raise our binocs and focus—you guessed it—on a lone raven in a whitebark pine. We hold our enhanced eyes steady and watch as the raven's outsized beak opens and cries out a drawn-out kra-a-a-a, grating as fingernails scraped across a blackboard, a perfect nutcracker call.



Photo of Clark's Nutcracker by Patrick Maurice, Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado—July 9, 2017



Photo of Common Raven by Patrick Maurice, Big Sky, Montana—July 17, 2015

Environmental Cost of War by James Porter

With Veterans Day just past, Pearl Harbor Day upon us, and Ken Burns' *The Vietnam War* streaming live on PBS, I want to remind our conservation community about the environmental costs of war. First some facts. If you include expenditures on nuclear armaments, the U.S. sends nearly a trillion dollars a year to the Defense Department. To put this in context, this budget would fund:

- 1,000 Environmental Protection Agencies
- 300 National Park Services
- 100 National Science Foundations
- The room, board, and tuition for every college student in America

Environmentally, the cost of war, and the preparation for war, is responsible for:

- 6% of all materials consumed world-wide
- 10% of all global CO₂ emissions
- 10% of sea-level rise
- 10% of ocean acidification

A hotter world will be a more violent world. Within the Middle East and Africa, the best predictor of war is drought. The Arab Spring, and the continuing chaos that has ensued, was preceded by rising bread prices linked to climate-change exacerbated drought. As refugees from northern Africa pour into Europe and at least a million Myanmar Rohingya flood into Bangladesh, severe environmental degradation occurs along the way and in many of their temporary resettlement camps. The violence of war ripples for thousands of miles beyond the immediate shock waves of its front-line explosions.

At a time when arable land is increasingly important to feed a burgeoning human population, war takes us in the opposite direction. Across the planet, war has severely degraded 15 million km² of arable land. As a result of war, 17% of Kazakhstan is uninhabitable and 20% of Vietnam is littered with landmines.

In a partnership with the *Audubon Society*, the *International Union for the Conservation of Nature* has identified "Biodiversity Hotspots" across the Earth. These regions cover less than 1% of our planet's surface, and yet, within them, are found 60% of the world's plant species and 40% of the world's animal species. Within these same regions 90% of all wars have been fought over the last half century. The cultural equivalent of this would be to declare that, in the future, all wars would be fought on the grounds of the *Louvre* in Paris, the *Hermitage* in St. Petersburg, and the *Guggenheim* in New York.

The U.S. now engages in endless war. Our armed conflicts occur without formal declaration of war, at all times of year, and on almost all continents. War is almost never in a nation's best long-term interest. There is, in fact, a military term for this: a Pyrrhic Victory. When the environmental

costs are added to human, political, and financial costs of war, then every conflict of the century in which we live has resulted, exclusively, in Pyrrhic Victories.

In his recent book *War: An Inquiry* (Yale University Press, 2017), A.C. Grayling reminds us (with his italics in place) that, "Aggression is a *feeling* of an individual, but it is a *choice* in a state."



Photo of James Porter sampling a 2,000 pound bomb* on a coral reef by James Barton, Vieques, Puerto Rico— 2012

*Carcinogens leak from underwater unexploded ordnance, raising concerns for nearby fishing communities which suffer significantly elevated cancer rates.

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The Yellowthroat
Published monthly by the
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