



December 2018

The Yellowthroat

Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

Vol. 29, No. 10

Next Meeting:
Thursday, December 6, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Christmas Bird Count – Then and Now

Eugenia Thompson, a lifelong birder, is also former president of ORAS. Since 1998, she has compiled (along with Mary Case) the Athens Christmas Bird Count. She will discuss this topic. According to the Audubon website (audubon.org), the Christmas Bird Count is a long-standing program of the National Audubon Society, with more than 100 years of community science involvement. It's an early-winter bird census, where volunteers in the U.S., Canada, and many countries in the Western Hemisphere go out over a 24-hour period on one calendar day to count birds.

Before the turn of the 20th century, hunters engaged in a holiday tradition known as the Christmas "Side Hunt." They'd choose sides and go out with their guns. Whoever returned with the biggest pile of feathered (and furred) quarry won. Beginning on Christmas Day 1900, ornithologist Frank M. Chapman, an early officer in the then-nascent Audubon Society, [proposed a new holiday tradition](#)—a "Christmas Bird Census" that would involve counting birds during the holidays rather than hunting them.

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.

A High Low Tide: The Revival of a Southern Oyster summary of November meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to André Gallant for his presentation about his recently published book, *A High Low Tide: The Revival of a Southern Oyster*, at the November general ORAS meeting.

Gallant said much of the joy of eating oysters comes from the way oysters offer us the taste of the ocean as well as the taste of a specific location. Many indigenous tribes enjoyed oysters. Today, the remaining shells from their oyster feasts exist in middens—prehistoric piles of bones, shells and other waste.

Humans continued to eat many oysters but were harvesting them faster than they could reproduce. By the 20th century natural stocks were being destroyed. Eventually New York City was no longer referred to as the Big Oyster. But Georgia was still producing oysters even as northern ones were being wiped out. "Georgia has the right kind of marsh ecosystem," Gallant noted. However, he added, the muddy marsh bottoms mean intense competition for places to cling. So, the oysters often grow together in clumps.. Although Georgia oysters taste delicious, most consumers want single, perfect oysters.

There are ways to farm Georgia's oyster to get single, non-clumping ones. Oystermen and their families seek ways to overcome the many obstacles to bring the Georgia oyster back into prominence so more Georgians can eat these delicious local oysters right in their own state.

2018 Athens Christmas Bird Count (Mark Your Calendars for Dec. 15)

The 2018 Athens Christmas Bird Count will be Saturday, December 15. 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: eroberthom@bellsouth.net) or Mary Case (email: mecase@uga.edu) or talk to us at the December 6 general ORAS meeting.

The Northeast Georgia Invasive Plant Cooperative

by Lauren Muller

The southeastern United States is celebrated for its tremendous levels of biodiversity—a stunning collection of interesting and unique ecosystems resulting from a wide range in geologic formations, climatic conditions, and ancient glaciation periods. It is well documented in the scientific literature that the rapidly increasing human population and associated activities represents one of the most serious threats to the many exceptional natural areas found in the Southeast.

Of these anthropogenic changes, the introduction of exotic invasive plants has brought about major changes in the landscape. Invasive plants have the capacity to outcompete and displace native plant diversity but can also have been shown to alter the habitat structure of birds and resource availability. Many of the Southeast's invasive shrubs such as Bush Honeysuckle, Autumn Olive, Nandina, Thorny Olive, Chinese Privet, and Mahonia all produce prolific fruit that are fed upon are dispersed by birds. While these fruits do serve as a food source, they are potentially toxic and far less nutritious than insects which are generally supported at a higher level by native plants.

In response to the increasing threat of invasive plant species to Georgia Piedmont ecosystems and biota, the Northeast Georgia Invasive Plant Cooperative (NGIPC) was formed by the Athens Land Trust. NGIPC is dedicated to addressing the needs of public and private landowners whose properties are being negatively impacted by the encroachment of invasive plants through education and outreach and boots-on-the-ground invasive plant management.

Partner organizations include: The State Botanical Garden of Georgia, UGA Cooperative Extension, Athens-Clarke County Sustainability Office, Georgia DNR, Georgia Forestry Commission, the Weed Warriors, Keep Athens-Clarke County Beautiful, New Urban Forestry, and the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society. These partnerships facilitate outreach opportunities and improve connections with federal, state, and local levels of land management.

NGIPC advocates for the creation of more ecologically relevant, native plant landscapes and healthier natural areas and greenspaces in Athens and the five surrounding counties. A grand gesture of thoughtful environmental action is required to preserve the biological richness of the region we call home and it is increasingly important for people to connect and identify with natural systems that surround us. NGIPC emphatically invites the community to learn about the impact and management of invasive plants in our region and to take responsibility for the preservation of biodiversity in the Southeast.

For more information contact Invasive Plant Management Coordinator, Lauren Muller at lauren@athenslandtrust.org



Photo of volunteer group, Boulevard Woods Park, Athens, Georgia—June 27, 2018



Photo of Hotshot Crew member Chris Reid, by Lauren Muller, Athens, Georgia—October 5, 2018

Eco-Haiku by Liz Conroy

Awake in the night
Barred Owl asks, “Who cooks for you?”
No chefs who serve mice!

Saving a Mourning Dove by Suzanne Lindsay

Birds face many hazards, but my husband, David, and I would never have included our flowerbed's fence. Its sections clip together, leaving triangular gaps where the top wires curve down to the sides. At the clips, the space is only half an inch wide (see photo on right).

Attracted by the nearby feeder, birds often perch on the fence. One October afternoon, however, David looked out a window and said, "There's a bird hanging on the fence." Hanging? I ran outside and sure enough, a bird was bent sideways through the gap between two sections. Its abdomen and tail were on one side of the fence. The rest of the body was on the other side. Suddenly, a muscle twitched beneath the belly feathers.

"It's a Mourning Dove, and it's still alive," I called. I ran to gather safety glasses and small towels, equipment we had seen televised rescuers use. Back by the fence, I saw that the bird's left wing was almost fully extended, as if it had tried to push away from the wire. Its head was turned to the right, and its right eye didn't blink as I approached.

From the flowerbed, David said, "It's caught in the fence by its leg. I think I can get it loose if you can keep it from struggling." I draped the towels over the bird's wing, head, and as much of the body as I could reach, then gently lifted it.

As the pressure of the bird's weight lessened, David eased the trapped leg upward. "The leg's not broken," he said. "There's not even any blood. I think it will be all right."

I looked over the fence to see the delicate bone intact, with the foot clenched beneath it like a knob. Flying over the fence, the bird had, in effect, stubbed its toes between the sections and momentum had carried the rest of its body up and through the wider top gap.

As David released the leg, the dove suddenly convulsed in my hands and exploded out from the towels. We watched it fly strongly across the back yard to the nearby trees. Judging by its flight, it seemed to be in good shape.

We will never know why the dove was trapped. Perhaps it was fleeing from a predator, or simply flew too close to the fence on its way to feed. The next morning, however, a pair of Mourning Doves patrolled the ground beneath our feeder. Both walked easily, without any hint of damage to a leg or foot. We can only hope that one of them was the rescued bird.



Photo of Mourning Dove by Patrick Maurice, State Botanical Garden of Georgia, Clarke County, Georgia—April 14, 2018



Photo of garden fence where the dove became trapped, by Dave Lindsay, backyard, Clarke County, Georgia—October, 2018

Coastal Connections: An ISS Update (Part 2) by Abby Sterling

On our shorebird-rich Georgia coast, expanding and maintaining the International Shorebird Survey's (ISS) coverage means working with barrier island managers to prioritize ISS counts. It also means working with new volunteers to establish new monitoring sites.

This can be challenging due to the remote locations of some sites and surveys which rely on boats for transportation. Shorebirds use barrier island beaches and sand flats for resting and feeding. They also use piles of wave washed shells, called shell rakes, to roost above high tides in larger bays between our islands. It's often difficult to see, let alone count these birds piled up in dense flocks along the marsh edge and stacked among the rows of white, sun bleached oyster shells.

Last week, while in Wassaw Sound, I was astounded to see six Least Sandpipers tucked into the shells on a rake—their small size highlighted by the fact that they were literally sleeping inside the oyster shells!

We also saw one of the few Long-billed Curlews that exist on the U.S. Atlantic Coast. This bird, largest of North American shorebirds, stood tall in stark contrast to the tiny Least Sandpipers. Historically, Long-billed Curlews were abundant on the East Coast during migration and wintering. Due to unregulated hunting for sale to restaurants in the late 1800's, and loss of habitat, it's now thought that fewer than 20 Long-billed Curlews overwinter in the Southeastern U.S. Flocks of Black-bellied Plovers, Semipalmated Plovers, Western Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitchers, and American Oystercatchers were the most abundant species on our final survey through the Sound, indicating that many shorebirds that winter farther south have already passed through here.

Participating in ISS surveys offers volunteers opportunities to observe migration patterns and appreciate the incredible birds that stop by our coasts on a much larger journey that connects us to Central and South America. We get the chance to puzzle over cryptic shorebirds in their duller winter plumage, and then be wowed by their bright breeding plumage as they return north in the spring on their way to Arctic breeding grounds. Our volunteers are making a real difference by contributing to surveys that play an important role in shorebird conservation. But we need support, funding, and volunteers to continue to gather this data.

We're looking forward to continuing to expand the coverage of the ISS and to providing training and tools for interested counters. Plus, data entry has been made simple by partnering with eBird! The spring surveys begin in March. Would you like to become involved? If so, please contact me at sterling@manomet.org for Georgia or Brad Winn at bwinn@manomet.org for work in any other state.



Photo of Semipalmated plovers, Sanderling, and Least Sandpiper on a beach edge by Abby Sterling, Glynn County, Georgia—September, 2011

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