



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

December 2019

Vol. 30, No.9

Next Meeting: Thursday, December 5, 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Emma Dickinson, will discuss the formation of the Lilly Branch campus Audubon chapter, various events, and chapter goals.

Kai Stewart, recipient of an ORAS conservation grant, will give an overview of the grant-funded pollinator garden installed at Malcolm Bridge Elementary School and the accompanying lecture series given to the students.

Patrick Maurice will take us to the South Pacific and share his experiences with UGA Discover Abroad. Lauren Ward will explain the establishment and growth of feral Monk Parakeet populations in urban centers in Europe.

Doreen Chaussadas plans to describe the fascinating Purple-crowned Fairywren and this bird's unique social system. Eugenia Thompson hopes to encourage involvement in the upcoming Athens Christmas Bird Count with her talk.

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.

2019 Athens Christmas Bird Count (Mark Your Calendars)

The 2019 Athens Christmas Bird Count will be on Saturday, December 14. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is the world's longest-running wildlife census and contributes valuable data to bird population research.

As reported in the groundbreaking *Birds and Climate Change Study*, analysis of more than 100 years of CBC data helped scientists discover the effects of climate change on North American birds.

We need participants of all levels of expertise, from beginners to experts. The actual count period includes the whole 24 hours of December 14, but most people count in the daylight hours only. You do not even have to count all day; your help for just a few hours is welcome.

To be assigned to a team in the Athens CBC circle, please email Eugenia Thompson: erobertthom@gmail.com. Or talk to someone you know who will be taking part in the count.



Ruby-crowned Kinglet (seen during Carter's Lake CBC) by Patrick Maurice, Gordon County, Georgia—December 30, 2017

Of Ents* and Ants *by Kathryn Kyker*

Amid these Ancient
colossal Beings we
Scurry like ants
diminished by their
Size but enhanced
by their Essence

We grow Quiet
revering their connections:
Earth to Sky
Life to Death
One to Others

Despite or Because
of relentless aging—
Solitary yet Together—

Beyond even the
Very Best Words.

* Ents are tree-like beings in Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*



Giant sequoia by Chris Risse, Sequoia National Park, Tulare County, California—September 2019

Uncovering Cryptic Beauty *by Robert Wyatt*

She had to have been as startled as I,
flying off her nest as I passed close by.
Her mate, brilliant red with an ebony mask,
joined her in scolding: taking me to task.

Parents away, I inspected the nest:
three bluish-white eggs had been laid to rest,
exquisitely speckled purple and brown.
Such cryptic beauty enkindled a frown.

Science can explain why cardinal males
have allure to spare, yet the female pales:
his worth as a mate is judged by his looks,
while her drab color lets her hide in nooks.

But why should an egg that lasts a brief time,
and stays concealed, be painted so sublime?

One day science may resolve it all.

Still, let cryptic beauty your heart enthrall.

Full Moon Hike (Cold Moon) at State Botanical Garden—Thursday, Dec. 12

On Thursday, Dec. 12 at 7:00 p.m., the Education Staff at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia invites hikers of all ages to enjoy the beauty of nature at night.

Be prepared for a two mile hike through the garden and on wooded trails. Topics such as the moon, constellations, or nocturnal animals may be discussed depending on the hike.

(A backpack carrier is recommended for anyone with young children or infants.) Meet at the fountain in front of the Visitor's Center. Fee: \$5 per person or \$15 per family.

Preregistration is required.

Call 706.542.1244 or visit: www.botgarden.uga.edu

Exploring Australia (Part 3)

by Patrick Maurice

Hawaii, New Zealand (NZ), Australia, and Fiji: four places that I've always wanted to visit. Thanks to UGA's Discover Abroad program, this dream became a reality during my spring semester abroad. Our third stop was Australia:

The first half of our program officially ended on February 22 in Wellington, NZ. We were free to do whatever we wanted before reconvening in Sydney a week later on March 1. This was our spring break, so nineteen of my classmates and I rented an Airbnb on the Australian Gold Coast. We partied it up Down Under, but I also needed to go birding!

Luckily, I had posted to Instagram about my trip and my Facebook friend, Alec Hopping saw it. He commented that he'd be at the University of Queensland (UQ) in Brisbane when I was in Australia. This was an amazing coincidence because we had never met each other in-person.

Alec is quite a birder: he spent a few months in the fall of 2015 working as a birding intern on Little St. Simon's Island. He found many cool birds while he was there, including a Sabine's Gull! During that time, we started texting and became good online friends.

We hatched a plan to go birding together while I was on spring break. He invited two other UQ birders, Nick Froese and Braden McDonald, too. On our first night, we camped in Lamington National Park in Southeast Queensland—a mountainous area that protects a large, subtropical rainforest.

We woke at 5:00 a.m. to the dawn chorus and saw species such as the Eastern Whipbird whose call sounds just like the crack of a whip. We also saw Australian King-Parrots, the endemic Albert's Lyrebird, and large Green Catbirds that don't look at all like the Gray Catbird we have in Georgia!

Driving several hours west, we arrived at a popular honeyeater waterhole in Durikai State Forest. Surrounded by dry, dusty land, the waterhole serves as an oasis for birds and other wildlife. We saw more than 50 honeyeaters of seven different species! Our next stop was Lake Coolmunda, a large man-made lake also teeming with birdlife. Hundreds of Black Swans and other waterfowl, a large flock of Australian Pelicans, spoonbills, and many different species of parrots, including the beautiful Pale-headed Rosella, greeted us.

We camped in Lockyer Valley, which is south of the town of Toowoomba. At dawn, loud laughing erupted outside our tent; we traced the sound to a pair of Laughing Kookaburras! I was ecstatic to see them in the wild; they are a symbol of Australia's birdlife and much larger than I thought they'd be.

We birded our way to Atkinsons Dam. Hundreds of Hardheads (related to scaup), Pink-eared, Pacific Black, and Maned Ducks were there. We watched a Black Kite hunting at eye level. A Black-faced Cuckooshrike hunted in a similar fashion by hovering over a patch of grass like a kestrel. It was our final stop of the birding trip. We saw about 170 species in a day and a half of birding—an epic trip!



Australian King-Parrot at Lamington National Park by Patrick Maurice, Queensland, Australia—February 27, 2019



Australian Laughing Kookaburra at Elanda Point Education Center by Patrick Maurice, Queensland, Australia—March 12, 2019



Black Kite at Atkinsons Dam by Patrick Maurice, Queensland, Australia—February 28, 2019

Message from ORAS President

by Lauren Gingerella

I enjoy birding with experts and friends and usually do more of it when I have time off work around the holidays. My nephew is finally old enough to go on his first birding adventure, and I'm excited. It's especially rewarding to inspire novices and children into the world of birding, but it can be a challenge. These six tips will help young birders:

- **Choose the right optics:** Kid-friendly binoculars or a monocular are easy for little hands to hold, and low magnification provides a wider field of view making it easier for a beginner to locate the bird. Most importantly, keep it low stress and provide the child with optics you don't mind getting dirty. If you have a spotting scope, get an eyepiece adaptor for your phone so birds will show up on the screen.
- **Get a good field guide:** Beginner field guides make it easy to identify the common birds in your area without filtering through pages of potential rarities in a comprehensive guide. They also provide entertainment while you wait for birds to visit your feeder. The *Stokes Beginner's Guide to Birds* is organized by color, which makes it easy for a beginner to quickly identify a bird.
- **Choose the right place:** Birds are everywhere, which means you only need to put up a feeder outside your window, or go for a walk in your favorite park, to observe them. I recommend visiting a pond or lake. Larger, charismatic birds that are easier to spot, such as herons, egrets, and ducks, will be found near water. Check out recent bird sightings on eBird to help you choose the right location, so your novice is set-up for success.
- **Listen:** Often you will hear birds rather than see them. Try to have them relate the song or call to something they are familiar with, such as a squeaky dog toy (Brown-headed Nuthatch). There are several bird identification apps with bird vocalizations available. Play the songs of a few common birds (e.g. Carolina Wren and Carolina Chickadee) before going outside, and challenge the youngster to listen for the sounds.
- **Turn it into a game:** Create a scavenger hunt or bingo with target birds that you are hoping to find. This can include feathers and owl pellets, too. Game preparation can be a good rainy day activity. These activities help children become familiar with what to look for when they head outdoors.
- **Keep a nature journal:** Ask children to draw birds they saw, the habitat the bird was in, and behavioral characteristics. Ask them to draw whether the bird was on the ground or in a tree, feeding from the suet or tube feeder, or if it was solitary or in a flock.

This will help them recall what species they saw and key identification marks.

I hope these ideas inspire you to take a youngster birding. Consider participating in the Great Backyard Bird Count (February 15–18), too. Visit: <http://gbbc.birdcount.org/>



Father and son birders (out in front) by Mary Conroy Almada, Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve, Tulum, Mexico—February 18, 2017

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The Yellowthroat
Published monthly by the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
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