



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

February 2012

Vol. 23 No. 2

Next Meeting:
Thursday, February 2, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

**Pine Plantation Management and its
Effects on Wildlife**

Dr. Vanessa Lane, ORAS Vice President, will discuss the effects of southern pine plantation management on birds and other wildlife.

Pine plantations are an increasingly common feature of southeastern landscapes for various reasons: Increasing land values and associated taxes have forced timber companies to sell the majority of their land holdings throughout the Southeast, including Georgia. This increases their need to intensify lumber production on remaining silvicultural lands.

Pine plantations provide an efficient means to establish, maintain, and harvest lumber. Yet, how does this increased efficiency affect wildlife in these forests, particularly when most of these plantations are harvested through clearcutting? The pros and cons of pine plantation management, not only on a local scale, but also within the context of Southeastern landscapes will be presented as well.

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.

Winter Field Trip

Feb. 11: 7:30 p.m. Loon Watch at Lake Hartwell. (Meet at Athens Tech parking lot on Hwy 29, just outside the Athens By-pass). We will carpool to Wally and Minnie Crider's home on Lake Hartwell. The focus of the trip is to observe Common Loons, but we may see gulls, grebes, and herons. Bring lunch and a spotting scope if you have one.

The Urban Rusties of Athens

summary of January meeting by Page Luttrell

Thanks to Patti Newell, Ph.D student at UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, for her presentation at the January meeting on the local ecology and feeding habits of Rusty Blackbirds. These blackbirds require wetland habitats for feeding where they forage primarily on earthworms and small mast (i.e. willow and water oaks).

At two sites in Georgia and South Carolina where Patti conducts her field work, she discovered that the "rusties" also feed in pecan orchards to ingest lipid-rich nuts. She discussed possible causes related to the population decline of this species which includes habitat loss and predation by accipiter hawks.

Heads Up - March 1 Meeting, 7:00 p.m.

Georgia's Wild Gardens Botanical photographers Hugh and Carol Nourse will present the beauty of plant habitats throughout Georgia with close-up views of wildflowers in their natural habitats. This photographic collection came from their work on *Guide to the Natural Communities of Georgia*, authored by Leslie Edwards, Kay Kirkman and Jon Ambrose.

Hugh and Carol were the major photographers for the Guide, trailing after the authors to every corner of Georgia from St. Mary's in the Southeast to Chickamauga Battlefield in the Northwest to Rabun Bald in the Northeast to Lake Seminole in the Southwest. In addition, Hugh and Carol Nourse have independently authored several books, including *Wildflowers of Georgia*, *The State Botanical Garden of Georgia*, and *Favorite Wildflower Walks in Georgia*.

Vulture Valentines

by Victoria Smith

They arrived with Thanksgiving.
After dinner, we spotted them
Above us, wheeling, dipping,
Riding the afternoon skies.

Black and Turkey Vultures
Choose our Southern latitudes
As refuge from Northern winters,
Where food is buried by mantles of snow.

Here, they gather their tribes in trees
Allow our sun to warm
Their outstretched wings
Waiting to take to the sky.

Like their kissing cousins
The California condors,
Our vultures cleanse
Disease from Nature's fallen.

On sunny afternoons they wheel
High above the big roads,
Looking for scavenge
They share generously with family.

By February, we see them
Grow more restless.
Coming down from time to time
to take a roof shingle.

Nearly voiceless. No songs to miss.
Red-headed Valentines
Rustle black feathers
Readying for flight back North.

(Authors note: Turkey Vultures are the main migrants. In Georgia, we have Black and Turkey Vultures as residents year-round.)

Interesting Loon Facts by Richard Hall

The name loon refers to its clumsy gait when walking on land. In Europe the Common Loon is referred to by the more majestic-sounding Great Northern Diver.

There are five loon species: Arctic, Pacific, Common, Yellow-billed and Red-throated. Of these, only Common and Red-throated regularly occur in Georgia in winter, although in recent years Pacific Loon has been found on large lakes in the north of the state.

Janisse Ray's "Drifting Into Darien"

review by Liz Conroy

Author Janisse Ray expresses her love for nature through memorable stories. Years ago at a talk in Athens, she described hiking with her husband: Ahead on the trail, a group of hikers walked and talked. Suddenly, one young man caught a lizard to show to his friends while laughing. Then he squeezed it to death and tossed it behind him.

Ray knelt in the dirt to cradle the dead lizard in her hand. Her heart broke, not just for the innocent creature, but that a person could crush life out of something so small, precious and harmless then throw it away like trash. Rather than grow embittered, she draws on such experiences to request positive responses from her audiences: "We need to be a voice for nature. All of us." Her words stir many readers to heightened awareness and greater action.

On October 11, 2011, Ray spoke at Seney-Stovall Chapel to launch her new book, *Drifting into Darien: A Personal and Natural History of the Altamaha River*. As before, her talk proved memorable.* As soon as she reached the podium, she offered heartfelt words. She read from her book, and several passages provided lessons in becoming less paralyzed when speaking up to those in power. "Most of us, I believe, give our lives away to fear," she read. For many of us, facing aggression by those seeking power and control often proves overwhelming. Yet Ray described how one woman found great courage. In her book, she quotes the late Kenyan environmental activist, Wangari Maathai: "I see it [courage] as pursuing what I know is possible."

What is possible? Someday, protecting the entire Altamaha River—the waterway winding through the land of her roots—is possible. Ray writes: "Along the 137 miles of the river, woods crowd both sides, the banks free of houses and lawns, for the most part—a floodplain forest in which I sometimes see the spirit of my grandfather. . . ." Hope for this possibility continues to grow as The Nature Conservancy and others work to protect the Altamaha by purchasing land along its banks. "Already, 100,000 acres [of the lower Altamaha basin] are protected," Ray announced.

Still, threats to this river and other rivers continue as nuclear plants and other industries allow toxic leaks to flow into the waterway. Ray uses her skills as a writer and her courage to expose and "to vent" about the big polluters. She can't do it alone; we all need to find our own courage to become voices for nature, too.

* Ray's presentation was sponsored by: University of Georgia Press, Environmental Ethics Certificate Program/Southern Nature Project, Georgia Review, Georgia River Network, Oconee River Project of Altamaha Riverkeeper, and University of Georgia Libraries.

Drifting into Darien is published by University of Georgia Press (2011). www.ugapress.org

December 2011 Clarke Co. Bird Sightings Summary *by Richard Hall*

97 species were reported to eBird from Clarke County in December 2011, compared to 105 in 2010 and 81 in 2009.

Warm weather meant that winter waterfowl were thin on the ground, but Gadwall and Green-winged Teal joined 4 Black Ducks at the Oxbow Lake during the month (MB, RH, JN).

Lake Chapman held a new county high count of Bufflehead (4) on 10th (RH, MJ), a female Redhead on 11th (RH, JN) and a Lesser Scaup hiding in the Ruddy Duck flock through the second half of the month.

On the Christmas Bird Count on 17th, new county high counts were set for American Woodcock (8 at the State Botanical Garden, plus another 4 at the South Milledge fields; JM) and House Finch (60, Lake Herrick; RH).

The Athens landfill proved to be an excellent location for birding during December. New county high counts were recorded here for Black Vulture (200; RH) and Ring-billed Gull (43; JN, RH), and the site also hosted several species hard to come by in the Athens area, including Loggerhead Shrike, up to 7 White-crowned Sparrows, a Great Horned Owl on 15th, and single Vesper and Grasshopper Sparrows on 19th (MB, RH, MJ, JN).

Good backyard records included a Rufous Hummingbird seen on-and-off through the month (BKOG), a flock of 90 Rusty Blackbirds in the author's yard on 22nd, and a flyover Merlin the next day (probably the same bird spotted flying over campus by JE on 22nd).

Outside of the county, a Clay-colored Sparrow seen and photographed in a Chipping Sparrow flock was an excellent backyard find (JW), and the state's second Green-tailed Towhee was found on the Lake Oconee CBC (RC, SH, JM), sticking around until the year end for many to admire.

Observers: MB - Mirko Basen, RC - Rachel Cass, RH - Richard Hall, SH - Steve Holzman, MJ - Mitchell Jarrett, JM - Joel McNeal, JN - James Neves, BKOG - Bill and Karla O'Grady, JW - John Whigham.

Eco-Haiku

by Robert Wyatt

A whirr and a buzz--
two hummingbirds battle over
delectable nectar.

Red-winged blackbird
perched atop a cattail--
I salute your stripes



Photo of Common Loon by Richard Hall

Venus, Uranus and the Clouds of Jupiter

by ACC Leisure Services and The Athens Astronomical Association

When:
Thursday, February 9, 2012
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Where:
Sandy Creek Park (no pre-registration required)

Cost:
\$2.00 per person for entrance to the park.

Contact:
706-613-3631 or visit: www.athensclarkecounty.com

In the sky:
Conjunction of Venus and Uranus, the *cloud belts of Jupiter*,
winter moon craters and winter constellations

Supplies:
Telescopes provided, but you're welcome to bring your own.

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Did You Know? *by National Audubon Society*

Common Loons look impressive enough resting on the water, but we seldom glimpse them in their true element: below the surface. Loons are powerful swimmers underwater, using their feet to propel their torpedo-shaped bodies in agile pursuit of small fish.

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

President Richard Hall
President@oconeeriversaudubon.org
Vice-President Vanessa Lane
vp@oconeeriversaudubon.org
Treasurer Eugenia Thompson
treasurer@oconeeriversaudubon.org
Secretary Mary Case
secretary@oconeeriversaudubon.org

The Yellowthroat

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