



# The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

February 2020

Vol. 31, No.2

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

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

## **Invasive Plants--Bad News for Birds**

Gary Crider, steering committee member for the Northeast Georgia Invasive Plant Cooperative, will describe the “dirty dozen” worst invasive plants in the Georgia Piedmont, along with best management practices and control measures.

In his talk, he will explain how invasive non-native plants can overwhelm native flora, threatening the viability and diversity of our native plant communities, pollinators, birds, and other wildlife.

Gary Crider is also a volunteer leader with the Memorial Park/Birchmore Trail Weed Warriors, working to limit the spread of invasive plant species and to restore wildlife habitat on public and private land. In recognition of his environmental stewardship and activism with the Weed Warriors, the local Audubon Society and similar organizations, Gary received the 2013 Alec Little Environmental Award.

**Meetings are held...**the first Thursday of the month at 7:00 p.m. To get to the Nature Center: From the north side of the perimeter, take Highway 441, exit 12. 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.

## **Climate Watch: Brown-headed Nuthatches** by Heather Levy

Brown-headed Nuthatches are one of the emblematic species of our southeastern pine forests. Their charismatic mannerisms, fascinating social groups, high intelligence, and unique, albeit adorable vocalizations make them a species near and dear to many folks. Because they are residential, we can enjoy their presence year round.

Yet these birds, among many others, are at risk due to habitat loss from climate change. As pine specialists, they will see an overall decrease in suitable habitat across their range from increased temperatures.

In 2014, Audubon published its first climate change report, which inspired many concerned individuals to make positive changes for birds. The result was Climate Watch, a national citizen science project headed up by Audubon, aimed at assessing sensitive species' responses to climate change by monitoring select target species across their ranges.

Audubon's 2019 climate change report, *Survival by Degrees*, states that two-thirds of all North American bird species are at risk due to climate change. This sobering fact, on top of all the other interwoven and compounding environmental crises, is enough to give anyone climate anxiety.

But there's still time and hope. These statistics are based on a temperature increase of 3 degrees. If we can curb carbon emissions and limit that increase to 1.5 degrees, it would reduce threats for three fourths of those vulnerable birds.

Want to help? Consider participating in citizen science projects like Climate Watch to gather information about key areas to protect and how to mitigate habitat loss.

On February 8<sup>th</sup>, a team of birders will head out to conduct point counts for Brown-headed Nuthatches all around the greater Athens area. This will be the first Climate Watch count for Athens, which we hope continues. It's a great opportunity to partake in a large citizen science project, become involved in your community, and spend a morning watching nuthatches in the pine forests that surround us.

## Birding Solo: A New Adventure

by Kai H. Stewart

Ever since I was first introduced to birding, I've jumped at the opportunity to bird with fellow enthusiasts. I'd often tag along on field trips or official bird counts. Birding on my own consisted of isolated events where I'd identify a single bird I didn't know. Something about taking a solo trip for the purpose of observing birds felt intimidating. It seemed like an activity one should do with experienced birders, so I didn't spend much time birding despite how much joy it brought me. But my view changed after a difficult semester when I rewarded myself with a trip that was wholly my own.

My destination was Huntington Beach State Park in South Carolina; a park not far from my hometown. It was where I started this hobby and was a place I knew well. I was so excited the night before that I barely slept, but the excitement alone would carry me through the day. I left early and got to the beach not long after sunrise. I wanted as much time as possible to explore the park. Great Blue Herons and a flock of egrets greeted me as I scanned the inland ponds.

It wasn't long before I spotted a small raft of my favorite duck species, the Hooded Merganser. It had been years since I last saw one, and I was thrilled. Sadly, these ducks were far off and showed no signs of moving closer. But I desperately wanted a picture. Getting as close as possible became my goal of the day.

I moved around the thick woods by the pond. Each time I emerged into a clearing or boardwalk, I came closer to my goal. Finally, along a service road, I saw the ducks were about 30 feet from me, framed by an opening in the branches. Having already seen many familiar and new bird species by that point, this moment served as a crescendo to my journey. This heightened sense of the joy from birding is memorable.

To new birders who feel intimidated by the idea of birding alone, give it a try. You may find more than lifers out there!

## Green Life Expo at State Botanical Garden of Georgia—February 29

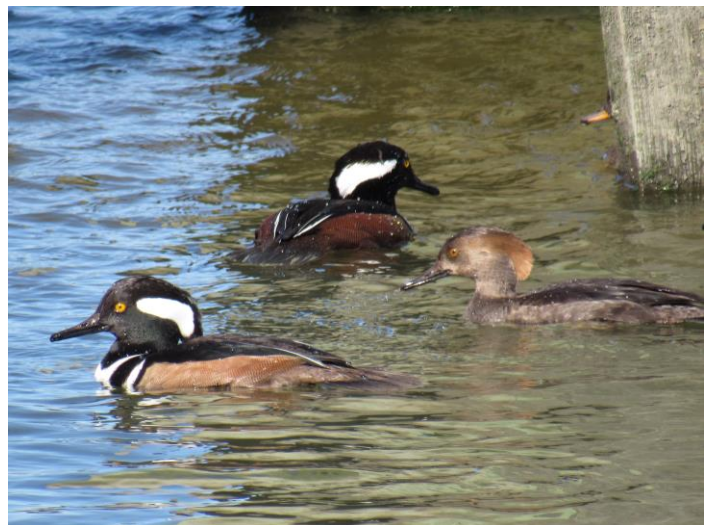
The Green Life Expo is designed to provide inspiration and the tools needed to help our community members become more sustainable in our everyday lives. The expo runs from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. followed by the Green Life Awards Ceremony at 4:00.

There will be hands-on workshops, sustainability panel sessions on industry and education, and exhibitors from local businesses and organizations.

For more information: [accgov.com/GreenLifeExpo](http://accgov.com/GreenLifeExpo)



**Common Gallinule by Kai Stewart, Huntington Beach State Park, Georgetown County, South Carolina—December 19, 2019**



**Hooded Mergansers (2 males/1 female) by Kai Stewart, Huntington Beach State Park, Georgetown County, South Carolina—December 19, 2019**

## Double Helix STEAM School Film

*summary of film presentation at Jan. meeting by Liz Conroy*

Students and teachers from Double Helix STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Arts) School in Athens expressed thanks for the 2019 ORAS grant they received. The students presented a lively film at the ORAS January meeting to show how they learned about birds with the grant money for binoculars, bird houses, and more. For more information: [doublehelixschool.com](http://doublehelixschool.com)

## Conservation of Cerulean Warblers

*summary of Jan. meeting by Clay Delancey and Liz Conroy*

Thanks to Research Coordinator at Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, Clay Delancey, for his talk on the conservation of Cerulean Warblers. Cerulean Warblers are disappearing faster than any other species of warbler and are a species of conservation concern. While most research on Cerulean Warblers has focused on breeding biology, Delancey focused on habitat preferences during post-fledging and nocturnal periods, and migration patterns to wintering sites and back to breeding sites.

Delancey discussed topics that he examined as a graduate student at Ball State University in Indiana. His work on fledgling habitat included how these warblers move to different areas after nesting to find dense cover to protect fledglings.

He then described the roosting habitat of male Cerulean Warblers during the nesting period. His research showed that these birds often roost outside of their territories and rarely near their nests.

Delancey pointed out the migratory paths of Cerulean Warblers revealed by light-level geolocators. These are small instruments used by researchers to determine the routes these warblers take to and from South America each year as well as each bird's wintering location.

At the end, he offered observations his lab noted in the field, including an American Redstart taking over a Cerulean Warbler nest, song in female Cerulean Warblers, and hybridization between a Cerulean Warbler and Black-throated Blue Warbler. Delancey reminded birders that we never know what we may find while out birdwatching.



**Light-level geocator ready to deploy on Cerulean Warbler by Clayton Delancey—June 2017**



**Male Cerulean Warbler with a radio-transmitter by Clayton Delancey, Yellowwood State Forest, Brown County, Indiana—June 2017**

### Eco-Haiku

*by Jessica Magnarella*

From soft earth  
I pull and pull  
Yellow fluorescent roots  
of  
Mahonia invaders

### Eco-Haiku

*by Liz Conroy*

Gracefully, he paused.  
And, with large antlers held high,  
showed me he'd survived.

## ORAS Receives a Burke Grant

by Angela Hsiung

The Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) recently received the National Audubon Society's Plants for Birds Burke Grant. With this funding, ORAS will be able to build a high-profile demonstration garden to showcase the importance of native plants to bird conservation while also creating habitat for other wildlife within the Athens community.

"I was really thrilled to find out ORAS was awarded the grant," said ORAS president, Lauren Gingerella. She and two other board members, Betsy Kurimo-Beechuck and Heather Levy, worked to develop and submit the grant proposal to the National Audubon Society (NAS).

NAS received 56 applications from 25 states for this funding cycle; ORAS, one of just 20 other recipients, was awarded the Burke Grant.

The proposed location for the garden is along the Oconee River Greenway. When complete, this garden will provide opportunities to demonstrate the significance of native plants to wildlife to Athens area residents as well as many visitors.

"Members of Oconee Rivers Audubon are already aware of the importance of planting natives for birds and other wildlife, which is wonderful," Gingerella noted. "But we really want to target new members of the Athens community who have not historically been engaged in native plants and/or bird conservation."

The grant emphasizes community engagement and collaboration with local organizations. With this opportunity, ORAS plans to collaborate with partners such as the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government, the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, Lilly Branch Audubon Society, other students and faculty from the University of Georgia, and local native nurseries in the implementation of the proposed garden.

The plan is to plant approximately 1,500 native plants in the garden. "[W]e are going to need a lot of help from ORAS members when it comes time to prep, plan, and maintain the garden," Gingerella added.

### ***Bird of Prey: February 24, 7:00 pm*** **Miller Learning Center Room 350**

This documentary tells the story of the rarest eagle on Earth. The Philippine Eagle, the world's largest and rarest eagle, is found only in the Philippines. Fewer than 800 individuals remain today, and the future of these iconic raptors, as well

as many other species, is tied to the fate of the last fragments of old-growth forest in the Philippines.

Discussion will be led by Dr. Richard Hall, Assistant Professor in UGA's Odum School of Ecology with a cross-appointment in the College of Veterinary Medicine Department of Infectious Diseases. He is also a member of the Center for the Ecology of Infectious Diseases at UGA, and serves on the board of the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society. UGA's Speak out for Species Film Fest website: <http://sos.uga.edu/filmfest>

## Great Backyard Bird Count 2020

by Lauren Gingerella

The annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) will be held Friday, February 14, through Monday, February 17, 2020. This year marks the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary since the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society launched the GBBC.

Anyone can participate in the count, from birding novices to experts, anywhere in the world. All you need to do is count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days and submit your observations on [eBird](#). More GBBC information can be found [here](#). Happy counting!

## Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

**President** Lauren Gingerella  
president@oconeeriversaudubon.org

**Vice—President** Sam Merker  
vp@oconeeriversaudubon.org

**Treasurer** Alison Huff  
treasurer@oconeeriversaudubon.org

**Secretary** Eugenia Thompson  
secretary@oconeeriversaudubon.org

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Submit items to address above or email *The Yellowthroat* editor Liz Conroy: [yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org) Articles, photos, notices, and sighting reports welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the first day of each month. All articles and artwork are copyrighted, and all rights are reserved by the authors. Opinions expressed in articles are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the official views of Oconee Rivers Audubon Society.