



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

January 2013

Vol. 24, No. 1

Next Meeting:
Thursday, January 3, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Join the Dark Side of Life: The Fabulous Diversity of Local Moths

John Pickering, Associate Professor, University of Georgia, Odum School of Ecology
Co-founder of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park's All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (Look for upcoming ORAS announcements with more details on Dr. Pickering's talk).

Get to Know ORAS Leaders in 2013

President Richard Hall:

President@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Vice-President Clark Jones:

vp@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Treasurer Eugenia Thompson:

treasurer@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Secretary Mary Case:

secretary@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Bird Walks & Field Trips: Ed Maioriello

fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Yellowthroat Editor: Liz Conroy

editor@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Program: Gary Crider

program@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Hospitality chair: Carole Ludwig

Education: Kate Mowbray

education@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Publicity: Roger Nielsen

publicity@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Membership: Steve Duke

membership@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Conservation: Linda Russell

conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Fundraising: Vacant

American Alligator

summary of December meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to Greg Skupien for presenting the December program, **Investigations of American Alligator Habitat Use and Population Abundance on Jekyll Island, Georgia**. He described how the American alligator has evolved to be effective at ambushing its prey. The nostrils and eyes are positioned at the top of the head so the reptile can stay mostly submerged and hidden in the water. They may lunge suddenly out of the water to reach nearby prey at the water's edge. As top predators, they help to regulate the populations of prey species. Small alligators subsist on crustaceans, insects and fishes. Bigger alligators eat turtles, fish and small mammals; the biggest ones will even take mammals as large as deer. Importantly, alligators also eat raccoons which are voracious nest predators.

Currently, Skupien is involved in alligator research on Jekyll Island and is working with others on a mark-recapture study. Also, he and others are helping to teach the public about alligators. He is developing educational programs about alligators at the Georgia Sea Turtle Center on Jekyll Island.



Photo of Greg Skupien by Katherine Adams

November 2012 Clarke County eBird Sightings Summary *by Richard Hall*

100 species were reported in the county during November 2012, compared to 94 in 2011 and 103 in 2010. As is typical for the time of year, much of the interest was provided by waterfowl movements at Lake Chapman. The highlights included the first county record of 5 Surf Scoters on 16th (MB, RH, MJ et al.), new county high counts of 10 Green-winged Teal on 4th (MB), 37 Lesser Scaup on 18th (RH), 12 Horned Grebes on 15th (MB) and 100 American Coot on 13th (RH). Also notable were the first fall record of Common Loon on 3rd-4th (RH), and maximum counts of 3 Gadwall, 12 American Wigeon and 3 Bufflehead on 13th (RH, MJ), 5 Northern Shoveler on 28th (RH), 75 Ring-necked Ducks on 17th (RH), 72 Ruddy Ducks on 30th (MJ), single Redheads on 15th, 18th and 29th, 4 Bonaparte's Gulls on 16th (JN) and single Ring-billed Gulls on 4th and 6th (MB, RH).

Non-passerine highlights included a Northern Harrier at the ACC landfill on 19th (RH), Sandhill Cranes heard flying over the State Botanical Garden on 28th (JH), 2 Wilson's Snipe at the Oxbow Lake on Cook's Trail on 13th (RH, MJ), vocalizing Great Horned Owls at the South Milledge Fields on 2nd (MB) and Sandy Creek Park on 13th (RH), and American Kestrels in the east of county on 5th and 11th (RH) and the State Botanical Garden on 19th (BKOG).

The South Milledge Fields continued to hold noteworthy open country birds, including a Loggerhead Shrike on 9th-10th (RH), a flyover Horned Lark on 3rd (RH, MZ), Vesper Sparrows on 3rd-5th and 22nd (MB, KG, RH, MZ), a Grasshopper Sparrow on 5th (RH), a Lincoln's Sparrow on 2nd (RH), and up to 8 White-crowned Sparrows throughout. The Athens Landfill held a singing Fox Sparrow and a new county high count of 9 White-crowned Sparrows on 12th (RH).

The Red-breasted Nuthatch invasion continues, with many backyard sightings and up to 3 birds frequenting a feeder at UGA's Ecology building. The first Rusty Blackbirds were recorded from Sandy Creek Park on 11th (JH, RH) and 22 were at Lake Herrick on 22nd (RH).

Always scarce in winter, Gray Catbirds lingered at Tanyard Creek on the UGA campus on 12th (RH) and Lake Herrick on 29th (JH). The highest Purple Finch count was of 8 at the State Botanical Garden on 24th (JH), and 50 Pine Siskins that descended on BKOG's feeders on 6th.

Observers: Mirko Basen, Krista Gridley, Richard Hall, Jim Hanna, Mitchell Jarrett, James Neves, Bill and Karla O'Grady, Marcus Zokan

Here's to the Year 2012 *by Todd Pierson*

The year 2012 was memorable for nature-lovers. It brought super storms and super droughts; it saw extinction (Lonesome George* is no more) and new species described; it brought the reelection of a president who brazenly declared in 2008 that his victory would be remembered as "the moment when the rise of the oceans began to slow" but shied away from the topic of climate change four years later.

What will 2013 bring?

Environmental pessimism needs little defense in the twenty-first century, but the greatest irony is that those who suffer most from living in Aldo Leopold's "world of wounds" are those who enjoy it. No one lamented the sinking of the Titanic more than those onboard, and no one feels the effects of environmental destruction more than the natural historians.

While conservation seems like little more than an afterthought in times of economic woes, and although "#biodiversity" isn't a trending Twitter tag, we walk a fine line between fighting for a cause we believe in and engaging in self-hating masochism. As long as it doesn't distract us too long from ensuring the long-term survival of the species and places we love, we must remember to bask in the immediate beauty of the natural world. As our Titanic sinks, let's order one last round of drinks.

No one said it better than America's most relatable environmentalist, Edward Abbey:

"One final paragraph of advice: do not burn yourselves out. Be as I am — a reluctant enthusiast... a part-time crusader, a half-hearted fanatic. Save the other half of yourselves and your lives for pleasure and adventure. It is not enough to fight for the land; it is even more important to enjoy it. While you can. While it's still here. So get out there and hunt and fish and mess around with your friends, ramble out yonder and explore the forests, climb the mountains, bag the peaks, run the rivers, breathe deep of that yet sweet and lucid air, sit quietly for a while and contemplate the precious stillness, the lovely, mysterious, and awesome space. Enjoy yourselves, keep your brain in your head and your head firmly attached to the body, the body active and alive, and I promise you this much; I promise you this one sweet victory over our enemies, over those desk-bound men and women with their hearts in a safe deposit box, and their eyes hypnotized by desk calculators. I promise you this; You will outlive the bastards."

* Lonesome George died on June 24, 2012 at the Charles Darwin Research Station (Galápagos). He was the last giant tortoise of the Pinta Island subspecies. (Ed.)

A Christmas Day for Birders

by Maggie Nettles (1946 – 2011)

From Gary Crider's and Maggie Nettles' Migration Southward, 1997:

Christmas Eve night at the Wakulla Springs Lodge provided an opportunity to slip out and listen to a Limpkin scream in the dusk. Inside the historic lodge, we saw a variety of wrought iron birds—great blue heron andirons guarding the enormous fireplace, egrets and herons parading up the stairs.

By first light Christmas morning, we had the spotting scope set up on the diving platform over the 250-foot deep spring. Being easy to please, we would have settled for watching the mullet “pole vault” through the swimming area, but a sunny dawn brought the anhingas and cormorants out to hang on the trees.

About 25 feet away on the shoreline, white Ibises fed busily, and coots alternated feeding with screeching chases of each other. A pair of moorhens had a wrestling match—their orange feet grabbing each other's faces—in the middle of a peaceful feeding scene composed mainly of American Widgeons.

An osprey screamed in the distance, a pair of red-shouldered hawks hunted overhead, and Forster's terns combined graceful flight with nose-dives into the water. A great blue heron, numerous snowy egrets and great egrets slipped quietly among the swampy edges.

To top the morning off, Gary was focusing the scope on the sunlight slanting through the Spanish moss on the cypress trees when he spotted a black-crowned night heron fishing from a cypress knee.

Since Wakulla Lodge expected over 400 people for Christmas lunch, we headed out for our third day at St. Marks Wildlife Refuge. We admired the birds in the pond at the lighthouse, with whom we had spent the previous day (ask us about our twenty-minute encounter with a sora!), then the glassy calm Gulf tempted us to launch our kayaks for a hour of floating with loons and up-close views of horned grebes. We paddled into an inlet, where a porpoise kept us company for a while. And on the way back to the lighthouse, an osprey with a fish flew by.

Note from Gary: Maggie Nettles (former ORAS president) wrote this piece during one of our annual late December sojourns to Florida. Part of the reason for these trips was our need to escape the traditional holiday activities. On this particular Christmas, we were happy to discover that wild birds can be a fine substitute for wrapped Christmas gifts!

Conservation Grant Awarded by ORAS: Update on the Habitat Improvement at Oglethorpe County Middle School

by Brandon Adams

I just wanted to pass along to you an update on how things are progressing with the bird houses and feeders purchased with the ORAS grant money:

We have now more than 100 birds identified and recorded using eBird. We have bluebirds that nested in two boxes hatching out 4 clutches of eggs. We now have a Kestrel using the purple martin house as a perch to watch for insects in the field. I think one day we had a Merlin on it, but the sun was in my eyes when I was leaving school that evening.

Faculty, staff, and students have been amazed at the variety of birds we have around the school. I am sure more birds have visited, but unfortunately they left without being seen.

This winter we hope to have some white throated and white crowned sparrows pay us a visit like they do at my house.

We have also started a compost site at the school as well with the prospect of having a garden this spring.

Take care and thank you,

Brandon Adams MEd
6th Grade Social Studies
Oglethorpe County Middle School

Give the Gift of Audubon!

For an introductory National Audubon Society membership



Oconee Rivers
Audubon Society

(which includes *Audubon* magazine, local membership, and a subscription to *The Yellowthroat*), mail this form with a \$20.00 check payable to **NAS** to

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Oconee Audubon Society
P.O. Box 81082
Athens, Georgia 30608-1082

Return Service Requested

Non Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Athens, GA
Permit No. 41

Resolution for New Year 2013 *by Richard Hall*

I plan to enter at least one eBird checklist every day next year. Even five minute counts of common species visiting your backyard are valuable data. Your sightings, combined with those of citizen scientists from across the United States (and the globe), will contribute to the largest online dataset tracking the abundance and distribution of birds in history! It's easy to set up an account and enter checklists—just type ebird.org into your browser and off you go!



First county record of Surf Scoters—sighted and photographed by Richard Hall at Lake Chapman in Clarke County on Nov. 16, 2012.

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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

The Yellowthroat
Published monthly by the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

Submit information to the address above or e-mail Yellowthroat editor Liz Conroy: yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org. Articles, artwork, notices, and sighting reports welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the first Thursday 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.

