



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

January 2014

Vol. 25, No. 1

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

For the 7:00 p.m. documentary film presentation:

The Ordinary Extraordinary Junco

Juncos have arrived in Athens as they ordinarily do every year. But did you know that the Dark-eyed Junco has been used a study species to reveal some of the most important ornithological discoveries in history?

Juncos exhibit extremely high diversity in coloration, size, and shape across North America and five distinct races exist in the United States of America. Researchers at Indiana University began studying Juncos decades ago and have learned a tremendous amount about these not-so-ordinary creatures.

Join us on January 2 for a viewing of the documentary film project, *The Ordinary Extraordinary Junco*, to learn more about this fascinating species. You will never look at a Junco the same way again.

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.

Message from the President by Clark Jones

My New Year Message is to encourage everyone to: (1) spend more time each week outdoors and (2) volunteer and/or make a donation to a local conservation effort.

Spending more time outside is something we all need to do. Whether it is going on walk for an extra ten minutes each day, or planning a weekly hike down a new trail, you are guaranteed to encounter something new and previously unnoticed. Additionally, we could all use the extra exercise given the amount of time most of us spend sitting in an office. And, if spending more time outdoors, why not record the bird species you encounter and submit them to eBird?

State and local conservation efforts are some of the most underfunded organizations that are capable of taking on-the-ground action in your "backyard". Supporting local efforts through volunteer service makes a difference that you can directly experience. Or, support them by donating money.

State agencies such as Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR) and non-profits like the Georgia Conservancy work hard to conserve and maintain the species and habitats that are all within a short drive from Athens. Here are state and local organizations you may want support:

Athens Weed Warriors

<https://athensclarkecounty.com/5175/Weed-Warriors>

GA DNR Nongame Conservation Section

http://www.georgiawildlife.com/node/340#Direct_Donations

The Georgia Conservancy

<http://www.georgiaconservancy.org/>

Georgia Ornithological Society

<http://www.gos.org>

The Joseph W. Jones Ecological Research Center

<http://www.jonesctr.org/>

The Orianna Society

<http://www.oriannesociety.org/>

Shooting Your Backyard Birds (With a Camera, of Course) *by Chuck Murphy*

The way most people photograph the birds in their yard is: See bird, get camera, chase bird. You are probably NOT going to get great photos that way. Of course, if you spot something unique and rare, then go chase it!

However, if you want a nice photo of a common bird, then you need to reverse that strategy and shoot like the pros do: First create the setup for a good photo, and then invite the birds to your avian photo studio.

You do not need expensive gear to get good photos. I have won nature photo contests with shots from a compact camera that fits in my pants pocket. Of course, if your budget allows for a DSLR and telephoto lens, that's even better.

For backyard bird photographers, an excellent compromise is the "superzoom" cameras that zoom from 24x to 60x. A few examples are the Nikon P520, Sony HX300, and Lumix FZ270 in the \$200-\$400 price range.

A fundamental guideline for nature photography is "No sign of the hand of man." In practice, that means avoiding the shot of a bird on a cheesy plastic feeder. Instead, set a stick above and a little away from the feeder and capture the bird on the stick. Position the stick by lashing it to a tripod, using a Christmas tree stand, taping it to a deck chair, etc.

Also, try for a natural background behind your stick. For example, look for a clump of trees for the background, rather than a billboard.

Now that your birds can pose on a natural-looking stick, invite them in to your yard. Create a bird buffet by concentrating many different feeders to attract a variety of birds to the same place at the same time: Sunflower, thistle, and millet feeders, along with suet for woodpeckers and mealworms for bluebirds. Also, the birds love having a clean, shallow birdbath with fresh water next to their buffet.

When your bird studio is complete, you are ready to shoot. Use your longest zoom and get as close as you can without spooking the birds. Patience is the key.

Shooting through a glass window makes for blurry photos. If you are shooting from inside the house, it helps to open the window just enough to poke your camera through.

Finally, keep in mind that the best light is two hours after sunrise and two hours before sunset. Happy shooting!

Chuck Murphy is an ORAS member and local nature photographer specializing in birds, bugs, and blooms. Please visit his gallery of yard birds at <http://bit.ly/YardBirds>.



Photo of Ruby-throated Hummingbird by Chuck Murphy, August 24, 2012, Jackson County (backyard)

1778 Observation of Hummingbirds

submitted by Joseph Lee Boyle

May 8, 1778, Pepperell, Massachusetts

"Every thing being in bloom, my entertainment is observing a number of humming birds extracting honey from the peach and cherry blossom; they buzz about like so many bumble bees which at first I took them for. Their shyness, and rapidity of flight, preventing a near view of them, we requested Capt: Davies to try shooting one; which after many fruitless attempts, he at last succeed in, and kill'd one with sand. This bird was very little bigger than a large drone, of the finest proportion that possibly can be imagin'd—but its plumage beggars description. The back and wings were a fine brown ting'd with purple; the neck display'd such a variety of colours, that it is almost impossible to particularize any—sometimes it was of a golden colour, another direction of a deep green, and in a third light a bright scarlet. The legs (about the size of a pin) and bill of a dark colour; the bill was an inch in length, and so sharp, it enter'd the flesh like a needle."

Thomas Hughes, *A Journal by Thos: Hughes....*, ed. E. A. Benians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 31-32. Hughes, a prisoner of war, was a Lieutenant in the Fifty Third Regiment of Foot.

November 2013 Clarke County eBird Sightings Summary *by Richard Hall*

99 species were reported to eBird from Clarke Co. in November 2013, compared with 101 in 2012 and 94 in 2011.

The month was notable for several late-lingering migrants: a Green Heron at Lake Herrick on 6th (MB), an adult Bald Eagle at Lake Chapman on 27th (RH, JN), a Black-throated Green Warbler at the South Milledge fields on 9th (JN), and an Indigo Bunting at Lake Herrick on 4th (JN) all represented new county late dates. Other lingering migrants included Gray Catbird and Tennessee Warbler at the South Milledge fields (KG), and a backyard Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher (BKOG), both on 2nd.

November is a great month to look for migrant waterfowl at Lake Chapman. Maximum counts for the month were 15 Gadwall on 7th (JH, JN), 51 Ring-necked Ducks, 2 American Wigeon and a Redhead on 8th (JN), 7 Northern Shoveler on 14th (MB), 9 Lesser Scaup on 20th (MJ), 3 Bufflehead and 7 Hooded Mergansers on 24th (RH), 20 Red-breasted Mergansers and 4 Green-winged Teal on 20th (MB).

Checking farm fields for wintering open country birds was also productive. The South Milledge fields yielded 2 White-crowned Sparrows on 3rd - 8th (MB, JN), plus Northern Harrier, Horned Lark and Wilson's Snipe on 4th (JH, JN). Morton Road held 2 American Kestrels on 20th, 3 Vesper Sparrows on 23rd, and a Loggerhead Shrike on 24th (all JN), with a large flock of 5,000 Brown-headed Cowbirds and a Northern Harrier also noted on this date (RH).

A new county high count of Killdeer was documented on Old Elberton Road on 20th, and nearby, a flock of 65 American Pipits was found along Charlie Bolton Road the same day (both JN).

Cold weather in the latter half of the month resulted in some interesting backyard sightings, including 3 Fox Sparrows in the author's yard on 23rd (RH). And, an even more exciting visitor was a female hummingbird discovered at CJ's feeder on 18th and banded by KT on 24th, confirming its identify as a Rufous.

Keep your feeders clean and well-stocked, bird baths clean and filled with fresh water, and maybe you'll get a surprise visitor too!

Observers: Mirko Basen, Krista Gridley, Richard Hall, Jim Hanna, Mitchell Jarrett, Clark Jones, James Neves, Bill and Karla O'Grady, Karen Theodorou.



Photo of Loggerhead Shrike by Richard Hall, November 25, Morton Road in Athens

A Voyage to the Falkland Islands *summary of December meeting by Page Luttrell*

Thanks to Gary Kochert, former UGA biology professor, for his presentation *A Voyage to the Falkland Islands*. After his retirement, he worked as a naturalist on an expedition ship, the MS Polar Star, lecturing on geology and natural history and also assisting with field trips via zodiaks from the ship.

Kochert presented photos of a typical trip aboard the Polar Star including the ship, local people who hosted the expedition groups, and the villages in the Falkland Islands. He showed close-up pictures of birds, such as Black-browed Albatross, Striated Caracara, Southern Giant Petrel, several species of penguins, and sea mammals. The mammals included southern elephant seals and Commerson's dolphins.

Much of the land on these islands has been severely grazed by domestic animals (sheep, cows, horses) brought to the islands by British immigrants in the 19th century. Also, cats and rats were introduced by humans. These newcomers have threatened the native birds, especially the ground-nesters.

The tour groups visited the smaller islands off-shore from the two large main islands. Many of these islands are privately owned and now actively managed for wildlife and native habitats. On one island, the groups saw a huge nesting colony of Black-browed Albatrosses interspersed with Rockhopper Penguins. These two species nest together in native tussock grasses which they use for nest materials and protection from wind and predators.

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Return Service Requested



**Photo of Dark-eyed Junco by Richard Hall,
December, 2013, Athens (backyard)**

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