



# The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

January 2016

Vol. 27, No. 1

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

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

## **The Importance of Native River Cane**

Thomas Peters of Athens is an expert in propagating river cane. He will describe the ecological value of North America's only native bamboo species and his efforts to restore canebrakes. Peters earned a master's degree in landscape architecture from the University of Georgia and has recorded some success in propagating cane, which once formed dense stands along rivers throughout the Southeast. Millions of acres of cane have disappeared due to development, agriculture, grazing and other factors.

River cane not only provides habitat for wildlife, including birds like Swainson's Warblers, but it also provides a buffer along waterways which helps to reduce erosion and absorb some of the runoff from farms and developments. The Cherokee and other Southeastern natives had a variety of uses for cane, such as arrows, baskets and woven mats. European settlers used cane for whistles, tobacco pipes and fishing poles.

**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.

## **Message from the President: Make a New Year's Resolution for Each Season**

*by Brian Cooke*

When it's cold, it's easier to stay inside. It's easier to wait on bluebird spring days and the songs of warblers. But birds don't have that luxury, so why should we? Birds puff up and let their body heat warm up the space between the feathers, essentially creating something similar to that lonely down jacket that has spent months hanging in your hallway closet.

Make a New Year's resolution this year to take advantage of each season's outdoor opportunities. Rather than spend winter in the dark of your home, spend time at Lake Herrick or Sandy Creek Park with friends or a field guide, learning about the ducks rafted up in the frigid waters. Challenge yourself to learn your backyard trees by the bark alone.

Better yet, take a trip to the mountains to finally see the views off the ridgelines, which are masked with leaves in the summer. Or stay in Athens and work up a sweat pulling invasive plants at local parks.

In spring, put on your rain jacket, some boots, and head out to find those pesky migratory birds that have evaded your life list.

In the summer, find some friends, grab a canoe, and check out the Middle Oconee River. Fellow Athens-Clarke County residents are helping to set the stage for a water trail along the river.

Fall brings football games and busy weekends in Athens. Don't miss out on fall migration, so bring your binoculars wherever you go. That's the beauty of birding. You can do it from just about anywhere and in any season.

If there is something I've learned living in Athens, it's that many people are constantly making the effort to continue learning. So pick new birds to identify, find your own calling as a volunteer, or start learning a new activity.

Whatever you do, make every season about being outside this year. Have a great 2016!

## **The Ecology and Health of the White Ibis in Urban Florida** *summary of December meeting* by Katy Manley

Thanks to UGA postdoctoral research associate Maureen Murray and graduate research associate Shannon Curry who spoke on “The Ecology and Health of White Ibis in Urban Florida” at the ORAS general meeting on December 3.

Many of us have learned that White Ibis are birds that travel and forage in large flocks, often feeding on fiddler crabs. Maureen and Shannon are researching the impacts of urbanization as it applies to ibises being introduced to new foods (white bread, landfill refuse), new interactions (impact of people introducing the aforementioned white bread in parks), and new stressors from urban experiences like increased noise, traffic, and domesticated animals.

As part of their research, Maureen and Shannon monitor habitat, behaviors, and health of the ibises in Palm Beach County, Florida.

Using telemetry equipment and blood samples, the data collected shows that 44% of the birds monitored stay at urban sites almost all the time and 25% of the urbanized birds return to natural breeding colonies during breeding season.

Data also indicates urbanized ibises have higher levels of stress hormones than natural birds and further indicates that this chronic stress creates a dampened ability to appropriately respond to stressors. There is also an increased exposure to pathogens as indicated by the presence of antibodies but no confirmed cases of avian influenza.

Research on the differences between natural and urbanized ibises is ongoing, and it is important to note that some of the birds caught in an urban habitat never return to the urban area.

In the future, Murray and Curry will study how diet (white bread versus fiddler crabs) impacts susceptibility to disease and how movements throughout urban areas affect the spread of disease throughout the species.

The overall goal of the White Ibis Project urbanization study is learning more about the impact of urbanization on wildlife and public health.

This research is just one of many examples confirming why we should support our conservation efforts for the National Wildlife Refuge System, so if you haven't purchased your Federal Duck Stamp, please don't wait another day!

To learn more about the White Ibis Project, please visit:  
<http://hernandezlabuga.wix.com/wilddisease#!white-ibis-project/qivcm>



**Photo of White Ibises by Katy Manley in Phinizy Swamp, Georgia—January, 2015,**

## **Message from the President: Volunteer with Us and Other Local Organizations**

by Brian Cooke

**Weed Warriors:** January 2 & 16, February 6 & 20, March 5 & 19

Invasive species removal at Memorial Park in Athens  
(<http://www.athensclarkecounty.com/5175/Weed-Warriors>)

**Bird Nest Box Inventory & Maintenance:** Anytime  
Help inventory and maintain the nest boxes in public parks in Athens (email: [president@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:president@oconeeriversaudubon.org))

**Great Backyard Bird Count:** February 12-15  
Help out with basic bird ID activities around the community during the Great Backyard Bird Count  
(email: [president@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:president@oconeeriversaudubon.org))

**Yellowthroat:** Anytime  
Submit nature articles, poems, sketches and clear photographs to our monthly newsletter. All are welcome to give it a try! (email: [editor@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:editor@oconeeriversaudubon.org))

Do you know of other volunteer opportunities? Do you want to volunteer with another project with Oconee Rivers Audubon? Contact us using our email addresses posted on the ORAS website (<http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org>)

## The Athens Area Christmas Bird Count Short Report *by Eugenia Thompson*

The Athens area Christmas Bird Count (CBC) was held on Saturday December 19, 2015. Here is the CBC short report: It was a beautiful winter day, but the birding was slow. Forty participants got 87 species with a few more during count week. (Detailed report next month—please stay tuned).

## Shrubs to Plant for Wildlife *by Liz Conroy*

If you have a bare patch in your garden area or yard that's not quite large enough for a tree, or sunny enough for most flowers, consider planting a native shrub to benefit wildlife.

Birds and other animals seek food and shelter in many of our native shrubs. A shrub that has grown well in my own yard is the oakleaf hydrangea (*Hydrangea quercifolia*).

Georgia gardening experts Erica Glasener and Walter Reeves describe the oakleaf hydrangea as “the queen of shade-loving shrubs” in their book *50 Great Shrubs for Georgia*.

With its large summer blooms, peeling bark and broad leaves, it's perfect to plant along the edge of a woodland for all to see. Also, it must be tough if UGA has planted this shrub in many areas of campus.

Lately, we've had many heavy rains, so this is a good time to observe your yard closely and notice where water pools frequently. Never plant an oakleaf hydrangea in such places because it may get root rot. But it does require regular watering, especially when it's newly planted. You will know it's thirsty when the leaves droop. Also, be sure to prepare the site with: “Rich, moist, well-drained soil with lots of organic matter.” I never fertilized my oakleaf hydrangea or sprayed anything on it. It has no major pest or disease problems and likes a year-round mulch of pine straw. It can be pruned in late June if you like pruning.

Finally, protect the young shrub with wire fencing until it gets big enough to survive hungry deer. Then just enjoy it!

## The Bird in the Storm *by Karla O'Grady*

As we relax in our warm houses we can easily forget the difficulties birds have to deal with in bad weather.

A few years ago, during an ice storm, I watched a female Red-Shouldered Hawk trying to shake off the ice that coated her head, back and wings. Several times she tried to fly only to fall to a lower branch. Icicles were hanging from her feathers and breaking off as she shook like a wet dog.

Finally she gave one super “human” effort and disappeared into the woods. I could only hope she survived the storm.



Photo of White Ibis by Mark Freeman in Pinellas County, Florida—December 22, 2013

## The Bird and the Mole *by Robert Wyatt*

How glorious it is to be a bird!  
To skyrocket swiftly into the sky  
and ponder the world from a place so high.  
Not bound to solid ground, but free to fly  
wherever, with nary a reason why.  
This lofty planet of sunshine and air  
offers ups and downs beyond compare.  
Though to some it may sound strange: I love change.  
How glorious it is to be a bird!

How glorious it is to be a mole!  
To breaststroke slowly through soil underground,  
where worlds of savory insects abound.  
Not bound by day or night—no need for light—  
navigating more by sense of smell than sight.  
This planet called “Earth” is covered with soil,  
which smoothes ups and downs, trouble and toil.  
I stay within my range: I don't like change.  
How glorious it is to be a mole!



“Bird and Mole” by William Pierson of Athens, Georgia—December, 2015

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Return Service Requested

## Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program Nest Box Promotion *by Ryan Chitwood*

Become a Certified Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Homeowner by providing habitat for birds, wildlife, and native plants in our community! Submit an application by the end of the year and receive a bonus nuthatch nest box pending your yard's certification. For more information: [www.oconeeriversaudubon.org](http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org) Or please email: [conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org)



**Photo of Common Loon by Mike Conroy, Cass County, Minnesota—Sept. 18, 2015**

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Submit items to address above or e-mail *The Yellowthroat* editor Liz Conroy: [yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org) Articles, artwork, 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