



# The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the*

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

June/July 2013

Vol. 24, No. 6

## Next Meeting:

**Thursday, June 6, 6:00 p.m.**

## Annual Potluck Picnic at Memorial Park

Our Potluck Picnic begins at 6:00 p.m. at Memorial Park in picnic shelter number 1. Bring a covered dish and enjoy an evening of socializing in the outdoors. Also, the Election of Officers for the upcoming year takes place at this meeting.

Following is the list of nominees:

- Clark Jones, President
- Richard Hall, Vice-President
- Mary Case, Secretary
- Eugenia Thompson, Treasurer

To reach Memorial Park, go south on South Milledge Avenue from its intersection with Lumpkin Street and turn right on Gran Ellen Drive just past Milledge Avenue Baptist Church. After several blocks, Memorial Park will be on your left. Take the first left, and shelter 1 will be down the hill on the right.

## See You in September – Save this Date!

In September, ORAS will meet on our usual first Thursday of each month. The September 5 meeting location is still to be decided (more details later). Also, while we don't meet in July and August, stay current on bird sightings at our webpage: <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/>

## Sightings Reported at May Meeting

Long-eared Owl, Cobb Street, 4/9, Krista Gridley  
Indigo Bunting, Daniel's Bridge Road, 5/2, Steve Duke  
Woodchuck, Cedar Creek, 4/27, Ann Berrigan  
Mississippi Kite, Simonton Bridge Road near Hickory Hills Subdivision, Oconee County, 4/26, 10/4, Eugenia Thompson  
Cooper's Hawk, Southeast Clarke County, 4/28, Eugenia Thompson

## A Special Thanks to ORAS by Mike Conroy

Special thanks to the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society for its sponsorship of the EURING 2013 Analytical Meeting and Workshop—an international ornithological and statistical ecology conference held in approximately three year intervals, alternating between Europe and some other continent.

This year the conference took place in Athens from April 28 through May 4 at The Georgia Center on the UGA campus. It is only the third time that this conference has been held in the United States.

ORAS provided a \$100 donation that was awarded for Best Poster and Best Presentation to Deborah Pardo of the British Antarctic Survey for “How Do Reproductive Trade-offs Change While Aging in Wandering Albatrosses”

Additional thanks are also due to Richard Hall for leading an international group of scientists on an exciting birding trip through Phinizy Swamp. During the day, more than 80 species of birds were sighted, along with some signature southeastern reptiles including American alligators and a rather irritated cottonmouth. Good show!



Photo of cottonmouth by William A. Link

## April 2013 Clarke County eBird Sightings Summary *by Richard Hall*

162 species were reported to eBird from Clarke County in April 2013, compared with 163 in 2012 and 159 in 2011.

The highlights of the month were the incredible discovery of a Long-eared Owl in KG's backyard on 9<sup>th</sup> (see Krista's article in this issue), and the second recent county record of Upland Sandpiper found at Charlie Bolton Road the same day (MB, JN) and staying until at least 16<sup>th</sup>.

New county high counts set in April 2013 included 11 Great Blue Herons at State Botanical Garden on 8<sup>th</sup> (JN), 150 Northern Rough-winged Swallows at Lake Chapman on 4<sup>th</sup> (MJ) and 60 Barn Swallows there on 28<sup>th</sup> (RH), 5 Prairie Warblers on the ORAS walk to Whitehall Forest on 13<sup>th</sup> and 6 Orange-crowned Warblers at Lake Herrick on 18<sup>th</sup> (MB, JH, MJ, JN).

New early dates were set for Forster's Tern at Lake Chapman on 4<sup>th</sup> (MJ), Blackpoll Warbler at Lake Herrick (MB, RH) and Northern Waterthrush at the State Botanical Garden on 11<sup>th</sup> (JH), Yellow Warbler in RH's backyard and Swainson's Thrush in MJ's backyard on 16<sup>th</sup>, Eastern Wood-pewee in Whitehall Forest and Mississippi Kites over JN's and BKOG's backyards on 18<sup>th</sup> (JH).

New seasonal late dates were recorded for Fox Sparrow in RH's backyard until 1<sup>st</sup>, Rufous Hummingbird in KG's backyard until 2<sup>nd</sup>, Vesper Sparrow at College Station Road on 14<sup>th</sup> (RH) and Horned Grebe (2) at Lake Chapman on 25<sup>th</sup> (MB).

Lingering waterfowl at Lake Herrick included 2 Lesser Scaup on 8<sup>th</sup> (RH, MB) and a Bufflehead on 10<sup>th</sup> (TM), while 18 Common Loons and a Ruddy Duck appeared at Lake Chapman on 28<sup>th</sup> (RH, JH, MJ). A flyover flock of 40 Double-crested Cormorants was seen on the ORAS Whitehall walk on 13<sup>th</sup>. Great Egrets were seen at the landfill on 9<sup>th</sup> (MB, JN) and the State Botanical Garden on 16<sup>th</sup> (MJ, JN). Multiple Osprey sightings included a bird carrying nesting material on Morton Road on 12<sup>th</sup> (RH). The landfill hosted shorebirds including a Least Sandpiper on 25<sup>th</sup> (MB) and Wilson's Snipe until 29<sup>th</sup> (MB, RH).

Noteworthy nightbirds included 2 counter-singing Eastern Screech-Owls on Cook's Trail on 22<sup>nd</sup> (JN), a Chuck-Will's-Widow over EM's house on 1<sup>st</sup>, and an Eastern Whip-poor-will at Lake Herrick on 27<sup>th</sup> (KB, RB, TM). A Merlin dashed through Lake Chapman on 9<sup>th</sup> (RH).

Potential breeding passerines included singing Horned Lark on Charlie Bolton Road until at least 12<sup>th</sup> (MB, RH, JN), Cliff Swallows seen from the Atlanta Highway bridge over the Oconee River (RH) and Ben Burton Park (JH), and multiple reports of singing Grasshopper Sparrows. At least one Swainson's Warbler was on territory in the State Botanical Garden from 11<sup>th</sup>, but the total number was hard to

ascertain due to the returning territorial Hooded Warbler singing perfect Swainson's song the same day.

Lingering winterers included Red-breasted Nuthatch at UGA's Ecology building until 17<sup>th</sup> (RH), White-crowned Sparrow at the landfill and RH's backyard until month end, 31 Rusty Blackbirds along Cook's Trail on 6<sup>th</sup> (SG), and an amazing 200 Pine Siskins still at BKOG's feeders on 30<sup>th</sup>.

Scarce migrants included a Lincoln's Sparrow in the State Botanical Garden on 5<sup>th</sup> (CJ), Bobolinks at the South Milledge Fields on 21<sup>st</sup> (RH) and Sandy Creek Park on 28<sup>th</sup> (MB), a Canada Warbler at Lake Herrick on 29<sup>th</sup> (JH) and a Veery there on 30<sup>th</sup> (RH).

Observers: Mirko Basen, Ken Blankenship, Rebecca Byrd, Scott Gravette, Krista Gridley, Richard Hall, Jim Hanna, Mitchell Jarrett, Clark Jones, Ed Maioriello, Trey McCuen, James Neves, Bill and Karla O'Grady



Photo of Upland Sandpiper by Richard Hall

### Give the Gift of Audubon!

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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

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## What the Crows Knew *by Krista Gridley*

I was oblivious to the visitor in my backyard, but the crows knew. They also had an opinion about the situation, one that they were voicing loudly. “Caw, caw, caw...” over and over, they were relentless with their harassment.

Standing in my kitchen, my curiosity was piqued. I walked out onto the back porch for a closer look and noticed a bird perched about ten feet off the ground in a Cherry Laurel tree. Thinking it too small for one of our resident Barred Owls, I wondered if it could be one of their fledglings. With the crows now trying to peck at the bird, I decided to intervene.

As I approached the tree, an owl and I exchanged the briefest of looks, and my first thought was, “I don’t know you.” An instant later it flew down my driveway, with the crows and me in hot pursuit. It crossed my street and landed low in an evergreen shrub, surrounded by the raucous crows. I ran back for my spotting scope so I could view it without getting too close. Having never seen this bird before, I started the owl litany: tufts on the head, too big for a Screech Owl, too small and slim for a Great Horned Owl, looks like a Long-eared Owl, but it can’t be one of those. Or can it? Suddenly it dawned on me that I needed a picture, and I reached for my phone. An empty pocket reminded me that it was charging in the kitchen. I ran to get it, hoping the owl would stay. It did, and I managed a few pictures through the scope before it flew down my driveway to its original perch, with its entourage close behind.

Richard Hall confirmed my suspicion after viewing an e-mailed photo, and promptly left his out-of-town dinner guests sitting at the National Restaurant. Others soon arrived, and we were able to observe it easily from the driveway. A striking bird with tall ear tufts, it appeared healthy and alert. Dark vertical stripes through the bright yellow eyes were accented by a rusty color on the sides of the face. The back was a soft brown color with a heavily barred chest and belly. It never vocalized. Finally, it took off again, and this time we were unable to relocate it.

Richard did a little research on previous Long-eared Owl sightings, and it seems this will be the 1<sup>st</sup> official record for Clarke County and the 8<sup>th</sup> for Georgia. The last documented bird was on Tybee Island in 2005. Normally this species ranges from the central United States into Canada. A nocturnal hunter, it typically roosts during the day in thick evergreens or brush, making it a difficult bird to locate. Even though our neighborhood is only a mile from downtown Athens, our preserved trees and vegetation may have made it an attractive place to stop over.

I didn’t sleep a wink that night – a life bird, a Georgia bird, and an awesome yard bird! The next morning I was in the yard at daybreak, just in time to see the crows fly into the now infamous Cherry Laurel. “Caw, caw, caw...” Every branch was investigated, and apparently satisfied, they dispersed as quickly as they arrived. The crows knew, and because they did, so did I. It was gone.



Photo of Long-eared Owl by Krista Gridley

## I Meant to Drive to Work Today\*

*by Grady Thrasher*

I meant to drive to work today.  
I was up at dawn to join the fray.  
The city with its office towers  
required me for at least eight hours.

Then a birdsong beckoned me to stay,  
and since I was early anyway,  
a few more minutes could do no harm  
to watch the sunrise o’er the farm.

I knew I should be leaving soon,  
but circling Swallows kept me ‘til noon,  
while Red-winged Blackbirds seem to chatter,  
“Another hour could hardly matter.”

By afternoon I couldn’t part  
from Nature’s feathered works of art,  
As crimson Cardinals and Purple Martins  
chirped, “Now’s no time to be departing!”

When shadows grew long, I thought of town,  
but a dazzling sunset held me bound  
by its stunning skyworks’ light revival,  
as a Whippoorwill hailed night’s arrival.

I might have gone to work today.  
I could have earned my daily pay.  
But Nature’s treasures made me stay,  
and a beckoning birdsong got in my way.

\*(from *Tim and Sally’s Year in Poems* by Grady Thrasher)

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

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**Gary Crider (left) receiving Alec Little Environmental Award from Larry Dendy. Photo by Roger Nielsen**

### **Excerpt from Larry Dendy's speech:**

“If I said the words, ‘Volunteer Extraordinaire for the Environment,’ the first name likely to pop into many of your minds would be Gary Crider. . . board member and one of the backbones of the Oconee River Audubon Society since that group's beginning and [who] strongly supported their efforts to protect habitat for birds and other wildlife. For many of us, birding came alive through the vivid, lyrical accounts of birding expeditions that Gary and his friend Maggie Nettles wrote for the ORAS newsletter . . . .”

### **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

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