



# The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the  
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

March 2010

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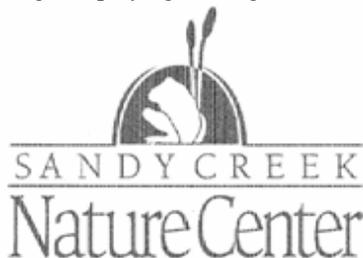
## Next Meeting Thursday, March 4 at 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center

Dr. Karl Miller, research scientist and instructor in wildlife biology in the University of Georgia's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, will talk about "Southeastern Plants and their Wildlife Uses" at the March 7 meeting.

He and his students have conducted extensive research on the interactions among physiology, behavioral ecology, social behavior, management, and habitat requirements of white-tailed deer and the impact of forest management practices on game and nongame wildlife populations in the southeastern United States. He co-hosted *Quality Whitetails*, a television show once aired weekly on the Outdoor Channel by the Quality Deer Management Association, which focused on sound management and stewardship of wildlife habitat and acted as a forum for hunter and land manager education.

Dr. Miller has developed a distinguished reputation as a widely respected authority in deer management research over the past 20 years and is author of the books *Quality Deer Management* and *Forest Plants of the Southeast and their Wildlife Uses*, along with over 150 other professional reports and publications.

**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.

## Spring Bird Walks & Field Trips

Have you heard the birds starting to sing? It's time to get outdoors and join the spring bird walks, which ORAS sponsors jointly with Sandy Creek Nature Center. Whether you are an experienced birder or a beginner, come join us as we witness the miracle of the northward migration.

Come to the monthly meeting or email Jonathan Gray at [fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org) for information about specific bird walks and field trips.

- March 20: USDA Agriculture Research Service property (Watkinsville)  
7:00 a.m.-12:00 noon: meet at Shops of South Athens parking lot by the Waffle House on South Milledge near the bypass
- March 27: State Botanical Garden  
8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.: meet at the upper parking lot by Day Chapel
- April 3: Sandy Creek Park  
8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.: meet at the last parking lot on Campsite Drive across the dam; the gates open at 8 a.m.
- April 10: Whitehall Forest  
8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.: meet in the driveway at the end of South Milledge Road (go through T-junction with Whitehall Road into Whitehall Forest)
- April 17: Sandy Creek Nature Center  
8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.: meet at the Allen House parking lot (the 1st lot on the left)
- April 24: Charlie Elliot Wildlife Center  
7:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.: meet at the Shops of South Athens parking lot by the Waffle House on South Milledge near the bypass
- May 1: State Botanical Garden  
8:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.: meet at the upper parking lot near Day Chapel
- May 8: Kennesaw Mountain  
7:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m.: meet at the Shops of South Athens parking lot by the Waffle House on South Milledge near the bypass

## ***The Breeding Bird Atlas of Georgia***

from <http://www.ugapress.org/>

*The Breeding Bird Atlas of Georgia* is the first statewide distributional survey of Georgia's breeding birds (University of Georgia Press). The editors are Todd M. Schneider, Giff Beaton, Timothy S. Keyes, and Nathan A. Klaus. Pierre Howard has provided a forward.

This is a comprehensive historical record of all free-ranging bird species known to be breeding in Georgia around the beginning of the new millennium. The atlas profiles 182 species, from the sociable House Wren to the secretive Black Rail; from the thriving Red-shouldered Hawk to the threatened Wilson's Plover. The atlas is the result of a systematic survey conducted from 1994 to 2001, the massive collaborative effort of several private organizations, public agencies, and many individuals. It offers a wealth of information critical to bird-conservation efforts and provides a baseline so that changes to species ranges, numbers, and other significant aspects of each species' status can be better understood.

Each species account includes

- Color photograph of the bird
- Information on the bird's habitat and life history, distribution, population trends, and conservation status. Details discussed include diet, nesting habits, life cycle of the young, predators, and interactions with humans.
- Color distribution map showing the state's six ecoregions and indicating possible, probable, and confirmed breeding
- Graphs showing population trends

Also included are chapters on the survey methodology, results of the surveys, influence of the physical environments of the state on bird distribution, changes in the avifauna since European settlement, and bird conservation.

**Todd M. Schneider** is a wildlife biologist with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division, Nongame Conservation Section. **Giff Beaton** is the author of *Birding Georgia* and coauthor of *Birds of Georgia*. **Timothy S. Keyes** is a wildlife biologist with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division, Nongame Conservation Section. **Nathan A. Klaus** is a senior wildlife biologist with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division, Nongame Conservation Section.

## **Cobb Street Rufous Hummingbird**

by Krista Gridley

It was the tenth of January and temperatures in Athens had dropped into the teens the night before. I stood at the kitchen window washing dishes and casually surveying the birds at my feeders. Out of nowhere, a blur appeared in front of my solidly frozen hummingbird feeder!

I admit that for years now I have been keeping my hummingbird feeders out all winter because everyone said that I should. That a bird would actually show up was quite a surprise! Quickly retrieving the feeder, I thawed it out and replaced the sugar water. Moments after hanging it out again, the hummingbird was back, returning to the feeder throughout the day. In fact, she stayed with us for twelve days before moving on to wherever she was going in the first place.

Our unexpected guest gave us more unexpected guests, as birders came by to take a look, get some photos, or have lunch with her. After finding out that she was likely a first-year female Rufous Hummingbird, she acquired the name "Lucy" for the rest of her stay on Cobb Street. We hoped to get her banded, but missed that window of opportunity. If she comes back, we'll try again.

We've actually missed having Lucy around and are looking forward to having our "summer hummers" show up soon. In the meantime, our feeders will stay full, fresh, and thawed!



Photo by Richard Hall

**Editor's note:** If you want to keep up with exciting local sightings, check out the ORAS QuickTopic message board at <http://www.quicktopic.com/29/H/6JbdZFsuhUc6>

## Cazadorcita: The Little Huntress

summarized by Maggie Nettles

Climate Change and Global Warming, the Georgia Coast and Central America, Neotropical Migrants, and What We Can Do!

When I asked Dr. Ron Carroll, professor in UGA's Odum School of Ecology and Director of the River Basin Center, to address the Audubon group, I threw all these phrases at him as subjects we needed to hear about. At a crowded February meeting, he linked all these topics together in a smooth presentation that added the urgency of new scientific data and references to the January 2010 Copenhagen Climate Conference.

Dr. Carroll opened with charts and maps illustrating population growth in the Southeast and pointing out the impossibility of sustaining such exponential growth. He noted that currently Georgia falls in the geographic range that receives the extreme fluctuations of climate change—both wet and dry—rather than an averaging and that it will continue to do so in the future. He illustrated dire consequences for the Georgia coastline—prime real estate disappearing into the ocean and mud replacing the revitalizing spartina grass marshes.

Then he went on to explain the links between Georgia's future climate and what is happening now with the droughts of the Costa Rican wet seasons. Even minor changes can disrupt such carefully balanced relationships as the one between the Central America fig trees, a keystone species that provides year-round food, and the wasps that pollinate them.

Dr. Carroll used the life of the Tennessee Warbler, *Vermivora peregrina*, to illustrate how interconnected we all are. "Cazadorcita" is the Costa Rican vernacular name for the bird. "The Little Huntress" eats more caterpillars, he said, than all other warblers put together. It needs the forests of Costa Rica, with both its nectar-producing plants and its insects, as a wintering place. It needs high quality stopover greenspace in Georgia to fuel its migration. And it needs the outbreaks of spruce budworm in the Canadian boreal forests to correspond precisely with its nesting time. Climate change threatens all these carefully evolved synchronicities.

**Question from the editor:** Do you know the link between your weather and dust clouds in Mali? Dr. Carroll explained the connection! If you missed the February meeting, you missed an opportunity to have current climate research summed up for you.

Look for "Loon Story: Additional Notes, Parts Two and Three" in upcoming issues of *The Yellowthroat*.

## Loon Story: Additional Notes, Part I

by Tim Homan

Although their wails may sound primitive, loons are highly advanced, or specialized, birds. This specialization, this divergence into a pigeon-holed niche, has transformed them to the extent that even lumpers went along with assigning loons their own separate Order (Gaviiformes).

Common loons may live up to 25 to 30 years, and there is compelling evidence they return to the same breeding territory every spring. This species' common name does not originate from the source routinely supposed: its crazy, loony, maniacal-sounding tremolos and yodels. The name "loon" is derived from old English and Scandinavian words meaning awkward or clumsy, referring to *Gavia immer*'s laughable inability to walk on land.

The common loon that surfaced near our stationary canoe rode high in the water and held its head aloft, making itself appear larger, a sign of intended dominance. While this military bearing did not fetch fear in us, other loons, all other waterfowl, and some of the mammals sharing the loon's breeding territory either do, or should, pay close attention to loon body language. These fiery-eyed birds back up their warrior-like looks with aggressive behavior. During breeding season territorial defense toward other waterfowl, including Canada geese, is fierce. Numerous observers have reported loons attacking mallards, and they are known to attack and kill adult common mergansers. This deep-diving species also defends its territory against beaver, otter, raccoon, muskrat, and snapping turtle. In Maine, researchers stared in surprise as several common loons mobbed a swimming coyote. *Gavia immer* is a stealthy submarine adept at underwater attack, an unseen spear thrust from below.

In the memoir of his Wisconsin childhood, John Muir wrote of the household cat's encounter with a captured common loon. The loon was sitting peaceably next to the fire. The cat, wanting to give the gawky interloper a quick lesson in territorial ownership—or worse—crept to within an easy pounce of the dagger-billed waterbird. But before the crouching feline could launch, the northern diver drilled him right between the eyes. That was the yowling end to the encounter.

Native Americans have long admired the courage and fighting spirit of the loon. *Mahng* is the Ojibway word for both bravery and loon. Among the Ojibway, "loon-hearted" was a compliment bestowed upon an exceptionally brave individual—such as in Longfellow's poem, "Song of Hiawatha."

*All the guests praised Hiawatha,  
Called him Strong-Heart,  
Called him Loon-Heart.*

## Oconee Rivers Audubon Society Chairs

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The Georgia Ornithological Society's Spring 2010 Conference is April 16-18, 2010, at The Georgia Center, Athens, Georgia. For details, see <http://www.gos.org/meetings/2010-spring-reservation.pdf>

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