



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

March 2013

Vol. 24, No. 3

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

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Birds ARE Dinosaurs!

Ray Freeman-Lynde, an associate professor in UGA's Department of Geology, will discuss how the boundary between birds and feathered dinosaurs is now blurry, thanks to the plethora of new feathered dinosaurs from China.

Eco-Haiku by Robert Wyatt

English ivy climbs
high up in an old oak tree—
smothers it to death.

Dogwoods flower profusely,
Produce an abundance of fruit.
Rose-breasted Grosbeaks feast.

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.

Spring Bird Walks – Think Spring!

Bird walks are from **8 a.m.-11a.m. or noon**. However, attendees may leave early. Please be sure to check ORAS announcements for any changes to this schedule.

- Mar. 23: **State Botanical Garden** (Day Chapel)
- Mar. 30: **Sandy Creek Park**
- Apr. 06: **Sandy Creek Nature Center**
- Apr. 13: **Whitehall (S. Milledge & Whitehall Rd.)**

(Attendees for the Whitehall walk must be on time).

Sightings Reported at February Meeting

Pine Siskins (25), Sandhill Cranes (3), North High Shoals, Oconee County, 2/3, Steve Holzman
Pine Siskins (47), Sandy Creek Park, 2/7, Old Farmington Rd, Oconee County, Mark Freeman
Pine Siskins (50), Athens, 2/4, Gary Crider
Bald Eagle (immature), Hardigree Wildlife Sanctuary, Oconee County, 2/2, Mark Freeman
Greater White-fronted Geese (3), Highway 53, Oconee County, 2/3 Carole Ludwig
Orange House Finch, Athens (feeder), 2/24 Mary Case



Photo of Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow by Richard Hall

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

95 species were reported to eBird from the county in Jan 2013, compared with 85 in 2012 and 92 in 2011. The most notable finds were the first county record of a White-winged Dove visiting feeders in the River Oaks subdivision all month (SH), and the second county record of a dazzling male Painted Bunting found at the ACC landfill on 11th (MJ). The rarity of this species in the Piedmont Region begs the question of whether this is last year's returning bird.

Waterfowl highlights at the Oxbow Lake included a maximum count of 4 Black Duck on 6th (JAH, JH), and 5 Gadwall and 2 American Wigeon on 30th (RH). Lake Chapman was generally slow for ducks, but hosted 2 Redheads on 19th (JN) and 2 Ring-billed Gulls on 25th (CJ). Lake Herrick was graced by a drake Ring-necked Duck and 1-2 Double-crested Cormorants present all month.

A Wild Turkey was recorded at the State Botanical Garden on 5th (MB), a Northern Harrier was at the ACC landfill on and off all month, and a Wilson's Snipe was at the South Milledge fields on 24th (MF).

A maximum of 6 American Woodcock were seen at the State Botanical Garden on 7th (RH). At least 3 wintering Rufous Hummingbirds remained in the Athens area throughout (KG, BKOG).

A Loggerhead Shrike was present on Morton Road on 11th (RH). Red-breasted Nuthatches continue to be widespread, with a good count of 5 at BKOG's feeders. A Gray Catbird was seen at Little Lake Herrick on 28th (JH).

An excellent count of 85 American Pipits came from the S Milledge fields on 24th (MF). Surprising for such an urban location, RH's yard hosted single Fox and White-crowned Sparrows over multiple days.

The highest count of Rusty Blackbirds was of 32 along Newton Bridge Road on 31st (MB, TB, RH, MJ). Purple Finches and Pine Siskins continued to be widespread, with maximum counts of 15 of the former in the State Botanical Garden on 13th (RH) and 31 of the latter in BKOG's yard on 25th.

Observers: Mirko and Timo Basen, Mark Freeman, Krista Gridley, Richard Hall, Jim Hanna, Jim and Allison Healy, Steve Holland, Mitchell Jarrett, Clark Jones, James Neves, Bill and Karla O'Grady,



Photo of Painted Bunting by John Whigham

Study of Kitty Cams: Insights into the Daily Life of a Free-roaming Cat

summary of February meeting by Carole Ludwig

Thanks to Sonia Hernandez, an assistant professor of wildlife disease who holds a joint appointment in UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources and the College of Veterinary Medicine's Southern Cooperative Wildlife Disease Study, for presenting the February program: **Kitty Cams: The Effects of Cats on Urban Wildlife**.

Her talk was based on the research that she and her collaborators—Anne Lloyd, Kyler Abernathy and Grey Marshall—are conducting. Their work has drawn the attention of the national media. For this study, 55 healthy, owned, free-roaming suburban Clarke County cats were fitted with point-of-view cameras (strapped to their necks) to learn how often the felines stalked and caught wildlife as well as the dangers they faced as they roamed and hunted.

The resulting images were then analyzed by the team and conclusions drawn concerning where the cats went, what they preyed upon, the disposition of that prey, and risks encountered by the cats.

The objective of the study was to quantify both the cat's hunting of wildlife and the risk behavior of the cats. Studies have estimated that free-roaming cats contribute to more wildlife mortality than all other human reasons combined.

Risk factors for the cats included shortened life span (3-5 years) from autos, storm drains, poison, disease, parasites, entrapment in trees, crawl spaces and car engines, and aggression from other cats, dogs and wild animals.

President's Message: Spring 2013 Call for Proposals for ORAS Small Grants

by Richard Hall

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) would like to support a student(s), teacher(s), individual, or a group conducting research, designing outreach or educational activities, or working on habitat improvement which will benefit birds and other native wildlife in the Athens area.

Awards are typically in the region of \$300. The amount is slightly flexible depending on the nature of the project.

Successful applicants are expected to either write a short report for our monthly newsletter, *The Yellowthroat*, or to give an oral presentation lasting 30 minutes to an hour at one of our monthly speaker meetings.

The proposal should be approximately two to three pages in length (single or 1.5 spaced). It must describe how the project will benefit birds, wildlife, and the Athens area community.

Also, each proposal must include an itemized list of supplies which would be purchased with the grant money.

Please e-mail applications to:
ORAS President Richard Hall:
president@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Deadline for receipt of these proposals is April 1, 2013.

Runner-Up Logo in ORAS Competition

by Jason Coombs



A Wonderful Wildlife Sanctuary: (A Cautionary Tale on What We Plant Today Can Become Tomorrow's Invasive Problem)

by Sue and Ed Wilde

In August 2012, ORAS certified our Five Points ½ acre lot as a wildlife sanctuary and presented us with a small sign which we proudly display in our front yard. The sign indicates to passersby that we have taken steps to protect our small piece of Georgia native habitat, and that we are encouraging birds and other wildlife to co-exist with us.

Our lot is long and narrow. The back area is a woodland sloping down to a small stream. When we moved here in 1999, the entire lot, with the exception of the mowed front lawn, was overrun with English ivy, a mono-culture blanketing the ground and climbing high into every tree.

After discovering a beautiful slate walkway and three sets of slate steps buried under the ivy, we began to take action to eradicate this horrible ground-cover. At first we enlisted the help of an energetic graduate student of horticulture who demonstrated that it is indeed possible to clear large areas of ivy by hand. He also showed us methods for eliminating privet, bush honeysuckle (Amur honeysuckle), Asian holly, Nandina, Liriope, Asian wisteria, and other exotic invasive plants. Ironically, many of the plant species which we were eradicating were the very same ones that I had been guilty of planting in our previous house.

The restoration of our backyard habitat became a real learning experience for us. One of the most important lessons we learned is that what we innocently plant in our gardens today often becomes the source of invasive infestations in our urban forests tomorrow.

Also, we read Doug Tallamy's eye-opening plant book, *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens*. Tallamy points out that, by planting only exotic plants, we deprive insects and caterpillars of their food source since they don't recognize non-native species as food. Diminishing insect and butterfly populations negatively affects birds. It deprives them of this very important protein source that they depend on to feed their nesting young.

As we removed the non-natives from our backyard woods, we planted trees, shrubs, ferns, and wildflowers—all of them native to the Georgia Piedmont—in an effort to attract birds and other wildlife. Our efforts were worth it! We have been rewarded by an increase in numbers and varieties of birds.

We hope that others will be inspired to have their yards certified as wildlife-friendly and will contact ORAS. By taking advantage of their expert advice on plant choices, many Athens' gardens and yards could be transformed into the bird and wildlife-friendly places that they once were before the land was developed.

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

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Important Request from Georgia IBA*:

Feral cat colonies are a major hazard to native birds (and reptiles and rodents). There is a big push by the cat colony people to make this dangerous activity mainstream. They have now convinced a major manufacturer to help them.

Please let Rubbermaid know what you think about this:
<http://www.erubbermaid.com/roughneck-homes?mid=57>

* Georgia Important Bird Areas Program (GA IBA) is a partnership of the eight Audubon Societies in Georgia and the National Audubon Society. Please check out their website: <http://www.atlantaudubon.org/iba/>

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Submit information to address above or e-mail *The 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.