



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

March 2014

Vol. 25, No. 3

Next Meeting:

**Thursday, March 6, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

“Birdscaping” Your Own Backyard

Whether you have less than one half acre or more than ten acres, there are ways to make your yard much more bird-friendly. Go beyond just providing bird seed and take it to the next level! Steve Holzman will suggest great flowers, vines, shrubs and trees to help bring the birds to you and will discuss ways to protect these birds from a variety of hazards. Also, there will be a brief discussion about the ORAS Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program.

Holzman has a B.S in Zoology from Southern Illinois University and a M.S. in Wildlife Biology from the University of Georgia. He has worked for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for 23 years and is currently the President of the Georgia Ornithological Society. He has proudly called himself a birder since 1986. He and his wife Rachel live in North High Shoals (Oconee County) with Steve's daughter Ava, two dogs, a rabbit, and four chickens.

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 dress for the weather, wear practical shoes, hats and bring insect repellent and snacks/water as desired. (Also, check ORAS announcements and website for any last minute changes to this schedule).

If you have other questions please contact Ed Maioriello at fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org

- Mar. 22:**State Botanical Garden**
- Mar. 29:**Sandy Creek Park**
- Apr. 05:**Sandy Creek Nature Center (SCNC)**
- Apr. 12:**Whitehall (S. Milledge & Whitehall Rd.)**
- Apr. 19:**State Botanical Garden (Day Chapel)**
- May 03:**SCNC-Cook’s Trail (clean-up)**

(Attendees for the Whitehall walk must be on time, and attendees for Cook’s Trail walk are asked to bring trash bags for picking up litter on the way out while still birding).

Spring Field Trips (out of town) *

Apr. 26 6:00 a.m. Kennesaw Mountain

May 10 7:00 a.m. Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center

* Please check listserv announcements for any changes in times and/or where to meet to carpool.

Eco-haiku by Robert Wyatt

Red-tailed hawk hunting—
spies a defenseless field mouse—
strikes. . . grasps only grass.

Birds at my feeder,
devouring seed at warp speed.
Cold weather coming.

January 2014 Clarke County eBird Sightings Summary *by Clark Jones*

101 species were reported to eBird for Clarke County during January compared to 99 in 2013, and 89 in 2012.

It was a good month for waterfowl with numerous sightings of American Black Duck at the Oxbow Lake on Cook's Trail (KG, RH, MB, JN), as well as on Lake Chapman at Sandy Creek Park (JN, MB, MJ, RH, JH) and Bear Creek Reservoir (JN).

Canvasback, a rare species on lakes in Athens, were seen at both Lake Chapman and Lake Herrick (MB, MJ, JN, RH). During the inclement weather James Neeves spotted a pair of Greater Scaup resting on Lake Chapman on January 28.

Owls have been reported in decent numbers as they have become more territorial and begun initiating nesting. Barred Owl (JN, RH, KG), Great Horned Owl (RH, KG, MB), and Barn Owl (RH, CM), were all reported during the month of January, although there was a conspicuous absence of Eastern Screech Owls. A Rufous Hummingbird was still present at Krista Gridley's residence through January and a Loggerhead Shrike was present off of Morton Rd. (JN, RH, MB).

The always cryptic Brown Creeper was sighted in several locations across Athens including a sighting by RH in Five Points, as well as sightings at Lake Herrick (MP, DB, RH) and the State Botanical Garden of Georgia (JH). Over 150 American Pipits were reported to eBird at locations across Athens-Clarke County including Lake Herrick (MB), the UGA fields on South Milledge (JN), the Landfill (RH), and Morton Rd. (RH, JN).

A lone, wintering Black-and-white Warbler was sighted off of Dearing St. early in the month (MJ), as well as a lone Catbird on the Greenway (CJ), and both probably wished they spent the winter further south with the weather we've been having around lately.

Interestingly, only two reports came in for Purple Finches (CJ, CK), but Rusty Blackbirds made a strong showing with many reports from various locations including the Greenway (CJ), Lake Herrick (MB, JN), Dearing St. (MJ), Cook's Trail (JW, RH, CJ), and Morton Road (JN).

Spring is just around the corner and migrants will be showing up before you know it!

Observers: CJ-Clark Jones, CK-Christine Kozlosky, DB-David Blount, JH-Jim Hanna, JN-James Neeves, KG-Krista Gridley, MB-Mirko Basen, MJ-Mitchell Jarrett, MP-Meg Patton, RH-Richard Hall

Orianna Society: Partnering with UGA

summary of February meeting by Liz Conroy

Like a thick, silky rope, the Eastern Indigo Snake (Indigo) slid smoothly across my arms. Orianna Society Program Manager Heidi Hall explained that this snake was raised in captivity. Years ago, staff members released its siblings into the wild but kept this one for public gatherings, including the social gathering after the ORAS meeting in February.

Earlier that evening, Chief Operating Officer Christopher Jenkins described how the Orianna Society began in 2008 after a young girl asked her father to help save the Indigo. Today, the society's conservation efforts focus on protecting the Indigo, other imperiled snakes, and the ecosystems they inhabit.

In his talk, Jenkins explained how the Indigo uses a variety of habitats such as scrub forests, wetland habitats, and longleaf pine sandhills. The longleaf ecosystem is particularly important for the Indigo. Today, only two percent of the longleaf ecosystem remains. He described what the vast forests were like before European settlers moved into the Southeast and then on into Texas.

Longleaf pine trees grew far apart with plenty of wiregrass in between. The forests were "fire-dependent" and burned frequently. Longleaf pines evolved to survive hot, fast moving fires sweeping through large parts of the forest.

Gopher Tortoises survive these regular fires by digging deep burrows for protection. Also, the burrows keep out the winter cold. "Their burrows are an important feature in the landscape," said Jenkins. Especially since the burrows are used by many other species—from large Indigos and rattlesnakes, to smaller creatures such as insects.

The docile, non-venomous Indigo (*Drymarchon couperi*) or "Emperor of the Forest" is actually the top predator of predators. It swallows venomous rattlesnakes, even though they spend winters together in the burrows. It may seem great to have lunch close at hand, but enter the humans and their yearly rattlesnake round-ups. "Gasoline fumes are pumped down into the burrows to get the rattlesnakes out," said Jenkins. Other resident animals sharing the burrow die from the toxic fumes or get captured by the humans. Also, Indigos are often killed by motor vehicles on roads. They are wide-ranging animals and habitat loss and fragmentation contribute to their decline.

The Orianna Society, a 501(c) 3 public charity, continues to work to acquire more land and partner with private land owners as well as with UGA. In March, the society moves to the UGA campus at Whitehall as part of the UGA Institute of Herpetology. Visit: www.oriannesociety.org

How to Observe the Prairie Warbler

by Nancy Miorelli

During the summer of 2010, I worked in the Albany Pine Bush on the effects of habitat fragmentation on Prairie Warbler nesting success. As this was the first time I had ever dabbled in birding, I quickly learned many new things:

1) Birds get up early.

This means that while I was getting ready for bed in the dorm bathroom at 8:00 p.m., other girls next to me were getting ready to go out for the night.

2) Binoculars are hard to use.

Especially when you get an inchworm on the lens. My boss could instantaneously find a bird in the binoculars and read the bands on its legs. I, however, had a hard enough time finding the tree the bird was in, let alone the bird itself or its colored bands.

3) Soft chipping is difficult to hear over road noise.

Paired males and females communicate with a soft chip and not a full song. At one point my boss asked, "Can you hear that soft chipping? They're talking to each other!" I responded, "No. I hear a truck."

4) Birds are more aware of their surroundings than we give them credit for.

Because we would find Prairie Warbler nests by banding and tracking the male, we would first need to catch him. To do this we set up good-sized net, staked it into the ground, and played the male's song on our phones. Most of the birds ignored us. Several birds would fly into the net and then bounce out. In all cases, the birds became wary of the net and avoided it all together. We did have one especially brazen male that landed on our net post and sang to us from there, as if to mock us.

5) Birds are better at differentiating sound than the interns are.

We would often play the Prairie Warbler call on our cellphones to get the males out of hiding so we could track them. This worked a couple times for each male, but they learned of our tricks and stopped responding to our feeble attention-seeking attempts.

6) They know you're watching them.

Prairie warblers mainly eat insects. If an adult has an insect in its mouth for more than a few seconds, it's going to bring that insect to its young. This is exciting as you'll actually get a glimpse at where the small nest is hiding. However, even if you're very far away, peering at them through the binoculars, many Prairie Warblers will still know you're watching them. One particular male flew around for ten minutes with a bug in its mouth, stopped, stared at me, swallowed it whole and flew away.

While it's been a long time since my first day in the field, burdened down with a clipboard, maps, heavy binoculars, and dread, I still fondly remember my time at the Albany Pine Bush. I'll never forget the raspy call of the males or the sheer excitement of finally finding a nest.



Photo of Prairie Warbler (male) by Nancy Miorelli, summer 2010, Albany Pine Bush

How to Apply for ORAS Grant *by Clark Jones*

The Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) is soliciting proposals for our conservation grants program which seeks to fund conservation projects and research in GA. The deadline for receiving proposals is March 1, 2014.

Amount: \$300

Eligible Applicants: Any individual wishing to conduct wildlife research with an emphasis on bird conservation, habitat improvement, or environmental education in GA.

Eligible Locations: Locally or throughout GA, depending on theme and relative importance of the project to conservation.

Requirements: Successful applicants are expected to submit a report detailing findings or results to ORAS. Also, applicants are asked to give a half hour to a one hour presentation of their project at an ORAS monthly meeting.

Application: Email a cover letter detailing your project, how it contributes to wildlife and/or wildlife habitat conservation, and the intended equipment or materials list with budget to the ORAS president at president@oconeeriversaudubon.org.

Oconee Audubon Society
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Athens, Georgia 30608-1082

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**Photo of Hermit Thrush by Chuck Murphy,
January 28, 2014, Jackson County**

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