



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

November 2010

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

Dr. Marianne Robinette--UGA entomologist and director of UGA's Insect & Bird Natural History: International Service-Learning Program--will focus on "Pollinators, Pollination, Beneficials, and Integrated Pest Management" in her talk to ORAS on November 7.

Dr. Robinette is particularly interested in researching and assessing science teaching and learning in higher education by introducing, integrating and evaluating service-learning courses in entomology, bridging theory and practice through stand alone entomology service-learning courses (Entomology Outreach & Service-Learning) and as a component of existing entomology courses (Insect and Bird Natural History in Costa Rica).

Heads-Up Notice for December Meeting:

In December, Dr. Michael Conroy will talk about "Wildlife Diversity and Conservation in Argentina." He will give a quick description of some of the teaching and research he does in Argentina (a lot of it bird focused) with photos of wildlife from the Iguazu, Patagonia and other areas showing the huge diversity of landscapes, habitats, and wildlife.

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.

Christmas Bird Count: December 18

The local Christmas Bird Count will be Saturday, December 18th. There will be a countdown potluck dinner at Sandy Creek Nature Center at 7:00 pm. You can join us even if you have not participated in the Christmas Bird count before. You do not have to be an expert to join a group. This count is nation-wide. Please contact Mary Case (706-548-3848, mecase@uga.edu or Eugenia Thompson (erobertthom@bellsouth.net) for further information.

Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program Coming Soon!

by Robin Woodroof, Conservation Chair

ORAS is excited to announce a new conservation program to help protect and preserve birds, wildlife, and plant species in the Athens community starting in our own backyards.

Would you like to turn your backyard into a wildlife sanctuary? It's easy. Let us help you make your property more wildlife-friendly. Learn more about wildlife, habitats, and native plants. Fall is a great time to get started by planting and creating wildlife habitat. All wildlife need food, water, cover, and places to raise young. Brochures and applications will be available soon. Check our website for more information.

Every Backyard is Important!



Birding sites in Oconee County

by Mark Freeman

Oconee County, until somewhat recently, has received less attention from birders than its neighbor to the north, Athens/Clarke County. With more agricultural land, Oconee County may offer more locations to find open country birds like Northern Bobwhite, Merlin, Mississippi Kite, Swallow-tailed Kite (rare), Loggerhead Shrike, American Pipit, Grasshopper Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, and Bobolink. There are a few small ponds that attract shorebirds in migration and waterfowl in winter. The woodland creek crossings of the more rural roads in the southern half of the county can be good places to search for migrating and locally breeding warblers, tanagers, thrushes, and other passerine species. A five mile driving tour of Colham Ferry Road and Old Farmington Road in the middle of the county offers a good sampling of a variety of habitats and can be productive most any time of year, with the best times of course being during spring and fall migration (mid March thru May and late August thru October). Please remember to bird from the road only, all lands on either side of the road are private property.

From the traffic light at the south end of downtown Watkinsville, go south on US 441 (business route) about a half mile and turn left over the railroad tracks onto Colham Ferry Road. Set your trip meter to zero. The first 2-3 miles can be good for Loggerhead Shrikes, especially the area near Bell Lake at mile 0.7 (check the wires on the east side of the road) and midway down Rose Creek Drive on the left at mile 1.4. Some species that have appeared at Bell Lake during the winter include Snow Goose, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, and Hooded Merganser. Tree, Barn, and Northern-rough winged Swallows appear in mid March, and in warmer months the lake may host Blue-winged Teal, Double-crested Cormorant, Great Egret, and Cattle Egret.

American Kestrel is usually fairly reliable in winter anywhere along this route. A Merlin was seen just south of Bell Lake in December 2002 and also further south at Astondale Rd in December 2004. The section between Green Ferry Road and Rose Creek Drive can be good for foraging kites in late July through August, especially over recently mowed hay fields. Mississippi Kites can usually be expected when scanning the fields and the skies high overhead. These large fields are also a good place to scan carefully for Eastern Meadowlarks in summer and flocks of American Pipit in winter, especially the field on the west side of the road just before Rose Creek Drive at mile 1.3. A good place to park is the gravel drive on the right where a few hay bales are stored close to the road. At mile 1.9 there is another larger pond locally known as Wilkes Pond that is worth checking for waterfowl in winter. Just three tenths a mile beyond this pond there is a good place to look for White-crowned Sparrow at a pasture entrance on the right. There is a collection of old round hay bales at the left end of the pasture gate that is always worth checking for this species and other sparrows, plus Palm

Warblers. Park off to one side of the pasture entrance and be careful of traffic. The tall privet hedge on the opposite side of the road has held an Orange-crowned Warbler on a few Christmas Bird Counts over the years.

At mile 2.4 turn right onto Old Farmington Road and continue towards Astondale Road. This little stretch of road is another spot where shrikes have been regular in summer, and the field on the right can have flocks of foraging Chipping Sparrows and Mourning Doves, which attracted a Merlin for a few days in the winters of 2007 and 2008. Continue across Astondale Road, where Old Farmington Road becomes a gravel road. (Turning right onto Astondale Road will take you to the Astondale cattle pond, described at the end of this article.) Immediately after crossing Astondale Road, there is a spot where Bobolinks may be found in springtime. During the first week of May, look for this species in the field on the left if the grass is tall, and in the small trees along the edge. A flock of 100-200 birds has used this field as a stopover during spring migration over the past several years. If the field has been recently mowed, there may not be any bobolinks, but there is another site further down this road where they may be seen. You can usually hear their unusual "spink-spank" bubbly calls if they are around in low numbers and not immediately apparent, so be patient before giving up too quickly. The brushy areas near this corner are also good for Orchard Oriole, Blue Grosbeak, and Eastern Kingbird. The pasture on the right is excellent for Grasshopper Sparrows in late spring and early summer; they can often be seen singing from atop a large hay bale or on the wire fence. Just 100 feet or so from the corner as you continue down Old Farmington, there is a shallow depression in the right pasture (close to the road) that may have water if it has recently rained. Check for shorebirds during migration and Wilson's Snipe, American Pipit in winter.

In less than a half mile there is a small hay field with a pond on the left. Ring-necked Duck, Green-winged Teal, and Redhead are sometimes present in winter but not to be expected every year. A single Canvasback was seen here in February 2004. Please observe the pond from the road only, a scope is useful here. The crest of the hill near the pond is also a very good place to listen for displaying American Woodcock in January and February. At late dusk in the fading evening light, listen for the abrupt "peent!" calls and then the wing whistle of the rapidly rising bird, followed by a subtle chirping-like sound as it descends back to the ground. With persistence you should be able to spot a silhouetted woodcock during one of its repeated ascents, a chunky bird with rapid wingbeats and long, thin bill. The next section of road just past a horse farm is mostly forested on both sides, with a small intermittent creek that passes under the road. Great Crested Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Red-eyed Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Summer Tanager, and Indigo Bunting can be expected in this area in the summer, and during migration it is worth a short stop to look and listen for other neotropical species. In winter this is a good place for both

Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, with Winter Wren and Brown Creeper appearing in some years.

Continuing onward, at mile 3.6 there is an organic farm on the left and another horse farm with a covered arena on the right. The farm on the left is the other site where Bobolinks sometimes show up for a few days in early May. They seem to prefer the corner near the road and the line of trees to the south. They are usually visible from the road and are easy to hear if they are present. Again, please respect the private property here and bird only from the road. This is also another great spot for Grasshopper Sparrow and Loggerhead Shrike, and occasionally White-crowned and Vesper Sparrow in winter. American Kestrel is reliable here, and infrequently a Northern Harrier may be found. It is worth lingering at this spot for some time, as this is the best habitat on the route for sparrows and wintering raptors. Continue downhill to the bridge over Greenbriar Creek, looking for Brown-headed Nuthatch and both kinglets in the pines just past the pastures. The creek crossing is the best spot on the route for warblers and other neotrops in migration. There is a mix of hardwood forest, with smaller trees and low brushy edge habitat on either side of the road. When the morning sun first hits the trees on the right side of the bridge there can a good selection of birds foraging not far from the road. Twenty species of warbler have been found at this site, including Blue-winged, Tennessee, Magnolia, Worm-eating, and Canada Warblers in migration, with Louisiana Waterthrush, Hooded Warbler, and Common Yellowthroat being the more common breeders. Wild Turkey have been seen along this wooded section of road, and this general area is another place where American Woodcock have been heard calling and performing aerial displays.

Beyond the creek the road climbs back up to an open area of large pastures with some fallow fields. The first few hedgerows along the road where the pastures begin can sometimes be good for Vesper Sparrows in winter, and the entire stretch from here to the end of the route is excellent for Palm Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Eastern Bluebird, Blue Grosbeak, and Eastern Kingbird at the appropriate season. This is another good site for Loggerhead Shrike and Eastern Meadowlark. During spring and summer, listen for Northern Bobwhite, especially where the road curves sharply to the right. At mile 5.0 the route ends at a short cut-thru road that connects to US 441. Turn right to return to Watkinsville and Athens.

The Astondale Road cattle pond is just 0.2 mile west of the intersection of Astondale Road and Old Farmington Road, near two red chicken houses. This little pond is always worth checking during shorebird migration, especially just after a heavy rain. Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Western and Least Sandpiper, and Wilson Snipe have all been seen at this pond, with occasional rarities like Red-necked Phalarope and Short-billed Dowitcher making surprise appearances. Check the fences for Grasshopper Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, and Eastern Meadowlark in spring and summer. Purple Martins and swallows forage over this pond in early

spring. The small pasture across the road from the pond has had foraging flocks of both Mississippi Kite and even Swallow-tailed Kite in August after the grass has been mowed.

This article was modified from the site description for the Colham Ferry Road area on the Wings Over Georgia website, an excellent resource for finding birding locations in the state. Check it out at http://www.wingsoverga.com/Birding_in_Georgia.html.

Sustainability at UGA

summarized by Maggie Nettles

Kevin Kirsche, UGA Director of Sustainability, talked about "**Sustainability at UGA, the Campus as a Living Laboratory**" at the October ORAS meeting. He outlined the five areas of focus: teaching, research, service and outreach, student engagement, and operations.

He also talked about the new office's plans to pursue a model for healthy living on campus and beyond; to develop a sustainable university; to create opportunities for students, faculty, and staff to enhance the quality of life in their communities; and to function as a living laboratory where sustainability is researched, taught, practiced, and constantly refined.

Watching Andean Condors in Argentina

by Liz Conroy

Watching massive Andean Condors (*Vultur gryphus*) soar through a canyon and bathe in a pool on high cliffs was a memorable part of a recent trip to Córdoba in central Argentina. My husband and I enjoyed this lively city while he taught a wildlife population workshop indoors. Meanwhile, I explored the outdoors.

Athenians will feel at home in Córdoba. It's full of college students, wandering visitors, art museums, historic sites, good restaurants and crazy traffic. But I also wanted to see wildlife in a national park. My guide was Martín Ávila, an experienced birder. He knows plenty of English, and I speak some Spanish. Also, a college student from Romania joined us who spoke both English and Spanish. The three of us conversed quite well.

On a cloudless morning in early September, Martín picked us up in his car that had working seatbelts. September is the end of winter and the days are mild, but I dressed in layers since we were heading into higher elevations. We drove to Parque Nacional Quebrada [gorge] Del Condorito in the Sierras Grandes to look for Condors.

From the park entrance, we hiked through dry, scrubby land for about two hours to the Balcón Norte [North Balcony], a cliff overlooking a deep, gray gorge with a tumbling waterfall at the far end. Suddenly, we saw soaring condors with white patches on their black outspread wings and white ruffs around the necks. Their primary feathers look like outstretched fingers and, like wing flaps on an airplane, these feathers allow them to make fine adjustments during flight.

We also spotted the grayish-brown juveniles riding the rising thermals with the adults. The chicks fledge at six months and learn from the adults how to soar, find food and their place in the pecking order.

As if on cue, these New World Vultures gathered at a pool of water in the rocks high up on the canyon wall. They took turns drinking until a large adult stepped in to the water. Other adults followed and then the juveniles. It looked like a party as they bathed in the shallow pool.

Andean Condors are intelligent birds with a strong social system and order of dominance that we witnessed during the bathing scene. The adult males are larger than the females and have a large caruncle and wattle. The white "ermine-looking" ruffs make both sexes appear regal in spite of their naked, wrinkly heads. Featherless heads and necks are useful for these carrion eaters who stick their heads into dead mammal carcasses to eat. The lack of feathers exposes the skin to the cleansing effects of sunlight and dehydration during flight.

We carried our own water and lunch, had a relaxing picnic on the cliff and watched them soar for a long time. Then we hiked back through golden grasslands shimmering in the sun. What a great day!

For information, contact Martín Ávila at explorandomartin@gmail.com or read about the park at www.quebradacondorito.com.ar.

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