



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

November 2011

Vol. 22 No. 9

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 3, 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Introducing the Georgia Museum of Natural History

Dr. Bud Freeman, Senior Public Service Associate at the Odum School of Ecology and Director of the Georgia Museum of Natural History, will present an introduction to the museum at the November meeting. Located on the University of Georgia campus, the museum is a consortium of 11 major collections which support research, teaching and outreach activities. The museum also serves as the major repository of natural history information and artifacts in Georgia. A new gallery offers the opportunity to see some of the museum's holdings which total over 6 million specimens and artifacts. The current exhibit running through the 9th of December pairs the landscape paintings of local artist Philip Juras with objects from the collections, and focuses on southeastern landscapes likely observed by William Bartram and vanishing plant species formerly occurring there. Visit the Museum's web presence, <http://natural.history.uga.edu> for additional information.

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.

Black Flies and the Critically Endangered Whooping Crane

Summary of October meeting by Eugenia Thompson

UGA entomologist Elmer Gray, supervisor of the laboratory with the world's only black fly colony, discussed his efforts to learn if black flies are affecting the reproduction of one population of the critically endangered Whooping Crane:

Young whooping cranes are carefully raised each year at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Wisconsin with no human interaction. In the fall, they follow ultra-light aircraft on a route to Florida established in 2001 and return on their own to Wisconsin in the spring. They have established pairs and laid eggs, yet nest desertion has been 100%. Black flies have been observed on deserted nests, on eggs, and on feeding cranes. The Black flies are suspected as the cause of the nesting failures.

The International Crane Foundation (www.savingcranes.org) funded the study which began in 2010. The Necedah NWR area—specifically the Yellow River which flows beside it—has two species of black flies which feed only on birds. The larvae develop during the winter in the icy river waters and emerge each April to feed on blood. Gray and his colleagues treated the river in early spring of 2010 and 2011 with the bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *israelensis*. This microorganism kills the black fly larvae without harming other aquatic insects, fish, or mammals. In 2011, six of twenty first nests were successful. Gray stressed that the intention is not to manage black flies but to show that they do severely impact the nesting success of the Whooping Crane. Scientists still seek alternate sites in which to raise and release the cranes. [Visit: www.operationmigration.org.]

Clarke County Sightings for August and September 2011

by Richard Hall

Perhaps due to the roasting heat keeping birders indoors, only 86 species were entered into eBird for August for Clarke County. This number is down from 89 in 2010.

A highlight for many this month was a good showing of Mississippi Kites, including young birds reported from the O'Grady's backyard, the State Botanical Garden and an extremely cooperative youngster whose favorite perch was directly above a footpath at Little Lake Herrick from 21st-25th. Many birders, dog-walkers and joggers were treated to the amazing spectacle of the adult swooping in over their heads to feed it cicadas. An immature Bald Eagle flew over the author's Five Points yard on 31st. The first migrant warblers began to appear in the second half of the month including an adult male Cerulean Warbler at the State Botanical Garden on 20th, and an immature there on 28th. Two Cedar Waxwings at Lake Herrick on 27th were extremely early.

Approximately 116 species were recorded in September, down from 121 last year. What we lacked in quantity we made up for in quality, the best of which was the first documented county record of 3 immature Wood Storks on 17th, found at the Oxbow Lake on Cook's Trail by the ORAS field trip. The drought conditions created good feeding conditions for waders here, with 3 Great Egrets and a Little Blue Heron present on 11th.

A Sora was spotted at Lake Herrick on 15th-16th; it or another showed extremely well at another part of the lake on 26th-28th. Roosting Chimney Swifts and migrating flocks of Common Nighthawks were a daily evening spectacle over Five Points throughout the month. Little Lake Herrick did well for flycatchers, with a Least Flycatcher on 2nd, a flock of 23 Eastern Kingbirds on 7th and an Alder Flycatcher on 9th (subject to acceptance by the state records committee). A good passage of thrushes included a Gray-cheeked Thrush on Cook's Trail on 24th. Warblers came thick and fast, the most unusual sightings being a Golden-winged Warbler at the State Botanical Garden on 7th-8th and a Wilson's Warbler at Lake Herrick on 30th. The South Milledge fields had a good run of sightings, including Loggerhead Shrike on 9th, Dickcissels on 9th and 13th, and 5 Bobolinks on 15th.

Why Plant Natives in Your Garden?

by Liz Conroy

Botanist Linda Chafin, a founder of The Memorial Park Weed Warriors, spoke at the May 2010 ORAS meeting. She described the work of the Weed Warriors. These volunteers removed exotic, invasive plants—such as Chinese Privet, Bush Honeysuckle, Monkey Grass, *Elaeagnus* and English Ivy—from areas in Memorial Park. An ORAS grant allowed the group to purchase and add native plants. Also, she

cheerfully announced that native plants were emerging throughout the newly uncovered areas where alien plants had once dominated and thrived.

Chafin finished her presentation with an intriguing comment: "I have learned so much about how native plants sustain our wildlife. Now when I look at leaf that is partly eaten by an insect, the leaf is even more beautiful to me." She described how native plants provide food for insects. In turn, insects provide critical food for area wildlife, especially for the birds each spring.

During a phone interview with Chafin, I asked about her comment. She replied that the book "*Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in our Gardens*," by author and entomologist Douglas Tallamy, gave her a much better understanding of insects and the native plants they need to eat.

"It's a way of looking at our world differently. I now realize that the perfect leaves on every plant in a garden actually mean that little nutrition is available for the birds which depend upon herbivorous insects to nourish their young," she said. Unfortunately, this is what most people, especially gardeners, are taught to believe is beautiful. "Everything tidy and every plant must look like a photo—plastic and perfect," she added.

I began reading the book to learn more about the crucial link between native plants and wildlife. Tallamy describes how herbivorous insects provide crucial nourishment each spring for birds to feed themselves and their young. Ripened berries become important later, but the rich sources of fat and protein contained in insects are needed by many birds early on to successfully reproduce.

Tallamy writes, "If our native insect fauna cannot, or will not, use alien plants for food, then insect populations in areas with many alien plants will be smaller than insect populations in areas with all natives. This may sound like a gardener's dream: a land without insects!"

Many gardeners continue to plant the exotic shrubs, trees and flowers around their homes that native plant-chomping insects cannot eat. This reduces a critical food source needed by the birds as they raise their young. Also, land lacking in these important spring "food packets" cannot provide for other forms of wildlife, including many amphibians, reptiles and arachnids. Without herbivorous insects available as a plentiful food source, an area becomes increasingly devoid of wildlife diversity.

Lend a hand to wildlife by adding native plants to yards and gardens. Learn to recognize holes in leaves as a beautiful part of nature's cycle. Our native plants evolved with our herbivorous insects and can handle a certain amount of chomping just fine. The State Botanical Garden of Georgia, where Chafin works, is a great source of native plants and information. Check out their website for plant sales, rambles and classes on native plants. www.uga.edu/botgarden/

Tree Fair at Bishop Park

by Athens-Clarke County Community Tree Council

The Athens-Clarke County Community Tree Council will host their annual tree fair on Saturday, November 5. This event is from 8:00 a.m. until noon at Bishop Park. Trees between 5-8 feet in height will sell for \$15-35, including native trees such as tulip poplar, blackgum, and various species of oak. Email: forester@athensclarkecounty.com Visit: www.acctreeprogram.com Call: Andrew Saunders 706-613-3561

Traveling Seeds

by Robin Woodroof

Have you ever looked at a tree and wondered how it started growing where it did? Plants have amazing ways of moving their seeds from one place to another to ensure their survival and to produce diverse ecosystems. Let's look at some of the ways plants arrive at their destinations.

- **Hitch-hikers** stick to fur, feathers, clothing, or inside animals
- **Droppers** fall to the ground and animals carry them away
- **Poppers** burst from seed pods and disperse from the plant
- **Flyers** are carried through the air by wind
- **Floaters** are carried away in water
- **Gardeners** purposely plant seeds

Hitch-hikers: Seeds, such as those in prickly cockleburs, can attach to clothing when you take a walk through a field. Seeds can also latch onto the fur of a dog, cat or wild animal as well as the feathers of birds. The seeds will usually fall off or are pulled off the animal in another location. Sometimes seeds stick to the bottom of shoes or in tire grooves and can also end up in a new spot. When birds, bears, raccoons and other animals eat fruit, the seeds move through their digestive systems and are spread in their droppings which help to fertilize the new plant.

Droppers: Squirrels are famous for carrying away acorns and other nuts that have fallen from trees and burying them for winter food. Sometimes they forget where they've stored the nuts or they don't need everything they've buried. If those nuts last through the winter, they might become large trees.

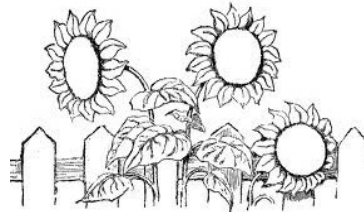
Poppers: Some plants have exploding seed pods that burst open and quickly fling seeds away from the parent plant. Dwarf mistletoe can shoot seeds about 20 feet at almost 60 miles per hour. The touch-me-not got its name because of this seed attribute. The plump green pod of Impatiens burst open when touched or become mature.

Flyers: Seeds soar through the air with the wind until they land in a new location. Pine trees produce flat blade-like seeds on high branches that fall off, spin and swirl like blades on a helicopter. Dandelions have seeds encased within lightweight fibers that can act like parachutes and can carry the seed for miles on a strong gust of wind. Poppies have tiny seeds that when open, can shake out and be blown away.

Floaters: Seeds are transported by the water of ditches, puddles, streams, ponds, lakes, rivers and oceans. Heavy rains wash seeds into ditches where they float until the water dries up. Elm seeds can travel for miles after falling into a stream. Coconuts can float in the sea until washed up on shore. Water lilies seeds float in cases of jelly until they sink to the bottom and grow. Fish can eat seeds and deposit them far from the original plant.

Gardeners: Seeds are purposely collected and planted by gardeners, farmers, and landscapers for many reasons including food, flowers, habitat, shade, and natural beauty.

Next time you see a squirrel burying an acorn, a pine seed blowing in the wind, a bird eating a berry, or you take a walk through a meadow, a new tree may have just been planted.



The Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary

by Robin Woodroof

Become a Certified Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Homeowner by providing habitat for birds, wildlife, and native plants in our community!

For more information: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org or email conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org

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For an introductory National Audubon Society membership



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

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

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Did You Know? *by AudubonWingspan - News for the Audubon Network*

Interesting facts about North American Raptors include:
Smallest – American Kestrel (9” long, 22” wingspan),
Broadest wingspan – Bald Eagle (80”), Heaviest – Golden Eagle (10 pounds), Longest distance migrant – Peregrine Falcon (Arctic slope to Tierra del Fuego), Biggest comeback – Bald Eagle (removed from the endangered species list in 2007).

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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Published monthly by the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
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Submit information to the address above or by e-mail to 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.