



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

October 2011

Vol. 22 No. 8

Next Meeting:
Thursday, October 6.
Social at 6:00 p.m./Program at 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center

Share your recipes and dishes at our annual potluck of favorite appetizers, and join us for an evening of socializing in the outdoors! If possible, come snack early at 6:00 p.m. Then stay for the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Black Flies and the Critically Endangered Whooping Crane: Is there a link?

Elmer Gray
University of Georgia entomologist

Reintroduction of the Critically Endangered Whooping Crane, *Grus americana*, was initiated at Necedah National Wildlife Refuge in Necedah, Wisconsin in 2001.

The cranes began attempting to nest at this site in 2005 and the phenomenon of unusually high levels of nest desertion has been observed each year. Significant populations of black flies have been observed on the nesting birds and around the nest sites.

At the request of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership, applications of a biological larvicide have been conducted. Adult populations of the black flies were significantly reduced on the refuge. Biologists determined that six of 20 first-time nests were incubated to full term in 2011, as opposed to zero of 43 for the previous six years. This work represents the first time that a biological larvicide has been used to suppress black fly populations that are attacking an Endangered Species.

Mr. Gray currently serves as a Medical and Veterinary Entomologist at UGA where he supervises the staff of UGA's Black Fly Rearing and Bioassay Laboratory. This laboratory operates the world's only black fly colony.

Fall Bird Walks

Bird walks are from **8 a.m.-11a.m. or noon**. But attendees may leave early. Dress for the weather and wear practical shoes and a hat. Bring bug spray, sun screen, snacks, water.

- Oct. 1: **State Botanical Garden** (Day Chapel)
- Oct. 8: **Whitehall Forest** ** (S. Milledge Ave. & Whitehall Rd.) Note: GOS Fall Meeting is also on this weekend: www.gos.org
- Oct. 15: **Sandy Creek Park** (Campsite Dr. last lot)

**Attendees for the Whitehall walk must be on time. We meet outside the gate and caravan down to Flinchum's Phoenix. Once the caravan is inside the gate there is no way for anyone without a key card to enter. (Attendees may leave at anytime because the gate opens from the inside).

If You Cut It, Will They Come?

summary of September meeting by Eugenia Thompson

Introduced in 1852, privet was widely established in the Southeast by 1932. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that 2.5 million acres are infested now. Today, 59% of the Oconee River floodplain is infested with it. Privet is tough, sprouts readily and has prolific seeds. Can it be controlled?

Jim Hanula, a research entomologist with the USDA Forest Service, Southern Research Station, discussed plant and animal community responses to controlled privet removal. He and his team tested two control techniques locally—hand-felling (with chainsaws) and using a track-mounted mulching machine. All privet stumps were then treated with herbicide. In fall 2005, they had study plots at State Botanical Garden of Georgia, Sandy Creek Nature Center, Scull Shoals, and Watson Springs. The plant community response was approximately the same for each method; an increase in non-privet herbaceous plants occurred. More bees (pollinators) were found on the mulched plots, but both plots had more bees, as well as butterflies. An increase in small animals occurred on the felled plots where brush was left. Hanula and his colleagues think that biological control offers the best long-term control of privet. No native *ligustrum* species occur in the United States so importing insects that eat privet could work.

Calling All Night Owls and Early Birds!

By Kate Mowbray

Join ORAS for a Big Sit Bird-a-thon at Sandy Creek Nature Center October 9, 6:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. To participate, sit and count bird species that you see and/or hear from one spot. Come for a few minutes or a few hours. Pack a cooler, a chair and be ready to sit. Interested in participating in the Big Sit? Email: Kate.Mowbray@athensclarkecounty.com or phone (706) 613-3615 X 231.

J. Phil Campbell Conservation Center:

A Call Out for Conservation

by Victoria Smith

This past May, I joined fellow ORAS members on a perfect Saturday morning, anticipating a last chance for birding the rolling farmland of the J. Phil Campbell Sr., Natural Resource Conservation Center (JPC) in Watkinsville.

ORAS has included it in Christmas counts for over a decade, and Extension uses it in training master naturalists. All this may change, for the Center (my husband's workplace) awaits closure due to this year's federal budget cuts.

This USDA-Agricultural Research Service facility shares Audubon's commitment to conservation of soil and water.

Unlike mainstream agriculture's clean fields, laid bare a large part of the year with insufficient scrubby areas for wildlife habitat, JPC's 1100 acres provides an oasis of productivity with permanent crop cover—grasslands interspersed with (no-till) cropped lands and hardwood forest.

This is why birds are abundant here today.

During the time of the Great Dust Bowl, these lands off Experiment Station and Hog Mountain Roads had some of the worst water-erosion in the country. Exposed red soil is a ground zero that does not support diverse communities without careful labor.

Seventy years of land stewardship at this location, have replenished soils that, in the 1930's, were among the most water-eroded soils in the country. (Red soils are exposed sub-soils, from which a foot or more of brown topsoil has been washed away.) Research beginning in the 1970's built a brown, organic-rich surface that is friable. Its long-term data can help other farmers better manage their lands and restore soil fertility.

The federal budget is experiencing deep cuts, yet we have an opportunity to make our local voices count in reversing some of these decisions. A precedent has already been set, where senators successfully argued to keep one ARS facility open.

We can educate our US Senator, Saxby Chambliss, using our understanding of how wildlife can flourish alongside conservation agriculture. Please call Senator Saxby Chambliss's office (East Georgia Office, 706-650-1555 or email, rsaxby_chambliss@chambliss.senate.gov) to let him know such items as:

- You're concerned that JPC's history in restoring soil fertility not be lost to future generations.
- This facility is important to your local economy, in jobs and purchases from farm suppliers in the region.
- JPC's powerful example shows how conservation agriculture improves soil fertility and productivity.
- An active JPC helps us move away from tillage agriculture, which lays soil bare for months, an untenable and expensive practice in our humid Southeast. Conserving soil will save millions of dollars, decrease pollution from fertilizer runoff, and restore groundwater supplies, important in our continued drought.
- Natural resource conservation needs a united front in agricultural research, with strong collaborations between state universities and federal researchers.
- We need to keep JPC's conservation experts in the region, where they can have sustained impact on the future of agriculture in the Southeast.

Whooping Cranes: A Rare Splendor

by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas:

“When we hear this call we hear no mere bird. He is the symbol of our untamable past.” Aldo Leopold

Once nearly extinct, whooping cranes appear to be on the upswing, from a low of 15 in 1941 to over 500 cranes in North America today. Despite a worldwide concern for their protection, the cranes still teeter on the brink of extinction.

At Aransas NWR, the elegant birds share the intracoastal waterway with oil tankers and the potential threat of deadly spills as well as the threat of natural disasters. Fortunately, intensive efforts are slowly establishing a new non-migratory flock in Florida and a migratory flock in the eastern U.S.

In fact, Aransas NWR hosts the largest flock of wintering whooping cranes in North America with over 250 birds. By mid-April, they depart in pairs or small family groups for a hazardous journey 2,400 miles north to nesting grounds at Wood Buffalo National Park in Northwest Territories, Canada.

Message from the President

by Richard Hall

I'm excited and honored to be serving as the new President of Oconee Rivers Audubon. For those who don't know me, I have lived in Athens for 2.5 years where I work as a research scientist in UGA's Odum School of Ecology. I am passionate about birds and have been so since my childhood where my interest was nourished by my school bird club and local ornithological society. I'm committed to Audubon's goals of promoting the joy of birding while highlighting the threats our birds face within our local community. Also, I am particularly keen to increase diversity in our membership. To that end, if you have read your copy of The Yellowthroat and don't wish to keep it, consider placing it in your doctor's waiting room, hairdresser's, classroom or local library for others to enjoy.

This is your society, and I am eager to hear your feedback about the services we offer (speaker programs, bird walks, education/outreach and newsletter among others). Is there anything we aren't currently offering that we should, or how can we improve existing services? Please email comments to: president@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Bats – Silent Flyers of the Night

by Trina Morris (GA DNR Nongame Conservation Section)

Many people consider bird calls part of a typical, daytime soundtrack. If you spend time outside, you'll see and hear birds. At night you may hear owls or the occasional nightjar. But we're often missing a major nighttime flyer because we can't hear them: bats. You may see them emerging at dusk and occasionally flying around streetlights. Once it's really dark, they're hard to see and most of their calls are too high frequency for our ears. But bats are everywhere. As Halloween approaches, many people include bats in their list of spooky creatures, along with vampires, mummies and other ghouls and ghosts. Also, recent reports of bats gathering in buildings can fuel superstition and negative myths about bats. Some people panic at the thought of a bat in their home. But the benefits of bats greatly outweigh any threats and often bats can be excluded by the homeowner, without having to seek the help of experts. Although the risk of contracting rabies or histoplasmosis from a bat is very small, they should never be handled directly.

Georgia is home to 16 bat species, all of which emerge at night to eat flying insects such as moths, mosquitoes and beetles. All Georgia bats use echolocation, a biological sonar system, to find food and avoid obstacles while flying in the darkness. Small insectivorous bats like those found in Georgia can eat more than 1,000 mosquito-sized insects in an hour. A recent study found that the loss of bats in the United States would be devastating to the agricultural industry. Bats are critical predators of crop pests such as corn earworm moths. Farmers would have to spend considerably more money on pesticides if bats weren't

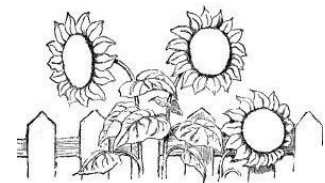
around to help. And bats around the world serve important roles as pollinators of crops such as bananas, mangoes, cashews and agave, all valuable agricultural commodities. Other wildlife depends on bats as well. They are an important food source for animals such as owls, hawks, snakes, and raccoons and are a critical part of cave ecosystems.

Like many other species, bats are in trouble. Many bat populations have been dramatically affected by widespread alterations to their roosting and foraging habitat, including loss of critical forested areas and caves. Also, water pollution has affected many waterways valuable to bats because of the aquatic insects the waterways produce. Widespread use of insecticides has further contaminated and reduced food supplies. New threats to bats include mortality from wind turbines, especially during bat migration on foggy nights. And most recently, bats are being affected by White-nose Syndrome (WNS), a mysterious affliction that has caused mass die-offs of cave bats in the northeastern U.S. The deadly condition, named for the white fungal growth found on the muzzles of many of the dead bats, has likely killed between 1-2 million bats so far. WNS has not yet been documented in Georgia but is found as far south as Tennessee and North Carolina.

If you want bats out of your house or you want to attract bats to your yard, visit Bat Conservation International's website at www.batcon.org. You can also get more information about bat conservation in Georgia and White-nose syndrome by visiting the GA DNR website at www.georgiawildlife.com. But the most important thing you can do is spread the word. Just because we don't always see and hear them, bats are everywhere. They are filling a very important role in the environment and just like other wildlife, they need our help to survive.

The Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary

by Robin Woodroof



Congratulations Steve Holzman, New Certified Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Homeowner!

Thank you for 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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Did You Know? *by Eugenia Thompson*

The Great Crested Flycatcher (GCFL), a summer resident of our area, is the only eastern flycatcher that nests in cavities. A large flycatcher with a yellow belly and cinnamon in its tail and wings, the GCFL often weaves a snakeskin into its nest. But if snakeskins are in short supply, it will use cellophane or even plastic as a substitute.

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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.

