



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

October 2012

Vol. 23, No. 8

Next Meeting:

**Thursday, October 4, 6:00 p.m. Potluck
Meeting and Presentation 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

In October, Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) will return to Sandy Creek Nature Center (SCNC) for a 6:00 p.m. potluck. The ORAS meeting will follow the meal. Please bring a covered dish to share with others; drinks will be provided.

A Bird's-Eye View of Climate Change

For the 7:00 p.m. program, Dr. Robert (Bob) Cooper, a professor of wildlife at the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources at The University of Georgia, will give a presentation on the effects of climate change on forest ecosystems in the southern Appalachians. He has been conducting field work since 2003 by using an insectivorous songbird, the Black-throated Blue Warbler, as a model. This warbler, like several other bird species, is basically a northern species whose range fingers southward down the Appalachian chain into Georgia. The Black-throated Blue as well as other neo-tropical migrants are declining in the southern part of their range while staying stable or increasing in the north.

Dr. Cooper explains: "We are investigating possible reasons for this decline, chief among them is the decoupling of the timing of emergence of their caterpillar prey and the birds' nesting cycle with advancing springs. Consistent with our hypothesis that lower elevation populations should have a greater mismatch between prey and breeding, Black-throated Blue Warblers have largely abandoned the lowest elevation sites since the beginning of the project. Higher elevation plots maintain good populations, and prey delivery rates at nests show a close relationship with the onset of spring and availability of prey."

Dr. Cooper also is making comparisons with a sister project in New Hampshire, which shows similar relationships between caterpillars and productivity but has different demographics than southern populations.

"Overall, he says, our results are consistent with the hypothesis that population trends among and within sites are dependent on abundance of their caterpillar prey."

Dr. Cooper teaches courses in ornithology, experimental design, and conservation decision making at the School of Forestry, and most of his research involves birds. Much of his outreach work has been in cooperation with the Partners in Flight, a conservation group from whom he has received two national awards for his contributions. He has been a member of the ORAS Board of Directors since 2010.

To read more about this climate change project, visit:

<http://columns.uga.edu/news/article/learning-experience/>

Fall Bird Walks (in town)

Bird walks are from **8 a.m.-11a.m. or noon**; however, attendees may leave early. Bring water and snacks as needed. Also, please check ORAS listserv announcements for any updates and other important information.

- Sept. 29: **State Botanical Garden** (Day Chapel)
- Oct. 6: **Whitehall*** (S. Milledge & Whitehall Road)
- Oct. 13: **Sandy Creek Park** (Campsite Drive)
- Oct. 21: **Athens Landfill** (Lexington Highway)

* Attendees for the Whitehall walk (October 6) must be on time. We meet outside the gate and caravan down to Flinchum's Phoenix. (Attendees may leave at any time because the gate opens automatically from the inside).

Tree Fair at Bishop Park

The Athens-Clarke County Community Tree Council hosts their annual tree fair Saturday, October 13 at 9:00 a.m. until noon at Bishop Park. They will have trees for sale and offer other activities. Email Community Forestry Coordinator Andrew Saunders: forester@athensclarkecounty.com Visit: www.acctreeprogram.com Call: 706-613-3561

July and August 2012 Clarke County eBird Sightings Summary *by Richard Hall*

86 species were recorded in Clarke Co. in July 2012, compared with 80 in both 2011 and 2010.

A good-sized flock of 7 Mississippi Kites was seen along Morton Road on 29th (JW). An early returning Spotted Sandpiper was spotted at Lake Chapman on 15th (CJ). Scarlet Tanagers and Worm-eating Warblers were reported from both Sandy Creek Park and the State Botanical Garden throughout the month (RH, JH, CJ), although it is impossible to say if these were early migrants or breeders.

Grasshopper Sparrows were recorded singing in two spots in the east of the county on 8th (RH), hopefully indicating successful breeding.

August 2012 was the best August on record, with 103 species noted (compared with 86 in 2011 and 89 in 2010). The highlight was undoubtedly the thrilling find of 7 Black Terns at Lake Herrick following heavy rain associated with Hurricane Isaac on 28th (JN), the first eBird mention of this species for the county and a great find anywhere inland in the state.

Other notable sightings here following the storm included 11 Spotted, 1 Least and 1 Semipalmated Sandpiper on 28th (JN), a county high count of 142 Canada Geese and an Osprey on 29th (MJ), and a Semipalmated Plover (2nd county eBird record) on 30th (RH, MJ). The same storm system also grounded 19 Blue-winged Teal at the Golf Course Pond (RH) and a county high count of 15 Least Sandpipers at the ACC Landfill (JN), both on 28th.

Early returning waterbirds included a Pied-billed Grebe and a Great Egret first recorded at Lake Herrick on 10th (MB). AH was lucky to have a begging juvenile Mississippi Kite attended by an adult in her backyard for most of the month.

An early American Kestrel and a county high count of 310 Mourning Dove were observed on Spring Valley Road on 28th (JN).

An excellent passage of migrant Common Nighthawks occurred at the end of the month, culminating in a county high count of 340 over Lake Herrick in 20 minutes on the evening of 30th (RH). On the passerine front, a 'whitting' Least Flycatcher was located at Little Lake Herrick on 26th (MB, RH). An impressive 18 warbler species had been recorded by the end of the month, including multiple Ceruleans at Lake Herrick and the State Botanical Garden (MB, RC, RH, JH, SH), and the first of the season Canada Warbler on 13th was an wonderful backyard find (BKOG).

Observers:

Mirko Basen, Rachel Cass, Richard Hall, Jim Hanna, Steve Holzman, Alison Huff, Mitchell Jarrett, Clark Jones, James Neves, Bill and Karla O'Grady, John Whigham



Photo by Richard Hall — Black Terns at Lake Herrick

Birds of Honduras

summary of September meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to Robert Gallardo for presenting the September program, **Birds of Honduras and Making of the First Field Guide**. He began his "two-part" program with a series of outstanding photos from the wilds of Honduras, including remarkable and colorful images of Honduran birds, flowers, fungi, orchids, insects, snakes, mammals, and scenic rivers.

The second part of his presentation involved descriptions of his background and ongoing work in Honduras: leading bird watching tours, training new guides, producing CD's of bird songs, and creating regional bird guides, including the production of the first field guide to the birds of Honduras.

Gallardo described Honduras to be about the size of Tennessee. The country is 81% mountainous with no active volcanoes and typically poor soil. He said that coffee production is an important industry for the country; it is the major source of income for many Honduran families for the entire year.

Gallardo asked audience members to think about the coffee they buy. "Bird-friendly people must make wise decisions on coffee," he said. Shade grown coffee is bird-friendly. Studies show more than 150 species are able to thrive in shade grown coffee plantations. Why? In these plantations, the large trees are left standing. Birds feed upon the fruits, flower nectar and insects in the tree canopy, and the trees offer protection. But sun grown coffee plantations result in 100% loss of habitat due to the removal of the trees.

Currently, Gallardo is raising funds to publish *The Field Guide to the Birds of Honduras*. This guide will be available in English and Spanish and illustrated by artist John Sill.

Visit Gallardo's website: www.birdsofhonduras.com
And, visit Sill's website: www.johnsill.com

Try This “Scavenger” Hunt *by Kate Mowbray*

To allow birders and non-birders an opportunity to enjoy a close view of the landfill’s wild residents, Athens-Clarke County (ACC) Solid Waste Department and ORAS will host an autumn “Scavenger Hunt” on Sunday, October 21, 2012.

During operational hours, it’s too busy and dangerous for visitors to view wildlife at the landfill. For safety reasons, the “Scavenger” hunts are scheduled when the landfill is closed—such as Sunday. This allows visitors to roam freely.

During our spring hunt, Suki Janssen, Waste Reduction Administrator at the ACC Recycling Division, taught a short lesson on vultures. She involved a younger audience member by dressing her as a vulture. Then it was time for eager participants to begin a walk around the property.

From sandpipers near the retention pond, Orchard Orioles in the trees, to a Killdeer nest on an unused road, birds were all around us. In addition, ORAS members identified many birds which could be heard but not seen in the treetops.

Also, members of our group noticed signs of many other wild residents at the landfill. We looked at the tracks and scat from various animals such as coyotes and bobcats. Of course, the black vulture was always in the forefront of the action. Everyone was amazed at how close they could get before the vultures would fly to a nearby tree.

A great day was had by everyone; especially those keeping a tally of the number of species. By the end of our hike, we saw 61 species in all!

Because the hunt was so successful, a second “Scavenger Hunt” is planned for Sunday, October 21, 2012. Time: 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. Address: ACC Landfill, 5700 Lexington Rd., Winterville, GA

Phone: Suki Janssen: 706-613-3512 Ext. 317
Email: Suki.Janssen@athensclarkecounty.com



Photo by Richard Hall—Black Vulture at ACC Landfill

Helping Our Pollinators *by Liz Conroy*

Dan Harris is a beekeeper and the owner of Booger Hill Bee Company in Danielsville, Georgia. But he is best known as the jovial instructor for Beekeeping for Beginners, Advanced Beekeeping and Mead Making classes at The State Botanical Garden of Georgia (SBG) in Athens and at The Smith-Gilbert Gardens in Kennesaw.

Naturally, he encourages everyone to take an interest in honey. After all, honey production is his both his business and his joy. But Harris takes a wider view of nature’s pollinators in general. He considers pollinators to be like the canary in the mine. “The decline of many of our pollinators without clear explanation is Earth’s way of warning us. We need to heed the warning,” he says.

Pollinators are important for food production. We enjoy a wide variety of fruits and vegetables because honeybees (social, non-native bees) pollinate the blossoms so the fruit, vegetable or nut can form. Similarly, many plants are pollinated by our native bees, such as the solitary mason bee (*Osmia* spp.), hummingbirds, moths, beetles, and bats. Also, as Harris points out, “Plants change over time as the environment changes. Their ability to change comes from sharing genetic material. The sharing of genetic material for many plants depends upon the pollinators.”

Harris hopes property owners will help pollinators by providing suitable habitats even on small lots. “A half an acre might seem inconsequential, but if many neighbors are doing the same thing, the results are significant.” ORAS Education Chair Kate Mowbray emphasizes this important concept in her Wildlife Sanctuary Class at SBG with the motto, “Together our backyards, whether large of small, can become interconnected bird and wildlife havens.”

Dead trees provide nesting sites for wildlife but are often removed. “Provide nest boxes for mason bees,” Harris suggests. (Drilled blocks of wood often work). “Also, summer is a difficult time for pollinators because there’s little to eat. Look for plants that bloom in the summer.”

Anyone interested in helping honeybees may want to try beekeeping. SBG classes for beginning beekeepers are planned for December. “I get calls in the spring from folks who want to start beekeeping. But December is when you must get everything in place to begin in the spring,” he says.

Also, support local beekeepers by buying their honey. One way to use plenty of honey is in making mead (honeywine). SBG offers classes for beginning mead makers. This writer attended the class. Everyone was serious until Harris offered samples of his own mead and livened up the group. It was fun to learn this ancient craft, taste unique wines and meet others who care about bees and honey, too.

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Visit: www.botgarden@uga.edu

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Save this Date: Thursday, November 1

Betty Jean Craige is Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature and Director Emerita of the Willson Center for Humanities and Arts at UGA. She writes a regular Sunday column for the Athens Banner-Herald about her African Grey Parrot, Cosmo. Dr. Craige will discuss "Bird Brains: How Cosmo, a Parrot, Has Awakened Us to the Intelligence of all Earth's Animals" at the ORAS meeting in November. For more information, please visit: www.cosmotalks.com/

Call for Volunteers – Rivers Alive

10/6: Rivers Alive -- Athens (Oconee River clean-up)
Email: stacee.farrell@athensclarkecounty.com Visit:
www.keeppathensbeautiful.org

10/13: Rivers Alive -- Lake Oconee (lake area clean-up)
Email: 1janetpearson@gmail.com Visit:
http://riversalive.com/ra_cleanups.asp

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