



# The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the*

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

October 2013

Vol. 24, No. 8

**Next Meeting:**  
**Thursday, October 3, 6:00 p.m. Potluck**  
**Meeting and 7:00 p.m. Presentation**  
**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 provided.

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation (after the 6:00 p.m. potluck):

**Life above the Wrack Line: Nesting**  
**American Oystercatchers & Wilson's**  
**Plovers on the Georgia Coast**

Introductory notes from October speaker, Abby Sterling:

“After spending five years living on Little St Simons Island and working as a naturalist guide, I decided to pursue my master’s degree with Dr. Robert Cooper working with shorebirds. I’m examining how a variety of habitat characteristics affect the nesting and fledging success of two species: American Oystercatchers and Wilson’s Plovers.

Both species have variable and low rates of reproductive success; I’m interested in determining if there are common factors which could be used to predict success for these birds and ultimately help guide management of beaches. I’m working on three relatively undeveloped islands: Little St Simons, Little Cumberland and Cumberland Island. My talk will include background biology and conservation issues that nesting shorebirds face and how past research led to my current project. I will highlight some goals of my research and some of the very preliminary results that we’ve found.”

The aim of Sterling's research is to develop predictive models of where these shorebirds nest. This information will help conservationists focus their efforts on key sections of beachfront. With the knowledge that comes from living at the beach, hunting for nests, and observing birds on a daily basis, Sterling can describe the significance of subtle beach features for birds that lay their eggs directly on the sand.

## Fall Bird Walks

Bird walks are from **8 a.m.-11a.m. or noon**. However, attendees may leave early. Please dress for the weather, wear practical shoes, and bring insect repellent and snacks/water as desired. If you have any questions please contact Ed Maioriello at [fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org) or call 706-296-5275.

- Oct. 05: **State Botanical Garden (Day Chapel)**
- Oct. 06: **Whitehall** (S. Milledge & Whitehall)\*
- Oct. 12: **Sandy Creek Park** (Campsite Dr.)
- Oct 19: **UGA's Campbell Research and Education Center's Fields** (Meet at field across from the UGA Horticulture Garden on Hog Mountain Road in Oconee Co.)
- Oct 20: **ACC Landfill** (Meet ¼ mile inside the gate off Lexington Rd.)

\*Attendees for the Whitehall walk must be on time. 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).

## Fall Field Trip

Sept. 28: **Cochran Shoals**: Meet at 6:00 AM in the Shops of South Athens Shopping Center on S. Milledge near the Athens bypass. We will try to car pool, and there is a \$3.00 parking fee at Cochran Shoals.

## Tree Fair at Bishop Park in October

The Athens-Clarke County Community Tree Council will host their annual tree fair on Saturday, October 26 from 9:00 a.m. until noon at Bishop Park. Many young trees will be for sale, including beautiful, native trees. They will offer tree-related activities for all ages and educational opportunities.

The 2013 Tree Fair Pre-sale ends on Friday, October 11. To order trees ahead of time (\$15 - \$35), please visit [www.athenstrees.com](http://www.athenstrees.com) Trees may be picked up at the fair. A flyer for placing an order is available on the website along with more information about the 2013 Tree Fair.

## August 2013 Clarke County eBird Sightings Summary *by Clark Jones*

Fall migration is officially upon us, and 99 species were recorded to eBird for August 2013 compared to 105 from August this time last year (even though 11 more checklists were submitted during August of this year). We had an early spring, so perhaps we will have a late fall, although several species have shown up in the same places at similar times so far this year.

Mississippi Kites were seen during the first two weeks of August in Clarke county but were absent during the last two weeks. However, good numbers of both Mississippi Kites and Swallow-tailed Kites were observed several times in Oconee, Morgan, and Oglethorpe counties throughout the month (SH, RC, JH, JF, LD, RL).

Solitary Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Least Sandpiper were present near the ACC Park and Ride for several days beginning on 8/16 and were seen by many (CS, JPM, JN, MB, RH, MJ, JH). This may be the most traffic that the Park and Ride had in a single day since it was constructed!

Least Flycatchers were present at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia (SBG) and the South Milledge Fields and were seen by a slew of observers between 8/26 and 8/29 (JN, MJ, JH, RH, MB).

Warbler migration officially got underway in early August with Yellow Warblers reported at Richard Hall's backyard as well as at the SBG and the South Milledge Fields.

Chestnut-sided Warblers made their fall debut on 8/25 (JH) and were reported at several other locations (B&KO, RH, MJ, JH, JN, MB).

A Cerulean Warbler was present at Lake Herrick on 8/27 (RH, JN, MB) and a Golden-winged Warbler was reported from the SBG on 8/25 (RH).

Canada Warblers were reported at Lake Herrick (B&KO), and the SBG on 8/25-8/27 (B&KO, JH, MJ, MB).

September should be a good month for migration if there are enough rainy days which would continue to push more migrants through the area.

Observers: B&KO - Bill and Karla O'Grady,  
CS - Christopher Skelton, JPM - John Patten Moss,  
JF - James Flynn, JH - Jim Hanna, JL - Jason Lewis,  
JN - James Neeves, LD - Leila Dasher, MB - Mirko Basen,  
MJ - Mitchell Jarrett, RC - Rachel Cass, RL - R Lavender,  
RH - Richard Hall, SH - Steve Holzman

## Nature Trains *by Nancy Miorelli*

More than 300 million people use the bullet trains each year to travel between Japan's two major metropolises: Tokyo and Osaka. The bullet trains have been operational since the 1960's and have become faster with each new model. By the late 1990's, people would clamber into the Shinkansen high speed trains and be transported across the country at speeds reaching 200 miles per hour.

Not everyone was enamored with the fastest train in the world due to its one major flaw. It was loud! Loud enough that as the train exited a tunnel its "sonic boom" could be heard over a quarter of a mile away. To make matters worse, the bullet trains' route was littered with tunnels. Up to thirteen trains per hour would make the trek between Tokyo and Osaka, and people who lived even remotely close to the tracks would constantly have their day interrupted.

Engineers were aware of the problem. The bullet train was so nicknamed for its bullet-like nose, but that nose would compress air around it. In open areas, this was not a problem. However, when the train entered a tunnel, compressed air would be forced into the tunnel as well. The train would push this compressed air through the tunnel, much like a snowplow pushes snow. When the train came out of the tunnel, all that compressed air would be released which created a loud boom. The nose that made the train more aerodynamic was the same nose that produced this loud, obnoxious noise.

Chief engineer Eiji Nakatsu had a solution. As an avid birdwatcher, Eiji Nakatsu would spend some of his time observing kingfishers. Kingfishers prey on small fish and crustaceans and hunt their prey by diving quickly into the water, beak first, from a perch about six feet above the water. Remarkably, these birds don't even make a splash when they hit the water's surface. Much like the way that kingfishers travel between mediums of two different densities (air to water), the train had to travel between two different air pressures. The kingfisher's "solution" to this problem is a long beak that gradually gets wider to the base. This creates a streamline nose that pierces the water, allowing the kingfisher to silently, accurately, and quickly snatch its prey.

Armed with a battle plan, an understanding of physics and inspiration provided by nature, Eiji Nakatsu fitted the train with a new nose that mimicked the kingfisher beak. In addition to completely removing the sonic boom, the train is now ten percent faster and uses fifteen percent less energy.

This is one of many stories where mimicking nature has helped us improve our technology. In fact, there is even a field of science dedicated to this practice—"Biomimicry."

## Gardener—Spare That Shed! by Liz Conroy

The old shed squats down in the woods like an ancient gnome. The doorway yawns open like a toothless mouth. My husband and I like to peek inside on occasion to observe spider webs and ant lion nests. With a newer garden shed near our house, there's no need for this distant one.

Yet, a certain bird does seem to need it. On June 2, 2013, strange noises arose from deep inside the abandoned structure. Peering inside, I listened to tiny hisses and growls coming from one of the shadowy corners.

As my eyes adjusted to the dim light, I saw two large, dirty-looking eggs, about the size of goose eggs, side by side on the dirt floor. In addition to making small, scary sounds, something was chipping a small hole in the shell from inside the egg. What in the world was hatching?

Suddenly, a large, black bird flew over the roof, past one of the windows and out of sight. It was time to back away, leave the place quietly and find answers to our questions

Richard Hall, ORAS President 2012-2013, responded to my email with a suggestion that those were Black Vulture eggs. A later sighting of one of the parents confirmed his response.

On June 30, as we walked near the shed, an adult Black Vulture, clearly visible this time, flew rapidly out of the doorway and perched in the tree overhead to watch us closely. I peered into the shed again. Like a steaming tea kettle ready to overflow, loud hissing sounds burst from the shadows. Two fluffy, beige creatures with black eyes, beaks and faces turned toward me. Their downy wings were spread in a defensive stance. This time, with camera ready, I took a few pictures and left quickly.

At home on the Internet, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology website provided answers to our questions such as: Why would these birds use an abandoned building for a nest site?

A Black Vulture pair may spend several weeks perching near a promising nest site, probably to check out the safety of the place. They seem to prefer dark recesses and places with cover. Abandoned sheds fit this preference well, especially when nesting sites are in short supply.

After the nest site is chosen, the female lays two eggs on the ground. The eggs take about 38 days to hatch. The chicks grow slowly. This may be an adaptation to unreliable food supplies since Black Vultures avoid foraging in rough weather. Numerous storms occurred throughout the spring and summer 2013. Such frequent rainy weather likely meant fewer regular feedings for these little guys. At least they were well-protected from the elements in the old shed!

High-quality nesting sites are often used in successive years. I hope that our dilapidated, empty shed remains a good nesting site for Black Vultures. It was rewarding to see an unattractive, unused building become an attractive, useful birdhouse for vultures in need of a safe place to nest.

A final note to gardeners and others: please allow your open, unused sheds to remain if vultures are using them. Many birds are losing quality nesting sites as urbanization spreads. It's a great way to help these awesome scavengers!



Photo of four-week-old Black Vulture by Liz Conroy

### Give the Gift of Audubon!

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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## **ORAS Small Grants - Call for Proposals**

*by Clark Jones – President of Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

ORAS will support a student, teacher, individual, or group conducting research, designing outreach or educational activities, or undertaking habitat improvement that helps benefit birds and other native wildlife in the Athens area.

Awards are typically in the region of \$300, but awards of up to \$500 will be considered. Successful applicants are expected to write a short report for our monthly newsletter and/or to give an oral presentation of about 30 minutes to 1 hour at one of our monthly speaker meetings.

The proposal should be 2-3 pages in length (single or 1.5 spaced) and should describe how the project will benefit birds, wildlife, and the Athens community. It should also contain an itemized list of supplies that will be purchased with the grant money. Please email applications to Clark Jones: [president@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:president@oconeeriversaudubon.org).

Deadline for receipt of these proposals is October 1, 2013.

## **Oconee Rivers Audubon Society**

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Submit information to address above or e-mail *The Yellowthroat* editor Liz Conroy: [yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org)  
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