



# The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

October 2015

Vol. 26, No. 8

## Next Meeting:

**Thursday, October 1, 7:00 p.m.  
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

## Ecology and Conservation of Bird Populations at Low-latitude Range Margins

Dr. Richard Chandler, Assistant Professor at Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, will discuss his research on bird populations at southern range limits. He is working with a large number of species that share a similar distribution characterized by an expansive region in the northeastern US and southeastern Canada, and a narrow region restricted to the high elevations in the Appalachians.

He is interested in learning if populations in the Southern Appalachians are (or were) diverging from northern populations and how climate change (and other types of environmental change) will affect these populations. Answering these questions will require an understanding of the factors limiting the distributions of these species.

**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.

## Fall Bird Walks (in town)

Bird walks are from **8 a.m.-11a.m. or noon**. However, attendees may leave early. Dress for the weather and wear sturdy shoes. Bring water. (Please check ORAS announcements for any changes to this schedule and be aware that some new bird walks may be added later). Note that Sandy Creek Nature Center is abbreviated as SCNC.

- Sept. 26: **SCNC (Cook's Trail)\***
- Sept. 27: **Tallasse Forest**
- Oct. 11: **Whitehall (be on time for this walk)**
- Oct. 17: **State Botanical Garden (Day Chapel)**
- Oct. 24: **Vulture Awareness Day (Landfill)**
- Oct. 31: **Sandy Creek Park (Campsite Dr.)**

\* The SCNC Cook's Trail walk is also our Cook's Trail Clean-up trip. Please bring along a trash bag.

## Fall Field Trip/GOS Meeting

**Oct. 02 -04: Georgia Ornithological Society Fall Meeting**  
The GOS fall meeting takes place on Jekyll Island, and it's for birders of all abilities. Also, it's a great way for new birders to meet up with other birders. Visit: [www.gos.org](http://www.gos.org)

**Oct. 10: 6:00 a.m. Cochran Shoals** (More information on where to meet will be available in October).

## Newsletter to be Available Online Only

Attention: Future issues of *The Yellowthroat* will be available online only. If you would like to receive an email notice each time the monthly newsletter is posted, please send your name and email address to: [membership@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:membership@oconeeriversaudubon.org)

## The Wonderful World of Warblers

summary of September meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to Richard Hall for his talk on “The Wonderful World of Warblers.” He talked about the Family Parulidae which are small, insect-eaters. He noted that 57 species occur in the U.S., and most are long distant migrants.

In a related story, Hall became hooked on birding as a youngster when a teacher took him to see a Blackpoll Warbler in S.E. England. It should have been wintering in Brazil. Apparently, the warbler had been displaced by storms as it departed Newfoundland but survived the 2100 mile trip across the Pond.

In Georgia, 43 species occur and 23 species stay to breed, especially in Northeast Georgia in the southern range of the Appalachian Mountains.

Hall explained warblers play important ecological roles throughout their range. For example, the Tennessee known in Spanish as “cazadorcita” or little huntress, eats insects which attack coffee plants. It is a popular warbler in shade-grown coffee plantations.

There is much interesting research on warblers. An intriguing aspect of warblers is their “niche differentiation” as studied by the late Robert MacArthur. He found that similar species coexist on shared resources. For example, the Cape May hunts in the treetop for insects while the Yellow-rumped searches for food at the base of the tree.

At UGA, Bob Cooper, Richard Chandler, and others are researching the Appalachian population of Black-throated Blues in their southern-most range to better understand the effects of climate change at a range’s edge.

Also, new technologies, such as geolocators attached to migratory warblers, and stable isotope analysis of feathers grown at breeding sites, allow researchers to better know where different breeding populations spend their winters.

But locating warblers is often a challenge! They are masters of hiding in treetops. A good time to see them is in spring, when the males are full of testosterone and defending their territories. Hall recommended Kennesaw Mountain for good views of tree-top dwellers in the spring and Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta in the fall. In the summer, the North Georgia Mountains are good for finding warblers, too. Outside of Georgia, consider the Dry Tortugas in the Florida Keys, the Texas Gulf Coast and the Great Lakes areas of Point Pelee and Magee Marsh.

The main threats to warblers include habitat loss, human development, and climate change. We can help by purchasing shade-grown coffee and planting native, fruiting shrubs and trees in our yards. Hall suggests installing a water feature that offers shallow areas for birds to bathe. If the birds hear the sound of trickling or flowing water they will arrive quickly. Creating bird-friendly habitats around our homes and throughout our cities helps warblers thrive.



Photo of Richard Hall (left) and Brian Cooke by Liz Conroy at UGA’s School of Ecology—Sept. 3, 2015

## Message from the President by Brian Cooke

The other day I sat with a cup of coffee and watched as a father rode his bike along the Prince Avenue sidewalk while his son rode behind him. The man’s bike was attached to the boy’s, guiding the young rider safely. The young boy grinned happily and practiced pedaling along with his father.

Just like that young boy’s father, many of us at ORAS had a great birding mentor. For me, it was a friend who let me tag along one winter as he chased ducks for his year list (my list started that day). Others in our group have had nurturing parents who shared a love for nature. For others, you may have had great teachers that instilled a conservation ethic.

As summer winds down and the excitement of fall migration builds, it’s a great time to be outside. In the coming months, I encourage you try your hand as the teacher. Bring someone with you to share in your passions. Whether it’s a friend, a family member, or a coworker, get someone new out birding or volunteering. Here are ideas to get new folks hooked:

Bring new birders to the ORAS weekend bird walks!

Donate and maintain bird feeders at your workplace.

Invite a new friend on an adventure to chase rare birds.

Challenge family members to find the most birds on a hike.

Volunteer with students and other locals to create bird-friendly habitat.

Set out binoculars near your feeders during family gatherings or holidays for friends and relatives to use.

We have fall bird walks that encourage all skill levels and a variety of volunteer opportunities. Help us share our birding experiences and passions with all of Athens and beyond!



**Photo of male Eastern Bluebird by Chuck Murphy at his home in Athens—June 4, 2015**

## **Beholding Bluebird Bathing Beauties**

*by Karla O'Grady*

One of my favorite summer bird watching experiences is when the fledglings follow their parents to learn about life outside of the nest.

Once a male bluebird brought four fledglings to my birdbath to demonstrate bathing. Dad got in the middle of the birdbath and splashed vigorously even dipping his head under the water.

The offspring watched until the bravest one stepped into the water and splashed. The other three soon followed. Then the bluebird family flew away. Not one fledgling put his or her head under the water. Perhaps next time they will.

## **Armadillos in the Garden** *by Liz Conroy*

Shuffling sounds in the fallen leaves brought me to my feet inside the dark tent. I was alone with my ten-month-old daughter while camping on Cumberland Island. My husband had gone off to join his UGA student working on a bobcat reintroduction project. Meanwhile, the scratching noises grew louder. I unzipped the front opening of the tent and poked my small flashlight through it. The weak beam lit up a hunched dark body dragging a long tail. It looked like a giant rat. I reached out for a large stick and planned to club this dangerous rodent if it came too close.

Fortunately, my husband returned from his work and saw me brandishing my weapon of choice. He explained that Cumberland Island had armadillos, and these nocturnal creatures were hunting for bugs and worms in the leaves and soil. Cumberland Island in November 1988 was my first

experience with armadillos. I forgot about them for several decades.

In recent years, I heard stories of armadillos appearing in Athens. Gardeners began worrying about them digging around in the soft soil of vegetable patches and flower beds. These animals arrived here from arid climates with sandy soil. So they prefer easy-to-dig dirt to unearth all those delectable invertebrates: beetles, grubs, snails, slugs, millipedes, grasshoppers and more. Fencing was gaining greater importance for keeping out deer as well as these more recent newcomers—the armadillos.

One morning in mid-July, while walking before sunrise, I looked up our gravel drive to see two armadillos trotting merrily toward me like a well matched pair of ponies. It seemed like they should be pulling a tiny coach. Their weak eyesight allowed me to get quite close. But their hearing and sense of smell are well-developed. Suddenly they paused, touched snouts and scurried off in opposite directions. They were adorable. Even as roadkill they look cuter than possums because their hard outer shell holds them together. That's when their nickname "possum on a half-shell" makes the most sense. Their love of digging, however, is not cute.

With their short, strong legs and good-sized claws, the common, or nine-banded armadillo (*Dasyposididae novemcinctus*) claws easily through leaves and forest soil. Also, these foot and a half long creatures must burrow. Gardeners dislike burrowing mammals where their plants are growing. But a burrow is crucial to the armadillo. They need protection from predators and extreme temperatures. If threatened by a large animal, they may curl up in a tight ball while their armor protects them. But more often, they will hop into the air when threatened before trying to scramble into a nearby burrow. This "popcorn-like" behavior, by the way, is why they get hit by cars when drivers see them on the road and attempt to straddle them. An armadillo doesn't know how to keep down low when a vehicle is going over it.

According to "Living with Wildlife" by Diana Landau and Shelley Stump, armadillos play an important role in reducing the insect population. I appreciated one of their suggestions: "Alternatively, view the armadillo as a natural insect-control mechanism and share your yard with it." At least, give it try.

## **Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Program Nest Box Promotion** *by Ryan Chitwood*

Become a Certified Backyard Wildlife Sanctuary Homeowner by providing habitat for birds, wildlife, and native plants in our community! Submit an application by the end of the year and receive a bonus nuthatch nest box pending your yard's certification. For more information: [www.oconeeriversaudubon.org](http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org) Or please email: [conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org)

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## Oconee Rivers Audubon Society



**Photo of American Redstart and Blackpoll Warbler  
by Richard Hall in his backyard in Athens—May 1,  
2014**

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