



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

October 2016

Vol. 27, No. 8

Next Meeting: Thursday, October 6, 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Georgia's Wildflower Gardens

Linda Chafin, a Conservation Botanist at The State Botanical Garden of Georgia, will discuss Georgia's rich plethora of more than 4,000 native plants and take us on a tour of some of our state's finest natural communities. She will also discuss the natural history of their signature wildflowers. Copies of her book, *A Field Guide to the Wildflowers of Georgia* will be available for sale and signing.

Chafin teaches botany classes, conducts plant surveys, and writes about Georgia's native plants. The University of Georgia Press published her books, *Field Guide to Rare Plants of Georgia in 2007* and *Field Guide to Wildflowers of Georgia*, in 2016. She received a Master's degree in Botany from UGA in 1988 and has conducted botanical and ecological surveys throughout the Southeast.

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 Education & Visitor Center 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 website for any changes to this schedule and be aware that some new bird walks may be added later).

- Oct. 15: **State Botanical Garden (Day Chapel)**
- Oct. 16: **Whitehall (be on time for this walk)**
- Oct. 17: **Oconee Hills Cemetery**
- Oct. 22: **Vulture Awareness Day (Landfill)**
- Oct. 29: **Sandy Creek Park (Campsite Dr.)**

* The SCNC Cook's Trail walk is also our Cook's Trail Cleanup trip. Please bring along a trash bag.

Fall Field Trip/GOS Meeting

Oct. 01: 6:00 a.m. Cochran Shoals (Information on where to meet is available online: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org).

Oct. 07-09: 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. Check out: <http://www.gos.org/2016markedate>

3rd Annual Vulture Festival – Oct. 22

Oct. 22: 8a.m.-1p.m. Annual Vulture Festival A bird walk is 8 a.m.-9p.m. The free festival is 9a.m.-1p.m. Landfill Outdoor Classroom, 5700 Lexington Rd., Watkinsville, GA. Activities, games, food, flight-trained birds, and vultures!

For more information: www.athensclarkecounty.com/recycling or call: (706) 613-3512

An Aviary for the Housing and On-site Release of Migratory Songbirds

by Suzanne Degrasse

Thank you so much, Oconee Rivers Audubon Society for the grant that allowed me to build an aviary for the housing and on-site release of migratory songbirds.

Designing the aviary was as challenging as the construction, but over a month of weekends I did get it built. I received my Federal permit for the rehabilitation of migratory songbirds in late April, about 2 months into baby season, and have accepted 9 birds into my care- 6 Phoebes, 2 Northern Mockingbirds and 1 Carolina Wren.

After a few weeks of initial care, the Phoebes were transferred to another rehabber for release as their pre-release care is technically complicated, and the wren was also transferred as birds should not be raised alone. However, the two NOMO's were successfully raised and released on my property! I appreciate the great assistance and the opportunity to assist and enrich our local population of both migratory and non-migratory songbirds.

I will continue to accept birds year round and am now the only federally licensed full rehab center for birds in Northeast Georgia. Thank-you for making that possible.



Photo of juvenile Northern Mockingbird by Suzie DeGrasse, Ila, Georgia—July 12, 2016

Conservation of the Swallow-tailed Kite

summary of September meeting by Carole Ludwig

Thanks to Dr. Maria Whitehead, Project Director for the Nature Conservancy, for her talk on Swallow-tailed Kites at our September meeting. She noted there have been several decades of decline of their population and geographic distribution: Once these raptors nested in 27 states, but now in only 7 or 8 states and only as far north as North Carolina and Arkansas.

She listed reasons for their decline such as: the loss of habitat, disturbance and killing by collectors and predation by owls. Today, the U.S. population is estimated at only 10,000 or less. But there has been an increase of sub-species outside of the U.S.

Kites prefer second-growth, diverse wetlands for nesting, preferably with some tall trees and with access to open fields for foraging nearby. They arrive from South America in early March. In April, they build or reclaim an old nest in the top of a tall tree. Nests are usually a shabby collection of twigs and moss into which they lay 1 to 3 eggs in May.

These raptors are social birds. They nest in colonies and forage in aggregates, often along with Mississippi Kites. Their diet consists of arthropods which are caught and consumed on the wing, but sometimes they will take song bird nestlings, bats and small birds. Aggregates of up to 1,000 birds can be seen when they are fattening up for their long distance fall migration.

The challenges facing conservation of this species include: the clearing of forested wetlands and subsequent timbering, habitat fragmentation, salinity intrusion into habitat, predation by owls, and the birds' tendency to seek out a previous nest which may no longer be safe.

Research collaborators (STK Alliance, timber companies, The Nature Conservancy, and Audubon researchers) have several ongoing projects to better understand Swallow-tailed Kite decline and to try to help reverse it. Those projects include: 1) Simultaneous July roost counting from the air in every involved state from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m. 2) Telemetry so that nestlings and adults can be followed even during their migration. 3) Building nest platforms and using decoys to lure Swallow-tailed Kites to protected areas. 4)

Conservation, study, and design planning of habitat.

Whitehead ended her talk with a video of some of the work that she and others are doing and credited the photographer Mac Stone with the beautiful images presented to the audience.

Building Community Engagement One Wildflower at a Time *by James Wood*

On an overcast Saturday morning at the end of February students from the Urban Landscape Ecology class, taught in the Odum School of Ecology, gathered at the Athens Regional Medical Center (ARMC) Healing Garden to work on a service project. The goal: to transform a section of exposed red clay and turf grass into a bird and pollinator garden. In class the students had learned about the global decline of pollinators and impacts of urbanization on birds. They had practiced designing gardens, going through the process of selecting plants with the right tolerances for sun and soil moisture, as well as checking bloom time to ensure the garden provides resources through the growing season.

A few weeks before the class arrived, UGA's Ecology Club had already begun building the garden by laying the border of the garden bed, tilling top soil into the hard packed clay and covering the area with black plastic to aid in killing the turf grass. The garden would be several hundred square feet, big enough to include a variety of plant colors and textures.

When students in the Urban Ecology course arrived, they set to removing the black plastic, further amending the clay with rich organic soil and preparing the plants for their new home. Some sixty person-hours of work later, the install was complete, and ARMC had a garden designed to bring beauty and color their patients, staff and visitors, and also to benefit the birds and other pollinators that call Athens home.

The plants that were used are all native to Georgia, including Stokes Aster (*Stokesia leavis*), Ohio Spiderwort (*Tradiscantia ohioensis*), Hairystem Spiderwort (*T. hirsuticaulis*), Blue Sage (*Salvia azurea*), Joe Pye Weed (*Eutrochium purpureum*), Downy Sunflower (*Helianthus mollis*) and Butterfly Milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*). Diversity was bolstered with seeds of Button Blazing Star (*Liatris aspera*) and Showy Goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*), among others. In all close to thirty species were included.

The medical center had the garden certificated as a butterfly garden by the North American Butterfly Association, and they have pledged not to use any pesticides in the garden. A few weeks after the first garden was installed, several students built a second smaller garden at the corner of Sylvan Road and Talmadge Road, just down the street. This shadier pocket garden supports Wood Phlox (*Phlox divaricate*) and other native plants, and it's one more step towards restoring native wildflowers to Athens' landscape.

Today, the Black-eyed Susans, Downy Sunflowers, the Blue Sage and the Joe Pye Weed are blooming. With some luck and rain, these wildflowers will keep blooming into the fall. I've watched Ruby-throated Hummingbirds visit the bright blue flowers of the Blue Sage and American goldfinches, Bluebirds and Mourning Doves are common residents of the garden. Numerous types of bees, butterflies and other pollinators are also taking advantage of the garden. People,

from the neighborhood and from the medical center, are enjoying the lively colors and textures the garden offers, too. So, on behalf of both the people and the wildlife of that are enjoying the garden, a big thank-you to ORAS for supporting this project and making it possible!



Photo of the Bird and Pollinator Garden at ARMC by James Wood, Athens—February 20, 2016



Photo of the Bird and Pollinator Garden at ARMC by James Wood, Athens—July 19, 2016

Here there be Dragons by Fiona Sheehan

When people hear about Indonesia, they often think of Bali: idyllic rice terraces and traditional dancers. To naturalists, however, Indonesia is home to some of the richest biological diversity in the world. Head east 300 miles from Bali, and you will come face to face with living dragons.

Komodo dragons are the largest living lizards in the world; the record holder measured 10.3 feet long and weighed in at 366 pounds. As the dominant carnivores across their range, they eat everything from carrion to water buffalo and may even attack humans.

About a year ago, during my Peace Corps service in Indonesia, I visited Komodo Island. There I learned these dragons will even cannibalize their own young. While other large carnivores such as lions leave the intestines, hide, skeleton, and hooves of their prey, these giants leave only about 12% of their meal untouched. When they get to the intestines, they shake them from side to side to expel the feces. The young Komodos, who must always fear a hungry mom or dad, will roll in excrement to survive infanticide.

Komodo National Park, made up of four volcanic islands just off the coast of Flores, is a UNESCO World Heritage site, and the last refuge for the world's remaining 3,000 Komodo dragons. These latter day dragons have nearly disappeared in the wild due to land encroachment and dwindling prey; now they need human protection to survive.

In order to fund protected spaces for Komodos, however, conservationists must rely upon eco-tourism. Today, visitors can observe these fierce predators lumbering languidly past even a family with small children who show little fear of the heavily sedated dragons. You can even pose for a picture with a dragon! But what is the cost to yet another species that we must protect from ourselves?



Photo of (sedated) Komodo dragon by Fiona Sheehan, Komodo Island National Park, Indonesia—July 13, 2015

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

President Brian Cooke
President@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Vice-President Katy Manley
vp@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Treasurer Alison Huff
treasurer@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Secretary Mary Case
secretary@oconeeriversaudubon.org

The Yellowthroat
Published monthly by the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society
PO Box 81082
Athens, GA 30608

Submit items to address above or e-mail *The Yellowthroat* editor Liz Conroy: yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org Articles, artwork, notices, and sighting reports welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the first day 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 Audu