



# The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

October 2019

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## **Next Meeting: Thursday, October 3, 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens**

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

### **Botanist to Discuss Waxcap Mushrooms**

Botanist and mushroom researcher, Jean Lodge, will discuss her research on the ancestry, ecology and importance of the mysterious waxcap mushroom

The waxcap mushroom is a group of fungi with species found in Europe and North America. Before Lodge's research, scientists thought the European and North American species were the same. She will discuss her search for the true ancestry of this mushroom group. She will also examine the ecology of these fungi and their important relationship with plant roots.

Lodge is currently an adjunct faculty member with the departments of Plant Pathology, Plant Biology, and the Odum School of Ecology at the University of Georgia. She has also worked as a botanist with the U.S. Forest Service.

**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 announcements for any changes to this schedule and be aware that some new bird walks may be added later.

- Oct. 05: **ACC Greenway**
- Oct. 06: **State Botanical Garden (Day Chapel)**
- Oct. 26: **Sandy Creek Park (Campsite Dr.)**

### **Fall Field Trip and GOS Meeting**

Oct. 11-14: **Georgia Ornithological Society Fall Meeting**  
The GOS Fall Meeting takes place on Jekyll Island.

<https://www.gos.org/2019FallMeeting>

Oct. 19: 6:00 a.m., **Cochran Shoals** (More information on where to meet will be available in October).

### **Full Moon Hike (Hunter's Moon) at State Botanical Garden—Sun. Oct. 13**

On Sunday, Oct. 13 at 7:00 p.m., the Education Staff at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia (SBG) invites hikers of all ages to enjoy the beauty of nature at night.

Be prepared for a two mile hike through the garden and on wooded trails. (A backpack carrier is recommended for anyone with young children or infants.) Meet at the fountain in front of the Visitor's Center. Fee: \$5 per person or \$15 per family. (Preregistration is required.)

Call 706.542.1244 or visit: [www.botgarden.uga.edu](http://www.botgarden.uga.edu)

## Effects of Hurricanes on Island Birds

*summary of September meeting by Liz Conroy*

Thanks to Joe Wunderle, Emeritus Scientist USDA Forest Service in Luquillo, Puerto Rico, who discussed his experience documenting the short-term effects of hurricanes on Caribbean terrestrial birds. Along with research, he has taught for more than forty years in the Caribbean.

Wunderle recalled how his hurricane studies began by “default.” That’s because he and his group had already gathered data on Puerto Rico (P.R.) and elsewhere before major hurricanes struck.

Specifically, in the Luquillo Mountains, they studied the before and after effects of Hurricane Hugo (which brushed the eastern end of the island) in 1989. He noted that direct effects on birds from these storms include: mortality from winds, rains, and flooding as well as geographical displacement from winds.

Indirect effects from hurricanes include loss of food supplies and foraging options, loss of nests, changes in habitat structure and composition as well as increased vulnerability to predators and parasites. Indirect effects can often be the longest lasting effects on bird populations!

Category 3 (up to 129 mph winds) Hurricane Gilbert struck Jamaica, September 10-13, 1988. Fortunately, sampling had been done in December 1987. Wunderle noted that before and after comparisons showed little species turnover. The mean avian detections per point count (ten minutes of counting, then hike 100 meters and repeat) revealed that lowland forests had the most species. But the montane areas: cloud forest, coffee, pine plantations, contained fewer species. He noted, “Montane avian populations are more likely to decrease than lowland populations. But lowland habitats even show some increase.” The reason, he added, is due to the recovery of vegetation which occurs much more quickly in lowlands.

Wunderle explained how post-hurricane population changes are related to diet. The research showed how populations of nectarivores, seedeaters/frugivores decreased while populations of insectivores stayed the same in Jamaica, four months after Hurricane Gilbert.

Meanwhile, migrant insectivores actually increased: “Why are insectivores decreases rare?” he asked. “It’s because insect outbreaks are common after hurricanes.” After all, insects have a faster life-cycle than seeds and fruits. He added, “Many insects are detritivores (dead leaf eaters) so they really take-off in numbers after a storm!”

Some bird species that decrease in number after a storm include: Streamer-tailed Hummingbird, Orangequit, Black-faced Grassquit, Yellow-shouldered Grassquit and Black-and-white Warbler.

The latter is an insectivore, but because it forages on insects on twigs (knocked down in hurricanes), it can’t find food. In short, flower, fruit, and twig abundance declines after hurricanes. Additionally, patterns of fruit phenology may be disrupted after hurricanes so the availability changes and even the fruit quality may decline (Jeff Thompson, 2000).

The Puerto Rican Parrot population severely declined after Hurricanes Hugo and Georges. When storms destroy tree cover for these endangered birds, it’s easier for Red-tailed Hawks to prey on them. “It’s a double-whammy—less food and fewer places to hide,” Wunderle said. “But these parrots have site fidelity so they’re easy to track after hurricanes.” Those raised in aviaries know how to return to a food sources. “They know where to go when the crunch comes.”

What do birds do during the actual storm? They go to the leeward side of structures and go to ground to get out of the winds. Unfortunately, this didn’t work when Hurricane Maria arrived during the night over Puerto Rico with 150 mph winds. The parrots were disoriented; 17 of the 20 that had tracking devices were found dead from fallen branches.

Wunderle offered ideas on what can be done to help island birds after hurricanes: “Provide food during post-hurricane food bottlenecks and replace nest sites and cavities,” he said. Planting resistant and resilient fruiting plants such as Sierra Palms and Royal Palms is also helpful; these can even be planted as ornamentals. Preserving habitats is necessary, too.



**American Kestrel pair (showing light-bellied phase from Bahamas) by J.M. Wunderle, San Salvador Island, Bahamas—April 2014**

## Exploring New Zealand (Part 2)

by Patrick Maurice

Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, and Fiji: four places that I've always wanted to visit. Thanks to UGA's Discover Abroad program, I was able to make that dream become a reality during my spring semester abroad. Unfortunately, this trip wasn't a birding trip; it was a school trip. But I wasn't going to travel to all of these amazing destinations and leave my camera and binoculars at home!

Our second stop was New Zealand:

It's hard to choose a favorite memory from our travels around New Zealand. We spent three weeks there with the Kiwis—nickname for New Zealanders—but the actual birds are difficult to find. I didn't see one while I was there. Over the course of my time in New Zealand, I paraglided from a mountaintop, did a polar plunge, snorkeled with dolphins and completed the Tongariro Alpine Crossing. These were all incredible experiences, but one experience that stood out to me the most was snorkeling with dolphins in Kaikoura.

Kaikoura is a small coastal town on the northeast coast of New Zealand's South Island. It's known as one of the best places in the world to whale watch and swim with wild dolphins. As most pelagic birders know, marine life below the surface is a good indicator for finding pelagic birds above the surface, so I was really looking forward to this experience. After spending our first two weeks on the southern half of the island exploring Queenstown, Doubtful Sound, and Mount Aoraki, we headed to Kaikoura. February 13<sup>th</sup> began as a gray, drizzly day. Yet we were still excited. We were about to experience something that few people have done: snorkel with a pod of wild dolphins! After a brief presentation from the outfitter, Encounter Kaikoura, we suited up. Because of the cold water we couldn't just swim in our swimsuits, so wetsuits, a snorkel mask, and flippers were provided. After splitting into two groups, we headed out onto the cool, gray waters of the South Pacific.

The first hour was disappointing. These are wild animals that rove around looking for schools of fish; we were having trouble finding a pod. After getting in the water a couple of times, without much luck, we heard about a large pod of 300+ Dusky, Common and Hector's Dolphins and zoomed over to find them. We were successful! I got to be in the water with these magnificent creatures as they acrobatically swam and played around me. It was an incredible experience to be in their world and swim with them.

Swimming with dolphins was probably the highlight of the experience for my classmates. But my personal highlight was seeing the pelagic birds. There were White-fronted Terns, Hutton's Shearwaters, a Parasitic Jaeger, Northern Giant-Petrels, and multiple species of albatrosses. It was awesome! My favorite bird from the pelagic trip was a White-capped Albatross that let us cruise right up to it before taking off and flying right past the boat. This was an experience that I'm going to remember for a long time!



**White-capped Albatross at Kaikoura by Patrick Maurice, Canterbury, New Zealand—February 13, 2019**



**Hutton's Shearwater and Dusky Dolphin at Kaikoura by Patrick Maurice, Canterbury, New Zealand—February 13, 2019**



**Dusky Dolphin (flipping) at Kaikoura by Patrick Maurice, Canterbury, New Zealand—February 13, 2019**

## Message from ORAS President

by Lauren Gingerella

It's that time of year again! Fall birding is when birders dust off their binoculars from the lull of late summer and hit their favorite hotspots hoping to spot birds on their southbound migration. This time of year, I enjoy stepping into my backyard during the early evening hours and looking up. The Common Nighthawk is one of my favorite birds to see during fall migration.

Common Nighthawks are in the nightjar family, and are relatives to the Chuck-wills-widow and Eastern Whip-poor-will. In flight, nighthawks are slender with long-pointed wings. A white patch on the underside of the wing is a distinct identification characteristic. If you have the unique opportunity to see a nighthawk perched, then you will notice a well camouflaged, chunky, short-legged bird with a white patch on its throat.

Common Nighthawks are most active at dawn and dusk, often vocalizing their buzzy *peent* call in flight. Nighthawks also create a unique booming sound, which is caused by air passing rapidly through the bird's primary wing feathers during display dives.

This species is among the latest spring migrants to return to its breeding grounds. Common Nighthawks can be found breeding all across Georgia and nests are typically placed on open forest floors, sandy areas, rock outcrops, and occasionally gravel roofs in urbanized areas.

While migrating back to its South American wintering grounds, nighthawks can be observed flying and foraging erratically in large flocks. In Athens, I have observed Common Nighthawks flying over downtown and Stanford Stadium during evening football games.

According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, this species has declined by 61% between 1966 and 2014. Additionally, the 2014 State of the Birds Report lists Common Nighthawks as a Common Bird in Steep Decline. The overuse of pesticides leading to a reduction in aerial insects and loss of open woods are two major threats to this species. Increased predator populations, especially in more urban settings, decrease nest success as well. Since the Common Nighthawk is in decline, it is even more special to observe this bird during fall migration. So, listen for its *peent* call, and look up. You will not be disappointed to watch a flock zoom around in an extraordinary display.

## Rivers Alive! Volunteers Needed Oct. 5

Please clean-up our waterways! Bring a reusable water bottle, gloves, long pants, and closed-toed shoes. For more information: [www.accgov.com/riversalive](http://www.accgov.com/riversalive)  
View a list of sites and register ahead of time to volunteer: <https://uga.givepulse.com/group/138114-Rivers-Alive-Athens-Clarke-County>

## Connect to Protect—Native Plant Sale

Buy quality native plants at the Mimsie Lanier Center for Native Plant Studies at the State Botanical Garden on Oct. 3, 4, 5, and 10, 11, 12. Thursdays and Fridays: 4p.m. until 6p.m. and 9 a.m. until noon on Saturdays. Find plants that support Georgia's birds and insects. Proceeds help the center's conservation efforts. All plants are grown at the garden.

## Deadline for Fall Grants—Oct. 5

Fall is the time for grant applications! We begin accepting grants on September 5. The final deadline is October 15. Recipients can expect a decision by November 1. We anticipate that four to six grants will be awarded. For more information, visit: [www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/grant](http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/grant)

## SCNC Birdseed Sale—Order by Oct. 8

Buy quality bird seed through SCNC, Inc. (the non-profit organization that supports Sandy Creek Nature Center). Orders will be taken from Sept. 1 to Oct. 8. Delivery and pick-up take place on the weekend of Oct. 25-27. Seniors and anyone with special needs in the Athens area can have their birdseed delivered for free. <http://www.sandycreeknaturecenterinc.org/bird-seed-sale>

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