

# The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the  
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

September 2010

Vol. 21 No. 7

## Next Meeting

**Thursday, September 2 at 7:00 p.m.  
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

**Ben Emanuel** and **Jessica Sterling** will provide an update on the chemical pollution of Trail Creek in Athens.

Sterling, a graduate student in the Odum School of Ecology at UGA and Upper Oconee Watershed Network board member, has been studying Trail Creek and other urban Athens streams for two years. She will discuss baseline ecological conditions in the creek, the ecological damage done by the chemical spill, and the emerging ideas for remediation.

Emanuel, the Oconee River Project Director for Altamaha Riverkeeper, has been working with state, local and federal officials on the issue since the time of the J&J Chemical Company fire and subsequent chemical spill. He will update ORAS on those efforts and ways we all can help with issues that have arisen in the aftermath of the spill.

**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.

## GOS Fall Meeting

Georgia Ornithological Society will hold its fall meeting on **October 8-10, 2010**, at Jekyll Island, Georgia. For details, see <http://www.gos.org/meetings/meetings.html>

## Fall Bird Walks and Field Trip

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society and the Sandy Creek Nature Center co-sponsor these bird walks. We hope that both beginning and experienced birders will join us. The pace is generally slow, but participants should dress for occasionally muddy paths.

Thank you to Ed Maioriello for organizing the fall bird walks for us! However, we need volunteer trip leaders. If you can lead one of our walks (or organize one of your own), please contact Ed at [fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org).

All walks meet at 8:00AM!

- August 28: Sandy Creek Nature Center  
Meet at the Allen House parking lot across from the ENSAT building.
- September 4: State Botanical Garden  
Meet at the Chapel parking lot. Keep bearing left after you cross the cattle guard, the road will end at a parking lot.
- September 11: Sandy Creek Nature Center walk and Cook's Trail Cleanup!  
Meet at the Allen House parking lot. We will walk Cook's trail and pick up any trash we find, so bring a garbage bag or two!
- September 25: State Botanical Garden  
Meet at the Chapel parking lot.
- October 2: Whitehall Forest  
Meet at the closed gate at 0800. We have a key to get in. Don't be late!
- October 9: Sandy Creek Park  
Meet at the gate at 0800, or drive across the dam to the last parking lot past the campsites.

**September 18: 6:00 a.m. Kennesaw Mountain field trip:** Meet at Shops of South Athens Lot, South Milledge Avenue and the Bypass

## Georgia Coast Birding & Nature Festival

The festival is **October 7-10** on Jekyll Island. See <http://jekyllisland.com/Events/GeorgiaCoastBirdingNatureFestival.aspx> for details.

## An Eastern Phoebe's "Chatter Call"

by Sigrid Sanders from

<http://birdingnotes.sigridsanders.com/>

Wednesday, September 30th, 2009

The past few days, each morning has begun with the persistent calls and song of an Eastern Phoebe in the branches of the oaks outside our bedroom windows, and one or two Phoebes have been active around the house all day – even more active than usual.

With its plain gray back and wings, darker gray, slightly crested head and gray-white breast, this small, shadow-like flycatcher isn't flashy in appearance – but its animated behavior, characteristic habit of wagging its tail up and down when perched, and the way it hunts, nests and makes itself right at home around yards and houses makes it a familiar bird to many people. For me it's a favorite.

An Eastern Phoebe sings its name with a scratchy whistle, gives a distinctive sharp *tsup* call, and occasionally erupts in a jumble of tumbling notes that sound agitated or excited. The species account in *Birds of North America*\* describes a "chatter call" as a "rapid, harsh, nasal *tree-tree-tree-tree*, with occasionally as many as 30 elements" and that sounds like what I've often heard. The account goes on to say that this call is given only by males, and is almost always given around a nest or potential nest site. I've been hearing this call often the past few days and don't always see the birds when I hear it. Of course, they're not nesting right now, but on at least one occasion today, a Phoebe was perched on the site of *last year's nest* when it called like this.

I had been watching as it hunted from different perches around the front yard, calling, singing, fluttering around under the eaves to check for spiders and insects, and perching on the rim of the birdbath briefly. From a low branch on a pecan tree, it flew to the crook in the gutter over the garage where a pair of Phoebes nested last spring and raised three healthy babies. It paused there for several seconds and gave this rapid call of tumbling notes. I thought it might be one of the young ones that were born there, but maybe it was the male of the pair.

I'm not 100 percent sure this call – which I usually describe as "fussing" – is the same as the "chatter call," but the description given sounds like the same one.

\*Harmon P. Weeks, Jr. "Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*), *The Birds of North America Online* (A. Poole, Ed.) Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

## A Swift Night Out

adapted from information provided by Paul and Georgan Kyle

As summer draws to a close and the swifts have finished raising their young, these fascinating aerial acrobats begin to congregate in communal roosts prior to their migration in the fall. Some roosts may host hundreds or even thousands of swifts! We encourage you to join your local Audubon chapter in this exhilarating spectacle.

Participants should meet with Carole Ludwig on **Friday, September 10**, on the street behind the Bottleworks to count swifts. The group will observe the Bottleworks roost starting about 30 minutes before dusk and estimate the number of swifts that enter. If enough people participate, the group will split in two so that downtown sites can also be counted.

To participate, check the ORAS web site at <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/>, contact Carole Ludwig at the September meeting, or call her at 706-769-7008.

For additional information and results, please visit [www.chimneyswifts.org](http://www.chimneyswifts.org)

## Jekyll Island Bird Banding Opportunity

The Jekyll Island Banding Station will be banding birds **October 2 – 16**. To volunteer, contact Chris Pitman at 770/339-0916 or [ovenbird@att.net](mailto:ovenbird@att.net)

## More Bird Banding Opportunities

from <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/upcoming.html>

Learn how to mist net, measure, and band birds with Charlie Muise, Georgia's Important Bird Area Coordinator and his crew of banders! Charlie Muise runs two MAPS stations in the Atlanta area, including Panola State Park and Joe Kurz Wildlife Management Area.

**Editor's Note:** The Georgia Important Bird Areas program is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to protecting significant bird habitats in the state.

To make a tax-deductible contribution, please make your check out to "AAS" and write "IBA" in the subject line.

For more information or to volunteer, contact Charlie Muise at [cmmbirds@yahoo.com](mailto:cmmbirds@yahoo.com) or 678-967-9924, or see the IBA website:

<http://www.atlantaudubon.org/iba/>

## Tale of an Atlantic Puffin: Do Birds Really Mate for Life?

By Vanessa Lane

I tightened my coat around me, shivering against the foggy chill of a coastal Maine spring morning. The small bird blind was nothing more than a tall wooden box with barely enough room for the chair upon which I sat, and it offered meager shelter from the elements. I drew the thin fabric of an aging curtain closed in a vain attempt at warmth as ocean spray hovered in the air, tiny spheres of moisture that collected on my eyelashes in tiny drops of dew. A sudden gust of salty wind shook my blind like an angry sailor, challenging my presence on this 30 acre rock, 22 miles out at sea, that mankind had the audacity to call an island. Humans called this place Matinicus Rock, nesting seabirds called it home.

The raucous, gravelly scolding of distant common murrelets caught my attention, and I peered through the gap between my scarf and hat to observe. There, a ghostly shadow in the fog, an Atlantic puffin wheeled in close to gauge the shoreline. It darted back out to sea, disappearing into the white cloudy abyss, then returned a minute later. This time it was committed, and it plummeted from the sky like a stone, bright orange feet rising for the first contact with Mother Earth in months.

The landing was a bust. Feet made contact, but slipped, and the puffin collided chest first with basalt. Unabashed, the puffin stood and shook himself off, a confident man in his black and white tuxedo and smattering of facial clown paint. As I watched him carefully hop among the rocks of that barren shore, a flash of unexpected color caught my eye, and I swiveled my spotting scope around for a better look. My lens slowly coming into focus, I saw what I was waiting for... a plastic identification band on his right leg. This particular band was so old the numbers have long since worn away to underlying black plastic, but I caught a glimpse of green, and smile when I realized who this is. This was green-black, a

23 year old male, and one of the first puffins brought back from Newfoundland in the 1970s to reestablish puffins in the Gulf of Maine.

It was humbling to meet that bird, however indirectly, for he was as old as I was. I reviewed my notes, wondering if he'd use the same nesting burrow as years before. Already I could hear the low, evil laughter of puffin love within the rocks, and I pondered where his mate was.

Movement in the rocks drew my eye, and I watched green-black's mate emerge from the cracks leading to their burrow. Green-black curiously doesn't hop over to meet her, and instead keeps an attentive distance. Green-black's mate looked over her shoulder at the young, unbanded male creeping up the tunnel, his head held low for balance as he sized a gap to hop across. Once on the other side, green-black's mate leaned forward, beak slightly open, and the unbanded male accepted her invitation. The two shake their heads, bills clacking together in amorous display while green-black watches on, rejected.

I remember growing up, hearing wondrous tales of eagles, geese, and other magnificent birds choosing mates for life. The sacred vow between mated birds was a symbol of long-lasting purity and innocence, a reflection of what we want in our own relationships. Yet our own relationships are also reflected in nature.

The beautiful male red-winged blackbird tries to lure as many females as possible to his harem with promises of prime real-estate and gaudy colors, not unlike scenes familiar in many popular films. The sparrow-like female dunnock of Europe entices many males to her erotic, tail-lifting display, earning her title as the genuine pole-dancer of the bird world. And Mr. Green-Black, the divorced puffin after years of diligent devotion to what should have been his life-long partner. Even birds are subjected to the fickleness of love, despite a wide spread perception of unending fidelity. Mr. Green-Black taught me a valuable lesson that day. Now when someone asks me if birds mate for life, I ask them to consider the following question: do we?

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of Audubon!**



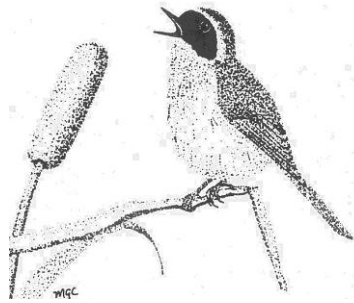
For an introductory National Audubon Society membership (which includes *Audubon* magazine, local membership, and a subscription to *The Yellowthroat*), mail this form with a \$20.00 check payable to NAS to

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society  
PO Box 81082  
Athens, GA 30608

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Street \_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

## ORAS Bird Conservation Grant

Congratulations to Kerrie Anne Loyd, summer 2010 recipient of the ORAS Conservation Grant.



Kerrie Anne is studying the effects of outdoor cats on wildlife by attaching "kitty cams" to cats and videoing their daily wanderings. ORAS is sponsoring the purchase of one camera.

If you would like to learn more about Kerrie Anne's project or donate money to her research, please email Vanessa Lane at [president@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:president@oconeeriversaudubon.org), and she will put you in touch with Kerrie Anne.

## Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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

Submit information to the address above or by e-mail to [yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org](mailto:yellowthroat@oconeeriversaudubon.org). Articles, artwork, notices, and sighting reports welcomed. The deadline for submissions is the first Thursday 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 Audubon Society.

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