



# The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

Winter 2021

Vol. 32, No.1

## ORAS Meetings:

**First Thursday (each month) 7:00 p.m.  
Virtual Presentations**

The Oconee Rivers Audubon Society's (ORAS) general meetings take place on the first Thursday of the month. Due to COVID-19 concerns, these will continue to be virtual meetings. For information about the topic of a presentation, visit: [oconeeriversaudubon.org](http://oconeeriversaudubon.org) or watch for ORAS announcements on social media.

## Hoping for GOS Fall Meeting 2021

by GOS President Larry Carlile

I wrote in the last issue of *The GOShawk* (<https://www.gos.org/newsletters/202009.pdf>) that the Georgia Ornithological Society (GOS) Executive Committee was going to convene a virtual meeting in October or November to decide whether we'd conduct a winter meeting on Tybee Island over the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend.

We just adjourned our virtual meeting, and we all agreed that hosting a winter meeting was not in the best interests of the membership given the on-going COVID-19 pandemic infection rates and the uncertainty associated with what conditions may be like in January 2021. We also decided that planning for an out-of-cycle 2021 spring meeting was not prudent. So, here's hoping that we can host a meeting in the fall of 2021 on Jekyll Island over the Columbus Day holiday weekend.

## Nature Always Renews by Robert Wyatt

When leaves change and fall in autumn,  
they cycle from top to bottom,  
but just in a vertical plane,  
as in the forest they remain.

Shortly, they shall again rise high,  
as nutrients microbes supply.  
Nature ever retains her wealth,  
for she always renews herself.

## Volunteers Needed for Pollinator Garden by Betsy Kurimo-Beechuk

As many of you may know, ORAS was awarded the National Audubon Society's Plants for Birds Burke Grant last fall. The location for the pollinator garden is along the Oconee River Greenway in Athens (at the corner of Martin Luther King and North Avenue) and is now part of a greater 12,000 square foot restoration area that the Athens-Clarke County (ACC) Sustainability Office (SO) is currently managing.

ORAS and the ACC SO have partnered in order to meet the grant's and county's objectives of enhancing this space with the addition of native plants. These plants will directly improve the habitat for many species of wildlife.

ORAS also worked with UGA students from the Odum School of Ecology to develop educational materials and interpretative and bilingual signage for the garden, and a local native plant nursery, Beech Hollow. Site prep for the garden consisted of mulching and weeding, and began in August 2020 with the help of numerous ORAS and community volunteers.

ORAS and Beech Hollow worked together to select plant species which will provide the greatest benefit to our native pollinator species by providing food resources throughout the year. Besides the native plantings, there are upcoming plans for a water feature, chimney swift tower, and a pathway through the garden. Volunteer help from the community is needed and much appreciated!

If you are interested in volunteering, please contact Betsy Kurimo-Beechuk at [elizkuri@uga.edu](mailto:elizkuri@uga.edu)

## Eco-Haiku (When Pollinators Party)

by Pat Priest

Bees lolling about  
drunkenly bumbling, tumbling  
deep in squash blossoms

## **EcoReach: Engaging K-12 Students and Teachers in Exciting Environmental Education** by Cece Working and Carol Yang

EcoReach is the UGA Odum School of Ecology's environmental education and community outreach organization. It is graduate student led, but open to students, staff and faculty from all departments. The mission of EcoReach is four-pronged. We aim to share information about ecology with the community, strengthen awareness of environmental issues, inspire an interest in the environment in school-age children, and facilitate educational opportunities for K-12 students in Athens schools and UGA students, staff and faculty. EcoReach focuses outreach efforts in Athens-Clarke County (ACC) to provide supplemental STEM programming in a school district where these opportunities are not always available.

To fulfill our mission, we attend community events such as the Athens Water Festival, Insectival, Boy Scout Merit Badge Days and Science Nights. We also participate in repeated visits to local schools and libraries to foster positive connections between K-12 students/teachers and UGA students/faculty. We've facilitated engaging activities about pollinators, water quality and more in local classrooms. During the past few years, we've led a monthly program about ecology at the library. In response to COVID-19, we've shifted our volunteer opportunities with local schools and organizations online. This transition has encouraged us to think about how to engage in meaningful ways with the local community, while still creating impactful environmental education opportunities. Recently, we contributed to the virtual Athens Water Festival in a Box initiative with some fun lesson plans and even a Water Cycle Dance video!

EcoReach is also excited to promote opportunities for K-12 students and teachers to Zoom with local scientists. We also have volunteers who are working to create engaging lesson plans about environmental topics in which local students and teachers are interested. In addition, other EcoReach volunteers are developing virtual projects, including a video blog series about local scientists ("Who are our local scientists?") and a platform for students, community members, and scientists to share about nature observations from their own neighborhoods ("Backyard Critters: Who do you see?"). We hope that these interactions with students will help demystify and humanize scientists. We also hope to expand understanding about the range of work scientists do, not only in labs, but also in the field and in collaboration with other organizations.

In a recent Zoom session with a high school class, EcoReach members engaged high school students in discussions about microbes. Participants learned about not only the microbes living in our guts that help us digest food and stay healthy, but also the important role of microbes which help to cycle carbon and nitrogen throughout the planet. The students who have composted food scraps were surprised that composting is essentially a form of taming bacteria. They were also impressed when they learned about the largest organism on

Earth; although many guessed that whales are among the largest, it was exciting to learn that the largest organism is actually a humongous fungus that has mycelium covering almost four square miles of forest in Oregon!

This past summer, teamed up with Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS), and the Lilly Branch Audubon Student Conservation Chapter, to fundraise to purchase binoculars for Black K-12 students in Clarke County. We received more than \$18,000 in donations to purchase binoculars to facilitate and encourage their bird watching. During fall semester, we worked to solicit nominations of students who would love to have their own pair of binoculars, as well as classrooms and science programs that would benefit from group binocular sets. We are thrilled with our collaborative fundraising outcome and excited to be moving forward with this project. We also look forward to continuing to work with ORAS!

## **Message from the President – Hello 2021** by Lauren Gingerella

**Rejoice!** We made it through the twelve months of turmoil that was 2020. The global pandemic uprooted our lives last March and planted new norms and rituals in our everyday routine.

For someone who regularly travels for both work and pleasure, quarantining at home was especially difficult. I wanted to be birding on the coast, hiking on the Appalachian Trail, or visiting family further north rather than being confined Athens. My internal *zugunruhe* nagged at me daily.

Like many others isolating at home during the pandemic, I found solace in watching the birds visiting my backyard. It was comforting to know birds continued on with their lives, uninterrupted.

I found entertainment in the interpersonal squabbles between birds, such as the Brown Thrashers and American Robins unwilling to share the birdbath, or a feisty Ruby-throated Hummingbird territorially claiming a feeder as its own. I was more than a little envious when Rose-breasted Grosbeaks visited our feeders this spring, knowing it was just a stopover visit as they were continuing their migration northward.

Then, my dorkiness peaked when I started to watch feeder cams on YouTube. With the press of a button, I could have a front row seat at feeders in exotic locales – Costa Rica, Colombia, and Europe to name a few. In one particular video series, there is a feeder that travels to different locations throughout Europe.

With my *Birds of Europe* field guide, I try to pinpoint the region based on the species occurring at the feeder and time of year. These feeder cams have given me an opportunity to learn new species and be ready for birding adventures when it is safe to travel again. Here's to a safer and happier 2021 with more travels and birding expeditions. Happy New Year!

## Enjoying the Animated Actions of a Foraging Reddish Egret

by Patrick Maurice

After my semester ended, I went on a four day birding trip with my family to central Florida to see what we could find. We didn't have any major targets for this trip; we just wanted to find as many species as possible.

We spent one night in Gainesville and two nights in Titusville. On the way to our hotel in Titusville, we stopped at Lighthouse Point Park because Purple Sandpipers had been reported there. After spending some quality time with a pair of Purple Sandpipers on the jetty, a Reddish Egret flew in and began to hunt in front of us.



**Purple Sandpiper by Patrick Maurice, Lighthouse Point Park & Jetty, Volusia County, Florida—  
December 19, 2020**

It was a joy to watch this Reddish Egret as it hunted in front of us. It frantically ran around in the surf chasing fish. It would raise and lower its wings as it ran around, and I wondered if having wings helps or hinders its ability to hunt.



**Reddish Egret by Patrick Maurice, Lighthouse Point Park & Jetty, Volusia County, Florida—  
December 19, 2020**

It seems like the wings could cause drag, but they may also help shade the water and make it easier for the egret to see its prey. I noticed multiple times that the egret would raise its wings just before striking the water, which could make the latter thought true. The egret was an extremely proficient hunter. We watched it catch five or six fish while we were there.



**Reddish Egret by Patrick Maurice, Lighthouse Point Park & Jetty, Volusia County, Florida—  
December 19, 2020**



## First Year Leading Own Section of the Christmas Bird Count *by Emma Dickinson*

Every year, the end of the fall semester signals two things: I can shed myself of the stress of classes and grades, and it is time for the Christmas Bird Count (CBC). I usually join a group spontaneously - in Athens or Atlanta. But this year, I was interviewed by Jessica Wurst for WUGA's program "Athens News Matters" to discuss the Athens CBC. <https://www.wuga.org/post/athens-news-matters-christmas-bird-count> So I thought it would be appropriate to do the CBC in Athens this year.

It was my first year leading my own section of the Christmas Bird Count. Luckily, I had the company of local bat expert and novice birding buddy, Cecilia Sánchez. I swear that it was the coldest CBC I have ever done. When we started a little after 8:00 am, a heavy frost was still on the ground, painting the landscape a muted white. We first traveled to the pastures across from Millstone Circle, off Morton Road. I had been to this spot before to look at some lonely pairs of Sandhill Cranes last February, and there had been a Loggerhead Shrike and a Northern Harrier reported earlier in the day.

Unfortunately, we dipped on both the shrike and Northern Harrier, but we did get to see two beautiful Red-headed Woodpeckers in the tall oaks by the farm pond, along with several Northern Flickers that were hyper focused on some tasty insects on the ground. A single sapsucker also hyperactively circled the tree.

The crown jewel of the visit was the mass of Killdeer that were feeding together in the field across from the farm pond - at least 175 strong. We also got to see them fly in a group overhead - seeing the small murmuration of the Killdeer is amazing. Next, we went down Morton Road to a powerline cut where we got a committee of Black and Turkey Vultures on the powerline. The coolest sighting was a plump Hermit Thrush that was conspicuously sitting on the edge of a tree stand.

After seeing Northern Flickers and Red-headed Woodpeckers, we were on a mission to see as many woodpecker species as possible. At Southeast Clarke Park, we were able to get a Hairy, Downy, and Red-bellied Woodpecker. Unfortunately, the Pileated Woodpecker evaded us. Still, we had six species total!

Finally, Athens CBC coordinator Eugenia Thompson was nice enough to allow us to visit her feeder at her house. Cecilia was excited to see her first Pine Warbler which was flitting among trees close to our vehicle. While 2020 was a dumpster fire, at least CBC 2020 was a rousing success! I hope 2021 is a better year for both humans and birds.



**Roseate Spoonbill by Patrick Maurice, Merritt Island NWR, Brevard County, Florida—December 21, 2020**

## Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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