



The Yellowthroat

*Voice of the
Oconee Rivers Audubon Society*

February 2010

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Next Meeting

**Thursday, February 4 at 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center**

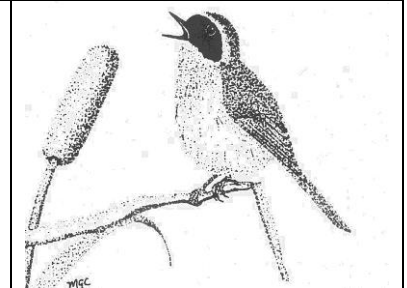
Dr. Ron Carroll, professor in the University of Georgia Odum School of Ecology and director for science at the UGA River Basin Center, will discuss “**Global warming consequences for the Georgia coast and for neotropical migrants and what we can do about climate change**” at the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society meeting on February 4th.

Dr. Carroll's research interests include conservation biology, sustainable economic development, ecosystem restoration, and invasive species. He played a key role in setting up the Metro Atlanta Flyway Cities Coalition, which is part of a national effort to protect and restore wildlife habitat in key cities throughout the flyways of North America.

Dr. Carroll has conducted conservation research in Latin America, especially Costa Rica, since 1967. He works closely with Ecuador's Maquipucuna Foundation, a 4,500-hectare nature reserve, surrounded by 14,000 hectares of “protected forest,” in the Choco-Andean cloud forest.

He is active in SELVA Foundation, an action-oriented environmental organization that focuses on large river ecosystems and related land use in Latin America. The organization provides concrete and pragmatic solutions to the serious problems affecting vulnerable eco-systems of universal significance with the objective of a secure and harmonious environment for all forms of life.

Note: The January meeting was canceled because of threatening weather. We hope we didn't inconvenience too many people but wanted to make sure everyone had a chance to hear Dr. Carroll.



SCNC Project WET and Flying WILD

Sandy Creek Nature Center is hosting a training workshop for Project WET and Flying WILD Education Program Saturday, February 20th from 9am-5pm.

This hands-on, activity based course will certify educators in two environmental education programs. The training will be eight hours in length and will introduce participants to each curriculum's materials and activities. Participants will receive a copy of two program guides, Project WET Curriculum and Activity Guide and the Flying WILD: An Educator's Guide to Celebrating Birds, as well as an introduction to resources that will help to make implementation of these programs a success.

Both Flying WILD and Project WET programs are aimed at educators who are interested in using hands-on activities about water resources, birds and bird conservation to encourage learning in science and many other subjects. These cross-curricular programs have science at their core, but make connections to language arts, social science, math, physical education, and art. While each program is aimed at the formal school system, non-formal educators such as scouts and 4-H leaders can also use each curriculum effectively.

The workshop cost is \$40 to cover the manual and other expenses. To register, send an email to janicedenney@co.clarke.ga.us with your name, contact information, and affiliation.

If you have questions, contact Janice Denney—janicedenney@co.clarke.ga.us, 706 613-3615 ext 229 or Kate Mowbray—katemowbray@co.clarke.ga.us, 706 613-3615 ext 232.

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.

Georgia Botanical Garden on eBird, 2009 vs. 2008

GABO posting from Joel McNeal
Date: Thu, 31 Dec 2009

Hi again, Georgia birders,

First of all, Georgia had already passed 1000 ebird lists for the month of December yesterday, so thanks to everyone who contributes to this valuable resource.

On to the State Botanical Garden, a Georgia IBA that gets birded AND reported to ebird very regularly. 238 total lists were submitted to ebird from the botanical garden in 2008, but *only* 224 lists were submitted in 2009 (although the species tally for 2009 exceeded that from 2008 by 3). Both years have a similar skew towards many more lists being reported during migration (especially spring), and the people submitting the lists between the two years is almost completely overlapping. Data from the two years is largely comparable, with the biggest discrepancy being a big difference in the # of June lists from 2008 (19 lists from 9 different days) to 2009 (only 2 lists, both from the same day). Post-migration birder burnout, I guess...

This isn't a scientific study with tightly controlled parameters; it's plain old citizen science, but it's still useful and (at least to me) interesting. I'll be discussing things in terms of the number of CHECKLISTS things appear on, not the number of individual birds that were reported. Keep in mind that multiple people will often share or submit checklists from the same day.

Birds reported in 2008 but not reported in 2009:

- White Ibis (24 lists in 2008!)
- Snowy Egret (13 lists in 2008)
- Nashville Warbler (4 lists)
- Merlin (3 lists, all representing the same bird on the same day)
- Spotted Sandpiper (2 lists)
- Red-breasted Nuthatch (2 lists, same bird on the same day)
- American Pipit (2 lists- birds in fields S. of botgarden, but part of IBA)

One of the most obvious habitat differences between 2008 and 2009 was the level of the Middle Oconee River. The drought made the river a series of sandbars and trickles suitable for sandpipers and waders for much of 2008, but the river has actually been a RIVER for most of 2009. Aside from the complete absence of White Ibis, Snowy Egret, and Spotted Sandpiper in 2009, the number of lists reporting Green Heron dropped from 40 in 2008 to 23 in 2009, lists with Great Egret dropped from 8 to 4, Little Blue Heron from 20 to 4, and Solitary Sandpiper from 14 to 2. Both waterthrush species, which are frequently spotted on the shores and sandbars when the river is low, were also down slightly in 2008. Lists with Great Blue Heron only dropped from 128 to 125, largely because the rookery across the river could still be counted on regardless of

water levels.

Birds reported in 2009 but not in 2008:

- Golden-winged Warbler (12 lists)
- Savannah Sparrow (8 lists- mostly from fields S. of botgarden)
- Sedge Wren (7 lists)
- Osprey (6 lists)
- Marsh Wren (6 lists)
- American Kestrel (3 lists- much more regular just across the road...)
- Northern Harrier (2 lists, both the same bird on the same day)
- Mourning Warbler (2 lists, both the same bird on the same day)
- Swallow-tailed Kite (1 list)
- Ring-billed Gull (1 list)
- Horned Lark (1 list, birds in fields S. of botgarden, but part of IBA)

Unfortunately, I missed the gull and the larks this year. I won't get into statistical significance since this isn't "real" science, but many species of warbler showed up on a lot more checklists this year relative to 2008. A few with the largest relative increases (other than the Golden-wings mentioned above) were:

- Swainson's Warbler: reported on 17 lists in 2009, up from only 1(!!!) in 2008
- Black-throated Green Warbler: 21 lists in 2009, only 2 in 2008
- Blackburnian Warbler: 16 in 2009, 3 in 2008
- Bay-breasted Warbler: 12 in 2009, 3 in 2008
- Magnolia Warbler: 62 in 2009, 24 in 2008
- Palm Warbler: 29 in 2009, 13 in 2008
- Tennessee Warbler: 23 in 2009, 12 in 2008
- Cape May Warbler: 45 in 2009, 23 in 2008
- Chestnut-sided Warbler: 57 in 2009, 31 in 2008

Thrushes also seemed to occur in much greater frequency (and abundance) this year relative to last year, and that is certainly reflected in the number of checklists they appeared on at the botanical garden:

- Swainson's Thrush: 57 lists in 2009, only 16 in 2008
- Veery: 26 lists in 2009, 10 in 2008
- Wood Thrush: 58 lists in 2009, 36 in 2008
- Gray-cheeked Thrush: 10 in 2009, 8 in 2008 (across 6 different days in 2009, 4 days in 2008)

Some other botgarden birds that showed big increases in the number of ebird lists on which they appeared in 2009 include:

- Red-tailed Hawk: 99 lists in 2009, 38 in 2008
- Blue Grosbeak: 80 in 2009, 42 in 2008
- Cooper's Hawk: 50 in 2009, 28 in 2008
- Gray Catbird: 133 in 2009, 95 in 2008

Other than waders and sandpipers, some of the

birds that appeared on far fewer botgarden checklists in 2009 include:

- Purple Finch: 14 checklists in 2009, down from 38 in 2008 (almost completely absent this winter)
- Yellow-breasted Chat: 32 in 2009, down from 82 in 2008
- Mississippi Kite: 14 in 2009, down from 30 in 2008.

Blue-headed Vireo, Winter Wren, Song Sparrow, Black Vulture, Great-crested Flycatcher, Brown-headed Cowbird, Barn Swallow, and Kentucky Warbler all showed >20% drops in the number of checklists on which they were reported from the botgarden in 2009. 17 fewer lists submitted in June 2009 relative to June 2008 explains some, but not all, of the drop in lists for the breeding species.

If you want to get more complicated than simply the number of checklists submitted, you can view the frequency, abundance, average count per list, high count, etc. over a given time frame for any location from the entire state to your county to Cochran Shoals or Jekyll Island to your own backyard if there is data available. Fun stuff for bird nerds like me.

Good birding (and ebirding) in the New Year,
Joel McNeal, Georgia ebird dude

Hummingbirds: Magic in the Air

Nature on PBS recently ran an hour special on hummingbirds. If you missed the show or want to re-watch some segment of the show or see additional footage or learn how the show was filmed, you should check out <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/episodes/hummingbirds-magic-in-the-air/introduction/5424/>

Hummingbirds are the tiniest of birds, yet they are some of the toughest, most energetic creatures on the planet. Hummingbirds spend most their lives in fast forward, but high-speed video lets us enter their world.

- Chapter 1: The Hummingbird Advantage
Revealing the secrets of the hummingbird's aerial agility.
- Chapter 2: Hummingbirds and their Flowers
Explore the evolutionary bond between hummingbirds and flowers.
- Chapter 3: Hunting and Survival
Excellent, swift hunters, the hummingbirds' speed might be their biggest threat.
- Chapter 4: The Mating Game
The unique and varied ways male hummingbirds will try to attract mates.
- Chapter 5: Nesting
How hummingbird mothers build, care for, and guard their nests.
- Chapter 6: Migration and Conservation
Monitoring hummingbirds' epic migrations; conserving rare species.

Birding by Canoe on the Suwannee River

by Page Luttrell

Tim and I took our annual Christmas canoe trip to Florida and paddled a 45-mile section of the Suwannee River, a beautiful blackwater waterway that starts in the Okefenokee Swamp. We camped on white sand bars across from limestone bluffs or in the woods on flat flood channels. In the wintertime, north Florida can be as cold as it is here in Athens, and therefore, not as “birdy” as the warmer southern part of the state. But we always enjoy seeing familiar birds in a wild setting, often seeing them behave in different ways.

The Eastern Phoebe was definitely the bird of the river. They seemed to line the banks on both sides, flycatching from the limbs of live oaks. We spooked up Wood Ducks every day from their hiding places on the river, concealed in the shadows of the banks. After a while we began to automatically check every tree or shrub overhanging the river ahead in anticipation of getting in a closer look, but it was still hard to spot them before they exploded out in front of us.

Red-shouldered Hawks called by day and Barred Owls by night. Sandhill Cranes flew overhead in long V-formations, trumpeting their way through the sky. Several evenings we heard small groups well after dark, perhaps stragglers flying late to their roosts. The river ran high and fast, so we had extra time to walk on the Florida Trail that parallels the Suwannee River along this particular section. We frequently saw large gangs of American Robins gorging on holly berries and occasionally spotted mixed feeding flocks of kinglets, titmice, chickadees, vireos, and warblers, sometimes accompanied by a Downy Woodpecker. The Ruby-crowned Kinglet always preceded the company, dancing around from tree limb to shrub to ground and back in quick tempo. We saw Blue-headed and White-eyed Vireos, Black-and-white, Orange-crowned, Yellow-rumped, and Yellow-throated Warblers in these wandering groups.

In one of our camps, we noticed an inquisitive kinglet flitting around a group of trees beside our kitchen tarp. Instead of ping-ponging around, it circled the trees over and over. At one point the bird actually sat still (!) several minutes on one of the branches, before resuming the circling behavior. Soon we realized the little guy was checking out all the sapsucker holes for bugs and/or sap.

What surprised us the most was seeing and hearing Red-headed Woodpeckers every day as we drifted down the river. Once we heard the characteristic rattle-call, we only had to find the dead snag and there one would be. We were heartened to see so many thriving in the woods beside the Suwannee River.

Tracking Device Reports a Round-Trip Wonder

by Henry Fountain in the New York Times, January 11, 2010
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/12/science/12obtern.html>

Arctic terns have a reputation as long-distance travelers, migrating to the Southern Ocean from breeding grounds in the Arctic. Researchers have suggested the round-trip distance might be as much as 25,000 miles.

But those were only estimates. While location-tracking tags have been used with large birds like albatrosses, Arctic terns, at less than four ounces, were too small to carry them. Now Carsten Egevang of the Greenland Institute of Natural Resources and colleagues have devised a miniature data logger that, at 1/20th of an ounce, is light enough. It records light intensity, using the timing of sunrise, sunset and length of twilight to determine latitude and longitude.

In *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, the researchers report on the journeys of 11 terns fitted with the devices. The birds, which began their trips in Greenland or Iceland in August, took two routes south, some hugging the African coast and others crossing from West Africa to Brazil to follow the South American coast.

Once they reached the Southern Ocean, they spent four months flying primarily east and west, again in areas that are rich in food. They returned in May and June having traveled, on average, about 44,000 miles. One tern totaled 50,700 miles, which is the longest animal migration ever recorded electronically.

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