



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

February 2019

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

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

The World of Bats: Near and Far

Kristen Lear will present the amazing world of bats. She will describe her experiences with bat conservation projects around the world, including researching the use of bats for pest control in Texas pecan orchards, using thermal imaging cameras to study a critically endangered bat species in Australia, and studying the socio-ecological dynamics of endangered pollinating bats, agaves, and rural communities in Mexico. Lear will then discuss the natural history of Georgia bats, where to find bats in Athens, local conservation efforts, and how to contribute to these efforts. Participants will see special equipment that bat researchers use to study these unique animals, including night vision binoculars, infrared cameras, and acoustic detectors. Lear began her PhD in Integrative Conservation in UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources in 2014. Her dissertation focuses on conservation of an endangered pollinating bat through "bat-friendly" agave management.

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.

Announcement of Spring Grants—2019

Spring is time for grant applications! We begin accepting grants on February 1. The final deadline is March 13. We anticipate four to six grants will be awarded. For more information, visit: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/grant

Athens 2018 Christmas Bird Count

by Eugenia Thompson

Saturday, December 15, 2018, dawned RAINY. Luckily for the thirty-nine participants in the Athens Christmas Bird Count (CBC), the rain stopped by mid-morning, and then the birds appeared.

By day's end, ninety species of birds had been counted. It was a bumper year for Red-headed Woodpeckers and White-breasted Nuthatches.

Unusual birds for our count were a Bald Eagle in Oconee County, a Green Heron at Lake Herrick, and two Baltimore Orioles in Athens.

Though the count circle had few large ponds or lakes, several duck species were counted in addition to the usual ducks—the Lesser Scaup, Gadwall, Bufflehead, Northern Shoveler, and Redhead. Only one individual of the following species showed up: Vesper Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Black-and-white Warbler, Brown Creeper, Loggerhead Shrike, American Woodcock, and Northern Harrier. Just two count week birds showed up: Gray Catbird and Fish Crow.

This year's count will be Saturday, December 14, 2019. Please note this date on your calendar now!

Eco-Haiku *by Nancy Hunter*

The fountain gurgles,
covered in Cedar Waxwings.
Just a short visit

Message from the President

by *Catie Welch*

It is with great sadness that I announce that I'm leaving Athens and the ORAS community. I have accepted a job at Kissimmee Prairie Preserve State Park to lead the Florida Grasshopper Sparrow research team. The Florida Grasshopper Sparrow is North America's most endangered bird species. Its endemic Florida subspecies' population is critically low; there's a captive breeding program in place to keep this bird from going extinct. It's a grand new adventure and I'm excited about it. But it's bittersweet to leave Athens.

It's been an honor to be the President of ORAS for the past two years. I have learned so much from our speakers, our members, and our board. I have enjoyed our beautiful little city and local birding spots. I have explored the mountains of northern GA down to the rolling red hills of the southwestern part of the state. There are many beautiful places in this state. I'm glad to have seen them and observed the diverse avifauna.

I hope that these places and the biodiversity will be conserved and cherished forever. I will carry the memories and experiences with me everywhere I go, and Georgia will always be on my mind.

As a leader of ORAS, I know we have developed some great relationships within our community, and I know we will continue striving for our goal of conservation and education of birds. I hope ORAS continues to work on our education and outreach to local schools, organizations, and the public. Disseminating scientific research can be a challenge, but we take our passion for birds and their world and make it approachable and enjoyable.

We are the nerds who make birding fun. I urge you all, please, keep up with the infectious passion for all things birds! Education is paramount to the success of conservation of species: "In the end we will conserve only what we love; we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught" - Babe Dioum



Photo of Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu by Catie Welch, Kenya—April 2018



Photo of Chinstrap Penguin by Theresa Perenich, Aitcho Islands, Antarctica Peninsula—2005

A Sad Farewell to Terry Perenich

by *Liz Conroy*

Theresa (Terry) Perenich, friend and long-time supporter of many environmental and conservation organizations (Oconee River Land Trust, Athens Land Trust, Georgia River Network, Sandy Creek Nature Center, Oconee Rivers Audubon Society, and more), passed away peacefully on January 11, 2019.

She was an excellent nature photographer, travel writer, and an avid reader. She enjoyed reading *The Yellowthroat* and *Flagpole Magazine* for her "local nature news and city news."

Terry accepted the position of Head of the Department of Textiles, Merchandising, and Interior Design at the University of Georgia in 1977. She retired as Professor Emeritus on December 31, 1999. Retirement allowed her more time for long trips and a variety of opportunities to photograph birds and other wildlife.

She loved to travel with her partner Phil Novinger and published several articles about their adventures on different continents. Her beautiful photographs from Antarctica fill half of a wall in their living room and inspire friends and neighbors to consider visiting the land of penguins. Terry loved birds. So when she adopted two rescue cats, she provided them with many toys and climbing apparatuses to keep them happily indoors and away from the numerous birds that visit her feeders on her back porch and yard. Terry will be greatly missed by many in Athens and beyond.

Newcastle Disease Virus Research in Birds *summary of January meeting by Liz Conroy*

Thanks to Catie Welch, Research Technician at UGA's Warnell School of Forestry and USDA's Exotic and Emerging Avian Viral Disease Research Unit, for her recent talk on Newcastle disease virus (NDV).

Welch recalled working in South Florida on White Ibis and their new urban lifestyle. These birds face novel stressors and diseases such as salmonella. This disease is much more common in urban ibises. With this strong interest in the urban/wildlife interface, she traveled to Kenya to study the interaction of wild birds with domestic animals and the transmission of NDV. She then explained NDV to the group.

Class 1 of avian paramyxovirus-1 (the pathogen that causes the Newcastle disease) affects wild birds so it's not a priority for researchers to study. But since Class 2 **does** affect poultry it is a priority to study. More is known about that class of viruses than any of the others. Paramyxoviruses are RNA viruses which means that they are highly diverse and can go through many mutations and much evolution!

Within Class 2, there are many notable genotypes: genotype 6 affects pigeons and doves (typically not a priority), and genotypes 18, 17, 14 (only found in W. Africa at this time).

Welch listed the scientific terms used to describe the level of NDV damage in an infected bird, based on poultry laboratory standards (these may be different for wild birds):

- 1) Asymptomatic enteric—no damage, but the bird is a carrier of the NDV.
- 2) Lento genic means on the cusp; the bird has greater than 90 days until death.
- 3) Mesogenic means 60 - 90 days until death.
- 4) Vicerotropic velogenic involves hemorrhaging and less than 60 days until death.
- 5) Neurotropic velogenic includes conjunctivitis, respiratory, and neurological symptoms and also less than 60 days until death for the bird.

She noted that humans can be infected with NDV. However, infection requires serious exposure to the virus, such as a lab worker having direct contact with a sample or a worker in a poultry operation who inhales or ingests aerosols from infected birds. No cases, however, have been found in humans who have eaten birds infected with NDV, nor has there been a case of human-to-human transmission of the virus.

In the U.S., the non-poultry origins of NDV include mainly cormorants, gulls, and pelicans. Low virulence NDV has been isolated from gulls, shorebirds, and waterfowl. Other variable virulence NDV has been isolated from pigeons and doves.

Welch also noted that Psitticines are known to carry vNDV. Parrot species carry the virus without showing symptoms. An outbreak in the 1970's in the U.S. was due to the exotic pet trade when an infected pet Amazon parrot was placed with some backyard chickens. The latter became infected.

Welch explained how she began researching the NDV problem in Kenya due to her continued interest in the wild bird/domestic animal interface. From 2016-2018, she collected blood from birds in live bird markets. At the poultry farms, target species included: Red-cheeked Cordon Bleus, any Weaver species, and Doves.

Later, while at the Ngulia Safari Lodge in rural Kenya, Welch noted that many birds from Poland and Russia flew by the lodge since it was located along the Palaearctic flyway. She and other researchers would set up mist nests at 10:00 p.m. and work until noon the next day.

She explained how RNA was extracted from the blood samples taken from the captured birds to determine the presence or absence of NDV. Virus isolation was also done which involves "growing" the virus in specific, pathogen-free embryonated eggs. Other processes include hemagglutination, assays of grown viruses, genetic sequencing, and phylogenetic analysis. The number of wild bird samples involved more than 1500 and the poultry samples numbered 2100. The samples are still being analyzed, and more than 829 have already been processed. She added, "So far, none of the wild birds we sampled have tested positive for NDV."

Welch concluded that both the cost of the vaccine and the difficulty administering have been barriers to its use by villagers. She said there must be a system to keep the poultry tightly contained to get the birds to inhale the vaccine if the aerosol form is used and intravenous (shots) of vaccine tend to be too time-consuming for farmers. But wild birds are susceptible, and birds (such as the Red-billed Firefinch) entering a chicken yard can become infected quickly. This is why continued surveillance work to understand the epidemiology of this ever-changing virus is so important!



Photo of African Black Kite by Catie Welch, Kenya—November 2016

Winter Birding—3,000 Miles Away

by Kathy Simpson

Next winter, consider attending the annual Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival. Morro Bay is located in a relatively low-population region in coastal California on the Pacific Flyway. The area is designated as a globally Important Bird Area and state and national estuary. Many bird species winter there.

You may see more than 200 species of birds during the four day event. This is due to the area's variety of birding habitats, including oak woodland, riparian, wetlands, estuarine, coastal scrub, oceanic pelagic, and more.

Well organized by the Morro Coast Audubon Society and three other groups, the festival is held during the Martin Luther King Day weekend. Over 130 events were offered this year, including workshops, field trips, demonstrations, talks, and a wine and nibbles get together. Part of the fun is the transportation of a given field trip. It might be a van, your two feet, a bike, or water travel via kayak, catamaran, glass-bottom boat or other seaworthy vessel.

This year's festival was my first-ever bird festival. I was nervous my first day on a full-day van trip. Would I be in over my head? Although I'm not a raw beginner, I'm certainly no identification expert. But the trip leader was good at teaching us how to identify the birds, particularly via structural features, and our skill level was irrelevant. When done, we had spotted 100 different avian species.

My favorite bird spotted that day was an errant Vermillion Flycatcher. Perched atop a coyote bush, he glowed bright orange-red like a miniature solar orb. Watching Black Brants was a mixed experience—although there were hundreds of them, there should have been thousands. But the eelgrass upon which they feed has been dying off dangerously fast, for reasons researchers are trying to determine.

Birds are not all that you'll see: On the pelagic trip, watch for whales and dolphins. During many field events, you're likely to observe harbor seals, sea lions and sea otters. Or go on the northern elephant seal tour. It is an amazing sight: hundreds of seals, including birthing mothers and bellowing males, wintering on shore. Elephant seals are huge, with males measuring up to 16 feet long and weighing up to 5,000 pounds.

Sign up as soon as the registration opens in November: <https://morrobaybirdfestival.org/>. The best events fill fast (within 1- 2 hours). Pack for a wide variety of weather conditions (upper 40's – low 70's, sun, rain, wind). Can't make it to the festival? Consider visiting any time during winter to wander the miles of beautiful birding areas. You just might get to see some of the approximately 15 California Condors released nearby in the past several years.

Green Life Expo and Awards—Sat. February 23 at Athens Library

The Green Life Expo is designed to provide inspiration and the tools needed to help community members become more sustainable. It's from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. on Sat., February 23 with an environmentally themed movie at 2:00 p.m., followed by the GreenFest Awards Ceremony at 3:00 p.m. Enjoy hands-on workshops, sustainability panel sessions on industry and education, kids activity area, and exhibitors from local businesses and organizations.

Tire Amnesty Week—Feb. 25 to Mar. 2

Residents of Clarke and Oglethorpe Counties may bring abandoned passenger vehicle tires (no tires on rims) to:

CHaRM 2005 College Avenue

Mon. 10:00 a.m. – 7 p.m.

Weds. 10:00 a.m. – 7 p.m.

Sat. 7:30 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

ACC Landfill 5700 Lexington Road

Mon. – Fri. 7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. or Sat. 7:30a – 3:00 p.m.

Call: 706-613-3508 (No disposal fee and a six tire limit)

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