



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

June 2020

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June Picnic—Cancelled

The traditional ORAS picnic in June is cancelled due to continued efforts in prevent the spread of COVID-19. Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS) also begins its regular summer recess. No general meetings will take place in July and August. We hope, however, to return in September with our annual ORAS Kick-off Meeting and Silent Auction on the evening of Thursday, September 3rd.

Stay tuned to our website and social media for updates about the fall bird walks and our September meeting time and location. Have a happy, safe, and healthy summer!

Birds and Other Wildlife Art Projects

The Cincinnati Zoo offers engaging videos and ideas for children who enjoy animal inspired arts and crafts. For example, youngsters can learn about the Lady Ross' Turaco, Rhinoceros Hornbill, and the African Pygmy Falcon then try a variety of crafts related to the animals that they see online. Home Safari Resource – Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden's website:

www.cincinnati-zoo.org/home-safari-resources/

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.

“Hook” Bird at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia *by Ed Maioriello*

My hook bird, as I call it, happened about twenty years ago. A colleague from work mentioned to me that the Oconee Rivers Audubon Society was hosting a bird walk out at the State Botanical Garden. He said that he was thinking of going and wondered if I'd be interested. Having nothing else going on that Saturday, I said sure.

It turns out that this walk was led by Mark Freeman, and as we were ambling through the shade garden there was a male Ruby-crowned Kinglet at eye level and no more than 10 feet away. This little guy showed no fear, just chattering away and displaying that bright crown. I was smitten. I had not known that kinglets even existed much less that they overwintered with us every year.

That led to the "hmm, what else don't I know about our birds here?" moment, and an ever deepening hole of wonder and curiosity.

Request from GA DNR Regarding Invasive Argentine Lizards (Tegus)

Wildlife biologist Laci Pattavina with the GA DNR/Wildlife Conservation Section makes the following request regarding the invasive Argentine lizards called tegus currently found in Toombs and Tattnall County areas:

"I do know that birders, hunters, hikers, farmers, and anyone who spends time outdoors can help us with reporting sightings, especially in the Toombs and Tattnall County areas, by emailing gainvasives@dnr.ga.gov with photos and location information.

This short YouTube video has good information: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UkRNMUhg4Hw>."

Please keep your eyes open for this attractive, black and white lizard. It eats the eggs of ground nesting birds and displaces animals such as gopher tortoises from burrows.

Spring Migration During a Pandemic

by Patrick Maurice

The Coronavirus has upended our lives, closing businesses, schools, restaurants, and more. However, there is one annual spectacle that hasn't (and can't) be cancelled—spring migration.

As winter transitions to spring, billions of birds leave their wintering grounds in Athens and points farther south to migrate north to their breeding grounds. Here are a couple of my highlights from birding (while social distancing of course!) over the past few weeks:



Northern Rough-winged Swallows by Patrick Maurice, Clarke County, Georgia—March 23, 2020

Birding after storms during migration can be especially rewarding because many migrants will be forced to put their migration “on pause” and seek shelter in natural and artificial habitats. I found a break in the radar and checked Lake Herrick on March 23rd. I was rewarded by finding two new birds for my Clarke County list (Double-crested Cormorant and Blue-winged Teal), and a large flock of 26 Northern Rough-winged Swallows with a single Tree Swallow mixed in.



Solitary Sandpiper and Lesser Yellowlegs by Patrick Maurice, Walton County, Georgia—March 28, 2020

Shorebirds are also migrating and can be found along the edges of ponds or in flooded fields. I was delighted to find my first Solitary Sandpiper and Lesser Yellowlegs of the year and they were right next to each other! Note that Solitary Sandpipers are smaller and browner than Lesser Yellowlegs with a green bill.



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher by Patrick Maurice, Dekalb County, Georgia—April 11, 2020

By mid-April, migrant songbirds that breed in the Georgia Piedmont are already building nests and laying eggs. I spotted this male Blue-gray Gnatcatcher putting the finishing touches on its nest in a Honey Locust tree at Stone Mountain Park.



Eastern Kingbird by Patrick Maurice, Bartow County, Georgia—April 18, 2020

Now is also a great time to look for migrating grassland songbirds such as the Eastern Kingbird. Resident species like Horned Larks and Eastern Meadowlarks have been singing and setting up territories for weeks, but they will have more competition for insects once the kingbirds arrive. A unique fact about kingbirds is that they were named for their red crown feathers. The red feathers are usually hidden, but when threatened by a predator or another kingbird, they will raise the crown feathers and attack.

What It's Like to Be a Bird

by David Allen Sibley and reviewed by Liz Conroy

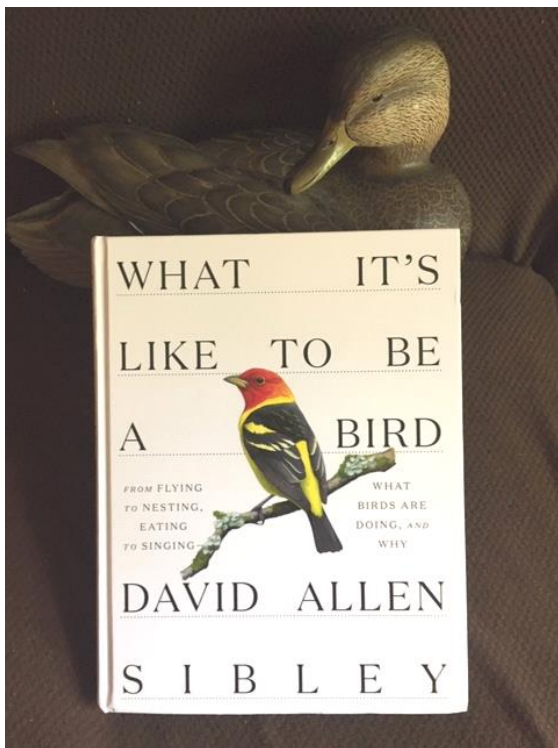
In his new book, *What It's Like to Be a Bird*, author and illustrator David Allen Sibley offers an intriguing selection of scientific facts about bird behavior, physiology, evolution, and more. He writes about their different ways of courting, flying, hunting, nesting and relies upon specific research for his work. (His sources are listed in the last section.)

This colorful, large book (9"by12") could be the perfect addition for a birder's coffee table. He points out, "It is not designed to be read straight through; it is designed to be browsed casually, so that different topics will spark connections and perhaps even a sense of discovery."

While relaxing at home, a reader may enjoy flipping through the book, especially the center section called the *Portfolio of Birds*. It is here that one finds his series of short and beautifully illustrated essays.

For example, most birders know that the male snipe doesn't sing to impress his rivals and mates. Rather, he uses his tail to make a low whistling sound in flight. The sound occurs because the edges of the outermost tail feathers lack barbules (hooks) making the feathers less stiff. "When these feathers are extended perpendicular to the body at high speed, the trailing edge of the feather can flutter very rapidly, like a flag in high wind, and its shape and flexibility is 'tuned' to vibrate at the frequency that produces the low whistling sound of the snipe's display." Who knew? Sibley's book is a treasure trove of interesting and fun facts about birds.

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2020.



David Sibley's new book (near duck decoy) by Liz Conroy, at home in Clarke County—May 15, 2020



Carolina Wrens' nest inside porch light (right) and porch light with screen attached underneath (left) by Dave Lindsay, at the front of the house, Clarke County—April 23, 2019

Wrens Wrestle with Nest-site Selection

by Suzanne A. Lindsay

Watching birds build and occupy their nests is a birder's delight, but what to do when the nest is in a dangerous place? We've found the cup-shaped nests of Carolina Wrens in many places. The most unusual and perilous site was inside our front porch light.

Wrens prefer cavities, (*The Sibley Guide to Bird Life and Behavior*, pp. 440-444), so it's not surprising that a pair found the hanging lantern. Closed at the top, the lantern has glass walls. A hanging central standard divides into three arms, each with a LED bulb.

The birds flew through the opening at the bottom, bearing tattered leaves, bits of moss, and pine straw. They stuffed these between the shaft and the smooth walls. Time after time, the materials fell out.

Finally, success! The pair managed to form a nest and the female began sitting. The nest lasted only a few days. It fell from the lantern and the eggs broke. They had been so recently laid that no embryos were visible.

Several more attempts failed. The lantern invited disaster, so we fitted a piece of chicken wire inside the bottom. Its openings were about an inch wide, and the birds popped right through them, carrying smaller bits of material. We then tried hardware cloth, with mesh about ½ inches square. The wrens couldn't get through it and finally left.

They probably kept trying. Carolina Wrens usually have two broods a season, and sometimes three. Elsewhere, they had a better chance of raising their chicks—worth the loss of our nest-side seat.

Message from the President

by Lauren Gingerella

There are some exciting changes on the ORAS board! Here are updates on our departing and fresh new board members. We are still searching for someone to fill our vacant Program Chair position. Please reach out to president@oconeeriversaudubon.org if you are interested in being more involved with ORAS!

Departing

Heather Levy: Heather worked hard as ORAS' Conservation Chair to set-up Audubon's Climate Watch surveys and write a grant proposal for our upcoming native plant garden. She served as Vice-President of UGA's Lily Branch Audubon Society as well. Heather will be defending and graduating with her M.S. degree from UGA this summer. She recently moved to Florida to work as a biologist with the Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission monitoring Florida Scrub Jays in Ocala NF.

Paige Howell: As our Publicity Chair, Paige wrote press releases and ensured that our monthly meetings were well advertised in local media. Paige has been working as a postdoctoral researcher in Dr. James Martin's game lab, but recently accepted a postdoctoral research position with the U.S. Geological Survey's prestigious Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Maryland. She will be developing a framework for using traditional surveys done by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in combination with eBird data to get better estimates of bird population sizes.

Gary Crider: Gary is a dedicated weed warrior and member of the local conservation community. Gary rarely missed an ORAS meeting, and was responsible for coordinating guest speakers for ORAS monthly meetings. He is stepping down as our Program Chair to focus on family and other projects.

New Members

Sheridan Alford: Sheridan is a M.S. Student at the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources. Her graduate research pertains to assessing and increasing African-American involvement in recreational bird-watching. Sheridan is joining ORAS as an at-large board member.

Cody Cox: Cody is a PhD Candidate in Integrative Conservation, and Lab Coordinator for Dr. Nibblelink and Dr. Bob Cooper. His research identifies the effects of forest fragmentation on avian habitat use to inform conservation planning in the Corredor Biológico Pájaro Campana, Costa Rica. Cody joins ORAS as our new Publicity Chair.

Clay: Clay moved to Athens a year ago to work as a Research Coordinator for Dr. James Martin's and Dr. Richard Chandler's labs. You may remember Clay from our January meeting, where he discussed his graduate research regarding habitat use of fledgling Cerulean Warblers, and roost site characteristics of adult male Cerulean Warblers. Clay is serving as ORAS' new Education Chair.



Swallow-tailed Kite by Mike Conroy, Tallassee Rd., Clarke County—May 11, 2020

Eco-Haiku—Tractor Chase by Liz Conroy

Swooping overhead,
As insects flee from tractor,
Swallow-tailed Kite!

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

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