



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

March 2020

Vol. 31, No.3

Next Meeting: Thursday, March 5, 7:00 p.m. Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Protecting Wilson's Plovers

Lauren Gingerella, will discuss her work developing a conservation strategy for Wilson's Plovers. They are listed as a "Species of High Concern" on the U.S. Shorebird Conservation Plan. Predators limit the success of their nests, leading to a decrease in the number of chicks produced each year. Gingerella conducted an experiment to determine how well nest enclosures work to increase successful hatch numbers. She found that enclosures were successful at preventing mammal and bird predators from eating eggs or destroying nests. But ghost crabs still entered.

Gingerella received a B.S. in Wildlife and Conservation Biology from the University of Rhode Island. She worked as naturalist and ecological coordinator on Little St. Simons which was also the site of her M.S. work, through the University of Georgia, where she studied Wilson's Plovers. She currently works as a wildlife biologist for North American Land Trust, and serves as ORAS President.

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.

Spring Bird Walks – Think Spring!

Bird walks are from **8a.m.--11a.m. or noon**. However, attendees may leave early. Please dress for the weather, wear practical shoes, hats and bring insect repellent, snacks and water as desired. Also, please check ORAS announcements and website for any last minute changes to this schedule: <http://www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/events>

If you have other questions please contact Ed Maioriello at: fieldtrip@oconeeriversaudubon.org

- Mar. 21: **Sandy Creek Park**
- Mar. 28: **State Botanical Garden**
- Apr. 05: **Sandy Creek Nature Center (SCNC)**
- Apr. 11: **Lake Herrick/Oconee Forest Park**
- Apr. 19: **Whitehall Forest***
- Apr. 25: **SCNC-Cook's Trail (clean-up)**
- Apr. 26: **State Botanical Garden**
- May 03: **A-CC Landfill**
- May 09: **A-CC Greenway**

*(Attendees for the Whitehall walk must be on time).

Spring Field Trips (out of town)*

- Apr. 04 6:00 a.m. Piedmont NWR
- Apr. 18 6:00 a.m. Kennesaw Mountain
- May 02 7:00 a.m. Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center
- May 15-17 GOS Spring Meeting (Hiawassee)

* Please check ORAS announcements for any late changes.

Controlling Exotic Pest Plants

summary of Feb. meeting by Gary Crider and Liz Conroy

Thanks to Gary Crider for his talk on “Controlling Exotic Pest Plants for Habitat Restoration.” He emphasized the importance of removal of non-native, invasive plants which cause economic or environmental harm and displace native species. As native plants are displaced, food sources for wildlife are destroyed. Non-native invasives also compete for pollinators that native plants need.

Even in heavily invaded areas, there are often native plants surviving in the overgrowth. Such habitats can be restored to a healthy state by removing the invasives. The remaining native plants then have an opportunity to rebound and thrive.

Effective removal of woody vines, shrubs and trees can be achieved by cut-stump treatment, in which a small amount of herbicide is applied to the cut surface. Visit: <https://ssl.acesag.auburn.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-1465/ANR-1465-archive.pdf> Cut-stump treatment is a favored method for habitat restoration because it does not disturb the soil.

Soil disturbance, which results from uprooting plants, can stimulate a secondary invasion by Japanese Stiltgrass and other opportunistic invaders. Pulling up plants often leaves behind root fragments which re-sprout. Cutting down an invasive plant usually results in vigorous regrowth with multiple stems; this compounds the problem.

The Georgia Exotic Pest Plant Council (<https://www.gaepcc.org/>) provides listings of invasive plants in four categories, from “serious problem” to “minor problem.” Beyond any “Dirty Dozen” or other listing of top tier offenders, awareness and control efforts should also be applied to lower-rated or emerging problems before they become widespread. Emerging and rapidly spreading invasive plants in the Georgia Piedmont include: Perilla Mint, Callery Pear, Japanese Knotweed, and others.

The Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System (<https://www.eddmaps.org/>) can be used in tracking established and emerging invasive plants. Non-professional members of the public can collect information on invasive species and receive verification via EDDMapS.

For further info: <https://www.invasive.org/>,
<https://www.bugwood.org/>,
<https://www.facebook.com/gaepcc>

For local information and opportunities provided by the Northeast Georgia Invasive Plant Cooperative:
<https://www.facebook.com/Northeast-Georgia-Invasive-Plant-Cooperative-174170916753262/>

Athens Christmas Bird Count 2019

by Eugenia Thompson

Thirty-nine people, including one feeder-watcher, participated in the Athens Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on Dec. 14, 2019 and counted 8,826 individual birds. Eighty-five species were represented.

High count was 2,035 Common Grackles. Non-blackbird high count was 763 Chipping Sparrows.

Only one individual of each of the following species was counted: Northern Harrier, Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, House Wren, Gray Catbird, Common Yellowthroat, White-crowned Sparrow, Merlin, Great Egret, and Green Heron (at Lake Herrick for the second Athens CBC in a row).

Two of each of these species showed up: Cooper’s Hawk, American Woodcock, Blue-headed Vireo, and Fox Sparrow. At least three Baltimore Orioles were counted; more showed up after the count. A good number of Loggerhead Shrikes—there were four in all.

We missed out completely on Wild Turkey, Wilson’s Snipe, Barn Owl, Fish Crow, Horned Lark, Brown Creeper, and Purple Finch. No hummingbirds or gulls were counted.

Please plan to join a team this coming December and help us count birds in Athens.



Baltimore Oriole by Katherine Edison, Athens, Clarke County—November 16, 2019

Youth Birding Competition April 24-25

Birders (K—12th grade) may enjoy spending the day finding as many species of birds as they can and competing against teams their own age at the Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center. Register by Mar. 31. Visit: <https://georgiawildlife.com/YBC>

Slow Down for Carrion-Eaters

by Liz Conroy

I live near Tallassee Road in Athens, close to Jackson County. With more traffic and faster vehicles, a better name for it might be: “Roadkill” Road.

It’s rare to drive into town and not see dead animals, most often wild ones, on the road. Years ago, they were more noticeable mostly during football weekends.

My possum-loving neighbor recently described her reaction to so many animals being hit by vehicles. “Whenever I pass a dead animal, I pull off on the shoulder or turn into a nearby driveway,” she said. “If there’s no oncoming traffic, I hop out and pull it off to the side of the road while trying not to encroach on someone’s yard.”

She explained that hungry carrion-eaters are attracted to the carcasses, big or small, and settle down to feed right on the pavement to their great risk.

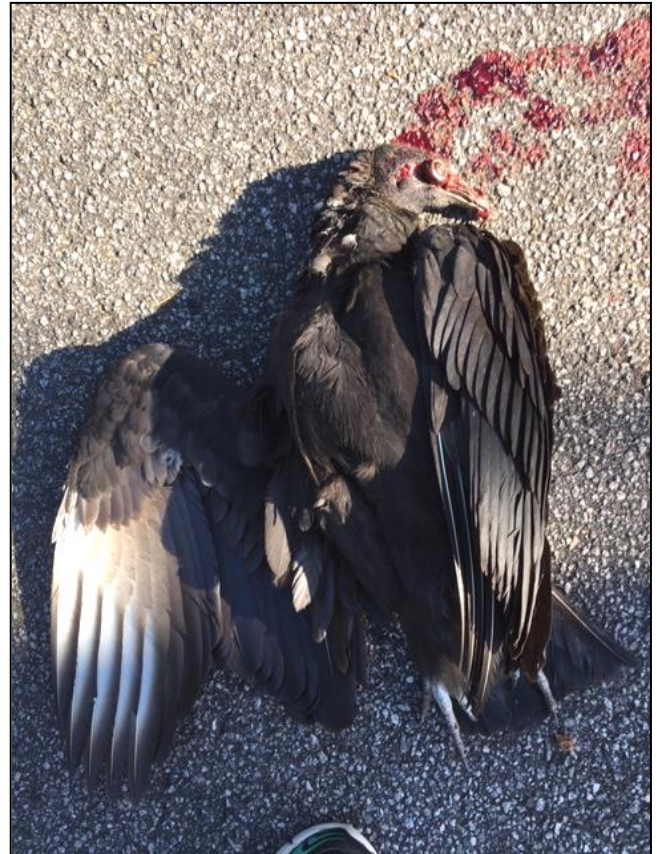
The Virginia Opossum (commonly called “possum”) is opportunistic. It eats not only insects and fruit, but also food in trashcans and carrion on roads. Possums are clumsy: they waddle and are not able to run quickly from oncoming vehicles. Whenever my neighbor finds a dead female on the road, she grabs it firmly by the tail, carries it off the road, and then checks the female’s pouch for babies (joey). If they’re large enough to survive being transported to a wildlife rehabilitation center, she takes them there.

Black and Turkey Vultures eat carrion, too. Searching for carcasses as they fly, Black Vultures (which locate food by sight) may follow a Turkey Vulture (which can detect the smell of decay) to a roadkill. The scent of the gas, ethyl mercaptan, is always a dead giveaway.

Gorging on their finds, these large birds become heavy and slow, unable to lift off the pavement in time to avoid an oncoming vehicle. They do, however, have a defense mechanism: regurgitation. It helps to deter predators. But a car could care less about vomit. The bird also loses weight, by regurgitating, and can lift off the ground faster. But usually it’s too late.

Birds and other wild animals have not had enough time to evolve reliable ways to avoid vehicles. (Think of our Eastern box turtles pulling their heads inside their shells for protection in the face of an oncoming car to little avail.)

I stop for box turtles and carry them across the road in the direction they were headed, far away into the area on that side. Now my neighbor has inspired me to remove road kill as well. I try to be safe; there’s no need to become road kill myself! If there’s a place to drive onto the shoulder or into a driveway, and get out, I’ll grab my small shovel and push the carcass to the side so vultures, hawks, crows, eagles, possums, and other wildlife can feast in relative safety. After all, as “nature’s cleaner-uppers” they deserve our appreciation as well as protection.



Black Vulture (hit by vehicle) by Liz Conroy, Tallassee Rd, Clarke County—December 16, 2019

Hurry to Apply for Spring Grants- 2020

We encourage any applicants conducting research or projects related to bird conservation, habitat improvement, and environmental education. Applications are due March 15. Contact: conservation@oconeeriversaudubon.org
Visit: www.oconeeriversaudubon.org/grant

Wildlife Rehab and Rescue by Liz Conroy

Who can you call after finding an injured vulture or other wild bird? ORAS member and wildlife rehabilitator Suzanne DeGrasse has a federally licensed rehab center for birds in Northeast Georgia. She notes: “I am happy to answer any questions about wildlife rehabilitation and rescue. Phone: (706) 255-7395

“Questival” at State Botanical Garden

Learn about the state’s history and natural resources and enjoy live performances and demonstrations at Alice H. Richards Children’s Garden at the State Botanical Garden. The Georgia Questival is Saturday, March 21 from 9a.m. to 2p.m. Cost: \$5 per person or \$20 per family. Visit: botgarden.uga.edu/event/questival

Message from the President

by Lauren Gingerella

Who else is excited about spring migration? I can't wait to visit my favorite greenspaces this season in search of migrants in their fresh breeding plumage. Here are a few of my go-to local spots for birding:

State Botanical Garden of Georgia: The State Botanical Garden must be the best spot in Athens to observe songbirds in migration. My typical birding route begins at the powerline parking lot, and scoping out the edge and meadow habitat in the powerline cut. I then walk along the orange and white trail next to the Middle Oconee River and finish the morning in the Dunson Native Flora Garden.

Cook's Trail: Cook's Trail is a 4.1 mile trail that connects Sandy Creek Nature Center and Sandy Creek Park. The trail runs through floodplain forest and is my favorite place to go in the spring to see first-of-the-year Prothonotary Warblers and Louisiana Waterthrushes. At the time of this writing, the trail is closed due to flooding and boardwalk damage. Please respect trail closures.

Lake Herrick: The trails around Lake Herrick and in Oconee Forest Park are a wonderful in-town natural area to go birding. The lake is adjacent to the University of Georgia's intramural fields which are often frequented by Eastern Bluebirds.

My Backyard: Fortunately, I don't have to go far to observe spring migration. I live in the heart of Athens, and I am always amazed at the avian diversity and abundance in my oak and pecan trees. I just need to step out on my back porch to see Black-throated Green Warblers, Northern Parulas, Black-and-White Warblers, and Summer Tanagers.

AAMG Association's Annual Plant Sale

by Liz Conroy

My experiences with the Athens Area Master Gardeners Association's annual plant sales have always been positive. Many of the plants they sell are native and set in one area so it's easy to find them. There are other plants for vegetable gardens, too. Master Gardeners will answer any questions. Because these volunteers donate the plants from their own yards and gardens, the plants are inexpensive and varied.

When? Saturday, April 25 at 8a.m. to 1p.m.

Where? Clarke County Extension Office
275 Cleveland Road
Bogart, Ga. 30622



Eastern Bluebird by Katherine Edison, Sandy Creek Nature Center, Clarke County—April 2, 2018

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