



The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

May 2019

Vol. 30, No.5

**Next Meeting:
Thursday, May 2, 7:00 p.m.
Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens**

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

North Georgia's Old-Growth Forests

Jess Riddle, forest ecologist and Executive Director for Georgia ForestWatch and author of *Georgia's Mountain Treasure*, will share his experience documenting old-growth forests in North Georgia. By the early 20th century, agriculture and industrial timber operations had denuded north Georgia of nearly all its forests. But some remnants escaped. These old-growth forests often do not resemble the stereotypical cathedral groves of giant trees. Instead, easily overlooked stands of weather-beaten trees provide exceptional wildlife habitat, record valuable scientific data, and offer management lessons.

Riddle will discuss where and why these forests have survived and how to recognize them. Riddle holds a BS in multidisciplinary plant ecology from Furman University and an MS in ecology from SUNY-College of Environmental Science and Forestry, where he studied tree climate-growth relationships.

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 **8 a.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

- May 05: **A-CC Landfill**

Spring Field Trips (out of town) *

May 04, 7:00 a.m. Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center
May 11, 6:00 a.m. Ivy Log Gap Road/Sosebee Cove

* Please check ORAS announcements for any late changes.

Full Moon Hike (Flower Moon) at SBG—Sat. May 18

On Saturday, May 18 from 8-9:00 p.m. The Education Staff at the State Botanical Garden of GA (SBG) invites hikers of all ages to enjoy the beauty of nature at night.

No experience needed but wear clothes and shoes that will be comfortable for a two mile hike through the garden and on wooded trails. (A backpack carrier is recommended for anyone with young children or infants.) Meet at the fountain in front of the Visitor's Center.

Fee: \$5 per person or \$15 per family. (Preregistration is required.)

Call 706.542.1244 or visit: www.botgarden.uga.edu

Controlling Invasive Plants in our Area

summary of April meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to Lauren Muller, director of the Northeast GA Invasive Plant Cooperative, who discussed the state of invasive plants in the Georgia Piedmont, various management strategies, and plans to reduce the impact of invasive plants in Athens and the surrounding counties.

Muller joined the Athens Land Trust after graduating from UGA with a Master of Science in Horticulture. Her previous work at the State Botanical Garden focused on the role of horticulture in plant conservation.

Her current role as Invasive Plant Management Coordinator allows her to preserve the integrity of Georgia Piedmont forests and grasslands by increasing removal of invasive plant species on public and private land. Muller also promotes community engagement through outreach, education, and youth program development.

The definition of an invasive plant includes several concerns: it causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or to harm human health. Additionally, invasive plants cost much time and money to remove.

Some areas in Georgia Piedmont forests may look healthy and green in winter, but if it's because of widespread privet, then it's not a healthy, ecologically sound forest. Prescribed burning does help to open up areas, Muller added. These are low intensity fires that burn invasive plants but don't kill trees. Forests in the Southeast actually evolved with fire.

If invasive plants are not controlled, they spread quickly. Birds eat the berries of English ivy and Chinese privet and even spread the plants through their droppings. Eventually the invasive plants outcompete natives in the area for sunlight, water, minerals with their dense monocultures. Invasive vines (Chinese wisteria) can wrap around trees and girdle them.

Native wildlife suffers as well since it evolved with native plants. The pH of the forest soil is altered by the invasive plants, too. Overtime, the biodiversity decreases in the area.

Human health is affected by overabundant pollen from invasive plants and invasive grasses grow into fire hazards with their fast growth and spreading habits. Some invasive vines (English ivy) tend to harbor mosquitoes.

Meanwhile, the economy is affected due to the time consuming and expensive methods needed to clear the invasive plants out of an area.

Examples of problematic invasive plants, according to the Georgia Exotic Plant Pest Council, include: Chinese wisteria, Chinese privet (the hedge at the UGA stadium), English ivy, Japanese stilt grass (*Microstegium*), Japanese honeysuckle, Japanese knotweed, Nandina (red berries are toxic and deadly to Cedar Waxwings), and Mahonia (looks like a holly but with bigger leaves and yellow inner bark).

Fuller pointed out the importance of knowing the type of invasive plant to determine the most effective type of treatment. Herbaceous broad leaf plants are annuals. These include Shiso which is also called beefsteak plant and is found in some gardens because it's edible although toxic to livestock. It's a mint with a square stem and smells like basil. Treatment must take place right before it sets seed.

Chemical used for treatment to get rid of invasive plants include three main ones (and be sure to read labels for use):

Glyphosate – get this herbicide for broad leaf plants and grasses. Used for cut & treat or foliar approach (trees, shrubs, vines). For cut & treat, mix half water and half glyphosate (41% strength – don't get premixed ones) in quart size spray bottle. Cut stem two inches above soil level. Spray the exposed area within 60 seconds. Glyphosate is safe when properly used and targeted in a careful way (not broadcasting in large areas). It is short-lived and has no residual effects. It works directly on the metabolic pathway within the plants.

Triclopyr – get this herbicide for broadleaf herbs. Used for cut & treat or foliar, but it's more expensive.

Sethoxdin – get this for grasses. Used for foliar approach.

Muller emphasized the importance of removing invasive plants from your yard and property whenever you see them. "It's rarely a 'one and done' action. You need to keep your eye on them." She also recommended planting more natives wherever you can and to join in local invasive plant removal efforts because volunteers are always needed!



Coral Honeysuckle (native) by Liz Conroy, near Tallassee Road, Athens, Georgia—April 5, 2019

Thoughts on Thistles *by Liz Conroy*

Birders often ask about which native plants are helpful to wildlife. Linda G. Chafin, author of *Field Guide to the Wildflowers of Georgia*, helped me have a greater appreciation of how our native thistles help our native fauna. I sent her a photo of this thistle which grows nearby:



Bull Thistle (Spiny Thistle) by Liz Conroy, near Tallassee Road, Athens, Georgia—April 9, 2019

She emailed this reply: “Hi, Liz – It IS the bull thistle! And the pretty purple flowered color form, too. As fearsome as it looks, it’s a good guy. Butterflies love its flowers for nectar, and the leaves are eaten by caterpillars. Birds love the seeds, but if you don’t want it spreading, you could just cut the head off after it’s through flowering. It’s either an annual or biennial, but either way it will not be back if you prevent seeding. Happy spring! Linda”

Red Foxes Raise Family in Five Points

by Ed Wilde

Over the last 10 years or so we’ve seen red foxes and their young in our woods, around the house, playing in the neighbor’s yard, curled up and sleeping out under the trees, hunting, and now and then going in and out of the storm drain in front of the house.

My wife’s (Sue Wilde) theory is that they use the storm drain to travel around this part of Five Points in Athens without having to take the risk of walking in the roads.

Several years ago, I saw two young foxes, about 3-4 months old, staring excitedly into the storm drain opening. Suddenly, out popped an adult fox with a rat in its mouth!

The kits tossed it around for awhile and ate it. Then all three went over to our bird bath and had a drink.

Last week, I looked out in the early morning light and saw what looked like a large rat coming out of the storm drain opening. It didn’t really surprise me. But it looked too big (about the size of a medium-sized rabbit) to be a normal rat. Then I noticed another one just as an adult fox crossed the street toward the opening.

My first thought was that the fox would catch the rats. Instead the “rats” ran to the fox, and I realized they were tiny fox kits! They still had their dark-grey coloring and snub noses, so they were only about 4-6 weeks old. Eventually, a third kit appeared. Then they all sort of milled about on the lawn at the edge of the road, with two adult foxes keeping an eye on them. At one point the mother started nursing two of her kits, but the third one seemed shaky and not real stable. Possibly it was not going to survive.

After 10-15 minutes they drifted away. I think some of the kits climbed down the opening, while the adults headed into the woods. Eventually, the neighbors came out to walk their dogs, and a car came by. After that I didn’t see them again for several days. The latest news is that we’ve seen a total of seven kits at one time!

We have often seen young foxes in the woods but never this young. It makes me wonder if something happened to their birthing den, and they were forced to leave early. But they have stayed near the storm drain and seem entirely comfortable going in and out of the opening for shelter when someone approaches, and there’s always an adult nearby.

It feels like a great privilege to have these animals comfortably existing so close to the house. We’ve found that we can easily observe them from our back elevated balcony because they rarely look up. They probably don’t fear predators from the air and are usually focused on the healthy chipmunk population. We hear the adults barking at night and hope the kits remain safe. We enjoy seeing them playing in the woods, and we look for them every chance we get.



Red fox and her kits by Ed Wilde, Five Points area, Athens, Georgia—April 16, 2019

Sandy Creek Nature Center: Snake Day—Sat. May 18

On Saturday, May 18 from noon -- 4:00 p.m. SCNC hosts an event for visitors to learn about the snakes found in our area of Georgia and beyond.

Come prepared to make snake creations because this year the event will focus on the beauty of snakes through art.

Fee: \$4 per person the day of the event and kids under three-years-old are free. Preregistration fee is \$3 per person. Local food trucks will be selling food and beverages.



Black rat snake by Paul Pringle, near Tallassee Road—March 30, 2019

Oconee River Land Trust Bird Walk with Audubon in Macon-- Sat. May 25

On Saturday, May 25 from 8-10:30 a.m. Join Oconee River Land Trust and the Ocmulgee Audubon Society in Macon for a morning bird walk along the Ocmulgee River to see plenty of beautiful songbirds and waterfowl. For more information: www.oconeeriverlandtrust.org Please email: caroline@oconeeriverlandtrust.org to ask about carpooling.



Brown-headed Cowbird (moulting male) by Patrick Maurice, Bartow County, Georgia—September 6, 2014

Eco-Haiku by *Manita Dean*

Body black, head brown,
Cowbird visits feeder host.
Chipmunk, aground, shares.

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

President Catie Welch
President@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Vice-President Sam Merker
vp@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Treasurer Alison Huff
treasurer@oconeeriversaudubon.org

Secretary Eugenia Thompson
secretary@oconeeriversaudubon.org

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Athens, GA 30608

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