



# The Yellowthroat

Voice of the

Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

November 2019

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## Next Meeting:

**Thursday, November 7, 7:00 p.m.  
Sandy Creek Nature Center in Athens**

For the 7:00 p.m. presentation:

Local historian, Steven Scurry, will discuss Georgia's first real estate market, the ten-year war that it triggered, and how those battles changed the environmental face of the South

Scurry's interest in the land and its history was fostered by his early explorations of rural landscapes in the South. His family's oral traditions imparted a lifelong desire in him to understand the reasons for the major changes that took place across the land.

A graduate of the University of Georgia, Scurry is still involved in earth and cultural studies, and he's a frequent speaker on the Oconee War. He seeks to bring this historical event back to its central place in Georgia history. He is a co-founder of Nowhere Archery. This is a local field school where traditional archery as well as a special regard for the Beloved Land are taught. (For more info about the school: <https://nowherearchery.com>).

**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.

## Lilly Branch Audubon Society: A New Home for UGA's Birding Community

by Emma Dickinson

Fall is a great time to get outside and watch birds! Yellow warblers and pale vireos dart out from the vegetation seeking food to fatten up for their migration. Fall is also a season of change. As we start a new semester at the University of Georgia (UGA), the Lilly Branch Audubon Society (LBAS) is flourishing on campus as a new Audubon Student Conservation Chapter.

A team of undergraduates and graduates make up the club executive board; this encourages a mixture of graduate and undergraduate members to join, too. Our mission is to engage the UGA student birder community and create excitement about birds and bird conservation.

As a new organization, we hope to grow by recruiting incoming students already interested in birds and those who want to learn more about birds and birdwatching. As a club, our focus is on long-term service projects which benefit bird habitats around campus and Athens.

One such project is the maintenance of a pollinator garden at Lake Herrick. With LBAS sponsorship, we hope to make it easier to care for the garden and manage it to attract more birds to Lake Herrick.

We also seek to develop relationships with local birders around town and especially with members of Oconee Rivers Audubon Society (ORAS). We advertise the weekend ORAS bird walks to our members and hope to bring awareness to others about several of the birding hotspots in Athens. We also invite LBAS members to monthly ORAS meetings and plan to advertise those meetings to even more students.

Why the name Lilly Branch? This name illustrates the connection between the North Oconee River and its smaller tributary, Lilly Branch that flows into it. We seek to build a similar connection with ORAS.

## **A Modified Big Year** by Heather Levy

I can't remember who first suggested doing a big year.\* The idea was actually a joke at first. How could a long distance couple, on a tight budget, with one person working full time and the other a grad student, even consider attempting a big year? It wasn't easy, but here's how we began:

Our modified big year goal is to see 500 North American species together in one calendar year from December 26, 2018 – December 26, 2019. A few logistics worked in our favor, but the biggest influence was our simple love of birds.

As we are near the end of our big year, we recall many memories with more yet to come. We've birded 12 states, and I've personally attained 158 lifers. We've followed some amazing birds into stunning habitats along the way and have marveled at the incredible diversity in both the birdlife and ecosystems of North America.

We've watched Long-tailed Ducks braving monstrous waves in the middle of a blizzard in Massachusetts, a nesting Lucifer Hummingbird buzzing around the canyons of Arizona, hordes of Horned and Tufted Puffins avoiding waves made by a breaching humpback whale, and a Northern Hawk Owl scowling over a snow-capped boreal forest in Minnesota.

That Northern Hawk Owl put our passion to the test! On December 31, we were up to our knees in snow in Sax-Zim Bog of Duluth, MN. A gridwork of old farm roads outline the bog, and under the blanket of snow that covered the landscape are aspen uplands, meadows, and rivers.

After hours of birding, we ran into a father and his young son, both bird enthusiasts who were going to hike out to a fairly reliable Northern Hawk Owl. The sun was dropping quickly, as was the temperature. The short walk to the owl felt like miles as I trembled in my too thin coat. A bright pink and yellow sunset lit the sky as we trekked on; I kept focused on it to forget that we were in -17 degree weather.

Finally, with a telescopic lens pointing at the top of a fir, we saw the owl sitting in all its glory. If the Great Gray Owl is the king of the boreal forest, the Northern Hawk Owl is the prince, with a piercing and unforgettable glare. It looked unfazed by us, standing in awe at a respectable distance. With shaking hands, I snapped a few blurry pictures and took a mental picture of the moment. Then we left the owl so she could begin her hunt for dinner.

Due to space limitations, I can't describe all of our adventures. Visit our website for trip details and an updated species list: <https://birdsnbrews.wixsite.com/website>.

\* Wikipedia: "A **big year** is a personal challenge or an informal competition among birders who attempt to identify as many species as possible by sight or sound, within a single calendar year and within a specific geographic area."



**Clapper Rail by Heather Levy, Edwin B. Forsythe NWR, Atlantic County, New Jersey—September 14, 2019**



**Broad-billed Hummingbird by Heather Levy, Santa Rita Lodge at Madera Canyon, Santa Cruze County, Arizona—August 8, 2019**

## **Full Moon Hike (Beaver Moon) at State Botanical Garden—Tuesday, Nov. 12**

On Tuesday, Nov. 12 at 7:00 p.m., the Education Staff at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia invites hikers of all ages to enjoy the beauty of nature at night.

Be prepared 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](http://www.botgarden.uga.edu)

## Rock and Gem Show at SCNC – Nov. 16

The annual Rock and Gem Show at Sandy Creek Nature Center features numerous gem and mineral collections displayed by local enthusiasts.

This event is free and open to all ages on Saturday, November 16 from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Come and learn more about our local geology, too.



**Broad-winged Hawk by Mark Magnarella, property near Tallassee Rd., Clarke County, Georgia—August 31, 2019**

## Eco-Haiku (Hawks)

by Robert E. Wyatt

Crows, haranguing a hawk,  
make known her lethal intent.  
Prey flee from the scene.

Song sparrows scatter—  
behold the passing shadow  
of a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Act of violence?  
Feathers on the forest floor...  
hungry hawk no more!

## Need Crossing Guards for Barred Owls

by Liz Conroy

Early morning on Saturday, October 5, I saw feathers poking up from the ground at the corner of Three Oaks Dr. and Tallassee Rd. It was a dead Barred Owl that appeared to have been hit by a passing vehicle.

Researchgate.net notes that, in the U.S., collision with vehicles is estimated to be the fourth largest source of mortality for birds after collisions with buildings, powerlines, and predation by domestic cats. According to the article, collisions with vehicles appear to be the major if not dominant source of mortality for owls. Why is this case?

It turns out that owls are particularly vulnerable because of their movements across broad territory, attraction to prey along roadsides, and tendency to be blinded by vehicle headlights.

In the past, Barred Owls were seen mostly in landscapes with large trees and few people. Now, with the spread of urbanization and destruction of their woodland habitats, Barred Owls are also found in suburbs that retain large trees.

Along with protecting our native trees (even the dead ones provide homes and food for wildlife) birds of prey expert Monteen McCord pointed out another way to help these predators: Avoid tossing food scraps out of cars.

She explained, “Even apple cores thrown onto the roadside are harmful. They attract rodents along roadsides where birds of prey hunt them. Then the birds can get killed by cars.” Check out her website for more info: “Hawk Talk” [www.hawktalk.org](http://www.hawktalk.org)



**Remains of Barred Owl by Liz Conroy, corner of Tallassee and Three Oaks Dr., Clarke County, Georgia—October 5, 2019**

## Botanist Discussed Waxcap Mushrooms

summary of October meeting by Liz Conroy

Thanks to Jean Lodge, botanist and mushroom researcher, who discussed her research on the ancestry and ecology of waxcap mushrooms. The waxcap mushrooms (genera *Hygrocybe* and *Cuphophyllus*) is a group of fungi, first named in Europe, with species found in many places throughout the world.

Before Lodge's research, scientists thought the European and North American species were the same. She discussed her search for their true ancestry and explained the ecology of these fungi and their relationships with plant roots.

Waxcap mushrooms are not saprobes (decayors of organic material) as had been previously thought. What types of partnerships have they established in nature? Many waxcap mushroom species are root symbionts. They gain photosynthesized carbon from their host plant and may provide it with nutrients. Lodge posed the question, "Do plants pay some waxcap species with sugary root exudates [carbon—based compounds] to kill their enemies and then provide the plant with nitrogen?"

Studies involving other types of mushrooms and ascomycete fungi interacting with beetle grubs in the soil indicate that this is a realistic hypothesis, indeed! Meanwhile, other waxcap mushrooms partner with algae to form lichens, or are moss parasites and actually kill the moss. (Those species are considered pathogens.)

Lodge is currently an adjunct faculty member with the departments of Plant Pathology, Plant Biology, and the Odum School of Ecology at the University of Georgia.



*Cuphophyllus* aff. *pratensis*, by D. Jean Lodge, Great Smoky Mt. National Park, Tennessee

## Message from ORAS President

by Lauren Gingerella

There are many reasons for why I am thankful for birds. Birds spread seeds, pollinate flowers, contribute to the food web, control pests, and play a role in cycling nutrients. I find that birds are fun to watch and have always provided me with an outlet to de-stress.

Recently, I was sitting at my desk trying to focus on a pressing work assignment; I shifted my eyes from the glow of my computer screen to the bird feeder outside my office window. Chickadees, a White-breasted Nuthatch, and a pair of House Finches picked seed enthusiastically from the feeder. A couple of chunky Mourning Doves waddled around at the base of the feeder picking seed from the ground as well.

This welcome distraction allowed me to temporarily disconnect from technology and appreciate wildlife outside my window. There are a multitude of reasons to be grateful for our feathered friends. Sometimes, it's the small moments, such as watching a bird on your feeder, for which we can all be thankful.

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