

Winter 2013 – Tybee Island.

Tybee Island, with its lovely beaches, wealth of shorebirds, and proximity to numerous outstanding birding locations, has been the favored location for winter meetings of the Georgia Ornithological Society for the past seven years. One hundred and seven participants continued the tradition in 2013 by gathering at the Ocean Plaza Beach Resort from January 18 to 21 to enjoy the beaches, make pilgrimages to the Crab Shack and other local seafood restaurants, and, of course, revel in the fantastic coastal birding.

Friday is often a day for dipping your toe into the waters of a GOS meeting—maybe you go on an abbreviated field trip, hear the evening speaker, and call it a day. Not so this January: We cannonballed right into the weekend with a fully stocked program of field trips, a workshop on feeding birds, and an evening program by a GOS research grant recipient. “Enjoy Bird Feeding More,” the workshop by writer and artist Julie Zickefoose, was more than a “how-to” session; it was a memorable blend of science and story, art and anecdote. Recipe for a bug omelet? Check. Cautionary tales about Mr. Troyer, the gouty bluebird, and the perils of too much suet? You bet. Lessons in bird nutrition, from calcium in eggshells to phosphorous in mealworms? Done. A veteran bird rehabilitator and a generous landlord to legions of birds in her home state of Ohio, Julie lent us her artist’s eye and a veterinarian’s sensibilities to give us a fresh perspective on the joys and responsibilities of feeding wild birds.

Later on Friday evening, graduate student Abby Sterling described her studies on the nesting success of American Oystercatchers and Wilson’s Plovers on Little St. Simons and Cumberland Islands. It turns out to be a very challenging business for a bird, raising chicks in the dynamic environment of the seashore. Many nests are destroyed by storms or tides, and the threat of predation by raccoons, grackles, mink, and even crabs is nearly constant. The goal of Abby’s master’s research at the University of Georgia is to develop predictive models of where birds nest, which will permit conservationists to focus their efforts on key sections of beachfront. With the intuition that can only come from living at the beach, hunting for nests, and observing birds day in and day out, Abby described the significance of subtle beach features for birds that lay their eggs directly on the sand; for example, nesting shorebirds are responsive to variation in the wrack line, sand texture and moisture, and vegetation. In addition to the engaging and informative science, Abby shared her enchanting photographs of baby plovers and oystercatchers.

Naturally, field trips were a big part of the weekend, and GOS members beat the bushes, muddied their boots in the saltmarshes, and braved near-shore pelagics to score some good birds. Some of the places we explored included Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge, Little Tybee Island, Fort Stewart, Savannah NWR, the Savannah spoils site, Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area, and, of course, Tybee Island and nearby Fort Pulaski. The highlights of my trip to Tybee’s north beach included a Loggerhead Shrike near the lighthouse, rock-hopping Purple Sandpipers, and Buffleheads bobbing and diving in the waves off the end of the jetty. Some of the more notable bird sightings of the weekend included a Barn Owl flushed during a daytime field trip, American Black Duck at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge, and a Western Kingbird that showed up at Fort Pulaski. The total species count for the weekend was 179, the same number as at last year’s Tybee meeting. (See page 12 for the complete species list.)

The highlight of the Saturday evening banquet was the keynote address by Julie Zickefoose, “Lifestyles of the Small and Colorful: The Eastern Wood Warblers.” The theme of the talk was the behavioral ecology of warblers on their tropical wintering grounds, with an emphasis on the differences between the fruit-eating warblers and the more insectivorous species. Julie’s career of painting and drawing birds might be more accurately described as a lifetime of “seeing” birds first and foremost: paying scrupulous attention to proportion and subtle gradations of color from feather to feather, considering negative space, and trying to translate the dynamism of behavior to a static image on paper. As a result, we were treated to a

consideration of the details that would enthrall an artist, but all in a larger ecological context. What is the significance of tail spots on a Hooded Warbler? Why does a Black-and-White Warbler have a particularly long hind toe? In what way is the “war paint” of the Chestnut-sided Warbler adaptive in the competitive environment of the tropics? Julie ended her talk with a plea to “get mad” about the habitat loss and environmental degradation that threatens many warbler species.

If you were at the banquet, I hope you had a chance to see the research posters presented by half a dozen graduate students: Camille Beasley, Mason Cline, Shannon Curry, Joanna Hatt, Clark Jones, and Gabrielle Robinson. All of these students have had their work funded by GOS. Their research shows that society grant money is a great investment in the careers of young scientists and in the scientific study of birds in Georgia and elsewhere in the Southeast.

Thanks to all the field trip leaders: Ken Blankenship, Rebecca Byrd, Steve Calver, Larry Carlile, Rachel Cass, Diana Churchill, Ellie Covington, Nathan Farnau, Capt. Rene Heidt, Malcolm Hodg-es, Steve Holzman, Nathan and Joyce Klaus, Ed Maioriello, Patty McLean, Joel McNeal, Ellen Miller, Kathy Miller, Dan Vickers, Russ Wigh, and Gene Wilkinson. We appreciate that you shared your time and expertise with us. Thank you also to Dan Vickers and Ed Maioriello for making arrangements with the hotel, speakers, and field trip leaders, and to Ashley Harrington, our tireless and cheerful business manager, who hauls colossal boxes of GOS merchandise from meeting to meeting. Finally, many thanks to Ellen Miller for organizing the photo contest, and congratulations to the winners.

– Jim Ferrari

Black-bellied
Whistling
Duck
Canada Goose
Tundra Swan
Wood Duck
Gadwall
American Wigeon
American Black Duck
Mallard
Mottled Duck
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Canvasback
Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
Surf Scoter
Black Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Bufflehead
Hooded Merganser
Red-breasted
Merganser
Ruddy Duck
Wild Turkey
Red-throated Loon
Common Loon
Pied-billed Grebe
Horned Grebe
Eared Grebe
Manx Shearwater
Wood Stork
Northern Gannet
Double-crested
Cormorant
Anhinga
American White
Pelican
Brown Pelican
American Bittern
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron
Tricolored Heron
Black-crowned Night-
Heron
Yellow-crowned
Night-
Heron
White Ibis
Glossy Ibis
Black Vulture
Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Cooper's Hawk

Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Clapper Rail
King Rail
Virginia Rail
Sora
Common Gallinule
American Coot
Black-bellied Plover
Semipalmated Plover
Piping Plover
Killdeer
American
Oystercatcher
American Avocet
Spotted Sandpiper
Greater Yellowlegs
Willet
Lesser Yellowlegs
Ruddy Turnstone
Red Knot
Sanderling
Western Sandpiper
Least Sandpiper
Purple Sandpiper
Dunlin
Stilt Sandpiper
Short-billed Dowitcher
Long-billed Dowitcher
Wilson's Snipe
Red Phalarope
Bonaparte's Gull
Laughing Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Lesser Black-backed
Gull
Great Black-backed
Gull
Forster's Tern
Royal Tern
Black Skimmer
Parasitic Jaeger
Razorbill
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-
Dove
Mourning Dove
Common Ground-
Dove
Barn Owl
Great Horned Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Red-headed
Woodpecker
Red-bellied
Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied
Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Red-cockaded
Woodpecker

Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
American Kestrel
Merlin
Peregrine Falcon
Eastern Phoebe
Western Kingbird
Loggerhead Shrike
White-eyed Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Blue Jay
American Crow
Fish Crow
Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
Carolina Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
Red-breasted
Nuthatch
White-breasted
Nuthatch
Brown-headed
Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
House Wren
Sedge Wren
Marsh Wren
Carolina Wren
Blue-gray
Gnatcatcher
Golden-crowned
Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Eastern Bluebird
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Northern Mockingbird
Brown Thrasher
European Starling
American Pipit
Cedar Waxwing
Northern Waterthrush
Black-and-white
Warbler
Orange-crowned
Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
Palm Warbler
Pine Warbler
Yellow-rumped
Warbler
Yellow-throated
Warbler
Eastern Towhee
Bachman's Sparrow
Chipping Sparrow
Field Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Henslow's Sparrow
Le Conte's Sparrow
Seaside Sparrow

Fox Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated
Sparrow
White-crowned
Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Northern Cardinal
Painted Bunting
Red-winged Blackbird
Eastern Meadowlark
Rusty Blackbird
Common Grackle
Boat-tailed Grackle
Brown-headed
Cowbird
Baltimore Oriole
House Finch
Pine Siskin
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow
179 species total

Species list
compiled by Dan
Vickers