

A Golden Year for the Georgia Ornithological Society
By Eulalie Gibbs and Richard Parks
1986

Many years of interest in birds and study of them were necessary before Georgia was ready for a state-wide organization. In Georgia, this interest and study began with Mark Catesby (1682-1749), an Englishman, the first person who could be called an ornithologist to visit the region now comprising the state of Georgia. Making his second visit to America in 1722, he came to South Carolina, which at that time included part of what is now Georgia. In 1723 he set up a base of operations on the Savannah River a few miles south of the present city of Augusta. From here he explored this area, assembling much of the material for *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands* (1730-1748). This work includes plates showing 109 species of American birds, mostly from this region.

The Quaker naturalist, William Bartram of Philadelphia, explored coastal Georgia and Florida with his father, John Bartram, in 1765 and 1766. Alone, he crisscrossed the state from the mountains to the sea from 1773 through 1776, noting the plant and animal life, including many observations of birds. The famous account of his *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* was first published in Philadelphia in 1791.

Georgia's first resident ornithologist was John Abbot, also an Englishman, who came to Georgia from Virginia in 1776 and settled in Burke County. Better known today as an entomologist, he was an attentive student of birds and an artist. Today in Europe and in America there are several collections of paintings of Georgia birds by Abbot. Perhaps the most important of these, the one in the British Museum of Natural History, consists of over two hundred water-colors accompanied by a handwritten text. The set of 100 watercolor portraits of "Birds of Georgia" with notes on their status in this state, executed in 1791 and 1792, and purchased by Chetham's Library in Manchester, England, may have been the first comprehensive, illustrated checklist of birds of a single American state. Abbot augmented this portfolio in 1805 and 1809 with 55 additional watercolors of birds and eggs. The set remained intact at Chetham's Library until 1980 when it was sold at auction and subsequently dispersed.

In his nearly 65 years of residency in Georgia, the self-effacing Abbot never published on birds, but he discovered a number of species new to science and drew and collected them for others in England, Germany, and America to describe in publications.

Other well known ornithologists visited Georgia in the early nineteenth century. Alexander Wilson came in 1809, Thomas Nuttall in 1815 and 1830, and John James Audubon in 1831, 1832, and 1837. John LeConte (1818-1891) and his brother Joseph LeConte (1823-1901) were born at the LeConte Plantation, Woodmanston, in Liberty County. John's list of 23 species included in *Statistics of the State of Georgia* (1849) by George White was the first published list of Georgia birds. Joseph collected and prepared birdskins in the 1840s in various sections of Georgia. In 1858 he donated these specimens, representing over 120 species, to his friend, Spencer Baird, for the newly created Smithsonian Institution.

After the activities of the LeContes and several others in the 1840s and 1850s, ornithological investigations in Georgia all but ceased for a considerable number of

years, but as the nineteenth century drew to a close there was a reawakening of interest. Almost simultaneously in Savannah, Augusta, and Atlanta, groups of ornithologists became active.

In Augusta, about 1890, Dr. Eugene E. Murphey began his study of the birds of that area, continuing for more than fifty years. In 1937 the Charleston Museum published his *Birds of the Middle Savannah River Valley*, adding a great deal of information about the birds of that region. He also wrote the historical narrative for *The Birds of Georgia* (1945), Occasional Publication No. 2 of the Georgia Ornithological Society. Dr. Murphey was a charter member and a faithful supporter of the society.

In the 1920s the state was fortunate in having three men who were to make important ornithological contributions within its boundaries and settle in three widely separated localities. Their coming heralded a rebirth in the study of ornithology in Georgia and kindled the flame of interest in a new generation of bird students. All three, Thomas D. Burleigh, Ivan R. Tomkins, and Herbert L. Stoddard, became important members of the Georgia Ornithological Society. More will be said about these men later in this account.

The first organized bird club in the state, the Savannah Audubon Society, was founded in 1916. The Atlanta Bird Club (now Atlanta Audubon Society) was established in 1926, the Middle Georgia Audubon Society in Macon about the same time, and the Milledgeville Audubon Society followed in 1930.

Among the early members of the Atlanta Bird Club were two Emory University students, Norman Giles, Jr., and Don Eyles, who saw the need for an ornithological journal. This need was met with the publication of the first number of *The Oriole* in January 1936 as the official organ of the Atlanta Bird Club. In the second number the editors called for more bird clubs around the state and proposed a future state-wide organization. Other members also thought there should be a means of contact with other bird students throughout the state. Consequently, the Atlanta Bird Club decided the time had come for a state ornithological society. Georgia members of The American Ornithologists' Union and the National Association of Audubon Societies and others interested in birds were invited to a meeting to discuss forming a state-wide organization. On Sunday, December 13, 1936, twenty-two people met in Atlanta, and from this meeting came the Georgia Ornithological Society.

Herbert L. Stoddard was elected president, Mrs. Hugh Harris secretary, and Miss Berma Jarrard treasurer. Other officers elected at this founding meeting were six regional vice-presidents from various sections of the state. Their principal duties were to represent the society in their community, work to increase membership, and encourage interest in birds and conservation. Roger Tory Peterson, then with the National Association of Audubon Societies, was present and was voted the first honorary member. Regular membership was \$1.00, and semi-annual meetings were to be held in April and October in various parts of the state. It was at this founding meeting, with the consent of the original editors and sponsor, that *The Oriole* became the official organ of the newly formed society.

The purposes of the society were to be:

1. To secure the cooperation of the various bird students and clubs over the state in gathering and disseminating accurate information of birdlife within its boundaries.

2. To promote interest in and appreciation of the value of birds, both aesthetic and economic, which would insure wise conservation of our birdlife.
3. To stimulate and unite public sentiment toward legislative enactment for bird protection.
4. To provide opportunity for acquaintance and fellowship among those interested in nature.
5. To issue a quarterly publication as a means of furthering the ends above described.

The election of Herbert Stoddard to the presidency of the new organization was unanimous. He had come to Georgia in 1924 to study the Bobwhite Quail, first under the U. S. Biological Survey, and later as director of the Cooperative Quail Study Association. In 1931 his monograph, *The Bobwhite Quail*, was published and established Stoddard's reputation as one of the outstanding ornithologists and naturalists in wildlife management in the country. For this pioneering work, The American Ornithologists' Union awarded him its coveted Brewster Medal. He had joined the AOU in 1912 and was elected a Fellow in 1936.

It was he who set the philosophy of the Georgia Ornithological Society, ensuring that it would be an ornithological society rather than a bird club. Writing in *The Oriole* in March 1937, he said "So no bird student within the State need feel the opportunities of the home area have been exhausted... With the organization this year of the Georgia Ornithological Society, a state-wide organization to be devoted to the study of Georgia bird life, the gathering of dependable information on the birds of the state should be greatly stimulated and those interested in these creatures greatly increased. And it should be clear that a great increase in both the scientific and popular interest is needed if the birds and their habitat are to be safeguarded at this time when the changes in habitat are coming so rapidly." He wanted the amateur to feel at home in the society, but at the same time wanted him or her to be inspired to become a student of birds.

It was a happy coincidence that Milledgeville was chosen for the first semiannual meeting of the Georgia Ornithological Society. It was here in 1872, at the age of eight, that Frank M. Chapman, the most noted ornithologist of the early 20th century, had his first experience with birds which he remembered as being "...definitely associated with a place and time." He recalled one of these experiences in *The Oriole* for December 1940. Before Roger Peterson, Chapman did more to popularize bird study in this country than any other person. He was a charter member of the GOS.

At the 1937 meeting bylaws for the society were adopted, providing for additions to the staff of officers. Wallace Rogers was chosen first vice-president; R. J. H. DeLoach, second vice-president; and Anne Feiffer (Hamilton), historian-librarian. Herbert Stoddard was the featured speaker at the banquet, and Thomas Burleigh, Harold Peters, and Earle Greene also spoke on various aspects of ornithology.

In 1938, Earle R. Greene of Atlanta was elected to succeed Stoddard as president. Greene's administration continued to promote interest in and appreciation of the value of birds, the study and protection of wildlife, especially birds, and the dissemination of knowledge gained from bird study. He emphasized that membership must be increased and some way found to get the study of birds into our schools and colleges. He was one of the co-authors of the checklist *Birds of Georgia* (1945), Occasional Publication No. 2

of the society. In 1933, his bulletin on the birds of the Atlanta area was published by the Georgia Society of Naturalists.

R. J. H. DeLoach of South Georgia Teachers College was made president in 1939 and led the society into the forties. Succeeding DeLoach in 1941 was Harold C. Jones of Rome. During his thirteen years at Berry College he banded over 1,500 birds, and contributed several papers to *The Oriole* on birds of the Rome area.

The year 1942 found the country deeply involved in World War II, and the fall meeting that year was cancelled in the interest of conserving gas, rubber, and general transportation. During the first year of the war, President Harold Jones worked to increase interest in birds and their conservation throughout the state.

In 1943, Eugene P. Odum was chosen to lead the society through the remainder of the war years. Because of the war, the nominating committee asked all officers to continue to serve for the duration. Dr. Odum retired from the University of Georgia in 1984 after forty-four years there. At the time of his retirement he held two endowed chairs, Alumni Foundation Distinguished Professor of Zoology (since 1957) and Callaway Foundation Professor of Ecology (since 1972). He was also Director of the Institute of Ecology, which he founded in 1961. He is author of *Fundamentals of Ecology*, the most widely-used ecology textbook in this country and abroad. He is a member of the National Academy of Science and has received many national and international honors, and is a Fellow of the American Ornithologists' Union. He has contributed many notes and papers to *The Oriole* and was one of the coauthors of *Birds of Georgia* (1945).

Conditions had not improved by the spring of 1943, but the regular semi-annual meeting was held in Atlanta. It was agreed to have only one meeting a year for the duration of the war. A newsletter was to go to the members in lieu of the fall meeting. Dr. Odum recommended the continued publication of *The Oriole* during the war. "One has only to glance at the published trash on our newsstands," he said, "to realize that a few pages of *The Oriole* are not going to create any shortage. Every effort should be made to continue the publication, both for its own worth and as the best means of keeping GOS members together." He also suggested local groups get together, have field trips, and send tabulated results to him.

Now as the society grew older, much material had accumulated, including copies of *The Oriole* reprints, exchanges from other organizations, periodicals, and occasional papers. An agreement was reached with the University of Georgia that this material be deposited permanently in the Special Collections Department of the university's Main Library. The 1,200 items from the GOS on deposit there are now owned by the university but may be examined at the library.

The first woman to hold the presidency of the society was Mabel T. Rogers. She succeeded Gene Odum in 1946. Miss Rogers, charter member of GOS, was a faculty member at Georgia State College for women, now Georgia College, at Milledgeville. With Hattie Rainwater she had edited an educational department section which had appeared in several issues of *The Oriole*.

William W. Griffin was elected to the presidency in 1947. He is a charter member of the GOS and was editor of *The Oriole* in 1941-42, and was one of the co-authors of *Birds of Georgia* (1945). For a number of years Earle Greene had been putting together lists and data on Georgia birds from various sources. He deposited this

collection at Emory University in April 1941. Griffin, then a student at Emory, carefully checked the material, added to it, examined additional specimens, organized the checklist, and wrote the text in essentially the form in which it was later published. The manuscript was then forwarded to the other three co-authors for revision, suggestions, and additions. After some delay because of the war, the *Birds of Georgia* was published in 1945. Because Georgia had never had a published state work on birds, this publication was an important step forward and did much to encourage bird study in the state. Griffin wrote the "History of Ornithology in Georgia" in Burleigh's *Georgia Birds* (1958). This history begins with 16th century references to birds in Georgia and is the most thorough history of the subject yet written. For many years he was active in the field and was a regular contributor to *The Oriole*. He joined The American Ornithologists' Union in 1946, and was made an Elected Member in 1957. In 1985 he received the Earle R. Greene Award for his contributions to the Georgia Ornithological Society as "President, Editor, Author, and Student of Birds."

J. Fred Denton, Professor of Cell and Molecular Biology at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, was elected president of GOS in 1949. He was also a charter member and had been editor of *The Oriole* from 1943 through 1949. He had become a member of the American Ornithologists' Union in 1935 and was made an Elected Member in 1950. Although most of his bird studies were done in the Augusta area, he studied the birds of several other localities around the state, especially in the mountains where he did extensive work on wood warblers. He wrote the account of the Swainson's Warbler for Burleigh's *Georgia Birds*, and few issues of *The Oriole* were without a paper or note by Denton. His last contribution to Georgia ornithology and GOS came in 1977 with the publication of the *Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds*, compiled by a GOS committee of which he was chairman. In 1977 he received the Earle R. Greene Award for his "...outstanding work in ornithology in Georgia."

The publication in 1958 of *Georgia Birds* by Thomas D. Burleigh was an important event in Georgia ornithology. Although not a GOS project, it was accomplished through the efforts of its members. The first thought of this book goes back to 1921 when Burleigh and his friend George M. Sutton, the well-known ornithologist-artist, agreed that Sutton would do the illustrations if Burleigh ever wrote a book on Georgia birds. Burleigh had come to Georgia in 1920 to a position on the faculty of the University of Georgia. For the next ten years he lived in Athens and used that city as a base of operations for the study of the birdlife in all parts of the state. After his departure from the state in 1933, he returned each year until 1945 for varying periods of a few days to several months to continue his studies of Georgia birds. In 1945 he returned to Georgia to live, this time expressly to carry on extensive fieldwork preparatory to writing *Georgia Birds*. Two years were required to complete essential fieldwork, when he again left the state, but continued his work on the manuscript, which was completed in 1956. *Georgia Birds* was published by The University of Oklahoma Press in 1958.

Burleigh was a charter member of GOS and although not living in the state, maintained his membership throughout his life. In the early years of GOS he contributed a number of papers and notes to *The Oriole*. His work on the *Birds of Athens* (1938) was Occasional Publication No. 1 of the society. He joined The American Ornithologists' Union in 1913 and was made a Fellow in 1948.

Two years after Burleigh had come to Athens, Ivan R. Tomkins settled in Savannah where he lived until his death. There he soon met Gilbert R. Rossignol, Troup D. Perry, and Walter J. Erichsen, three recognized ornithologists, and began his study of birds. He worked as an engineer involved with the dredging of the lower Savannah River. Here he had a unique opportunity for the study of water birds and took full advantage of it. He contributed many papers to ornithological journals dealing not only with the unusual species recorded, but also with life-history studies of the common coastal birds. Many of these appeared in *The Oriole*, and in the course of his studies he added at least a dozen birds to the Georgia list. In 1958 the GOS published *The Birdlife of the Savannah River Delta* as Occasional Publication No. 4, his account of the water and shore birds of the area. He was also a co-author of *Birds of Georgia* (1945).

In the mid-sixties another charter member, Anne Hamilton of Dalton, was elected president. An accomplished bird student, she is noted for her keen ear for bird songs and calls. Many of her notes and papers have appeared in *The Oriole*, including "Notes on the Birds of Screven County, Georgia" (1964) and with her husband R. E. Hamilton, "Checklist of Birds of the Dalton, Georgia, Area with Occurrence Extremes" (1960). In 1982, Mrs. Hamilton received the Earle R. Greene Award for outstanding contributions to the Georgia Ornithological Society.

Since 1966 the society has helped in promoting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Breeding Bird Survey each summer, and most of the routes in the state are run by GOS members. This is a study designed to provide information on the distribution and abundance of North American birds and specifically to measure fluctuations in populations caused by land use changes and environmental pollution. Each survey route is pre-selected and is driven one time each year in the breeding season. All birds heard or seen are recorded. Since 1975, GOS member Joe Greenberg has been coordinator for this project for Georgia.

Another program in which some GOS members participate is the North American Nest Record Card program, begun in 1965 by Cornell University. The purpose of this project is to accumulate as much information as possible on the breeding biology of North American birds. These data will be made available to researchers in many areas of bird biology.

Still another activity that GOS members take part in is the annual Christmas Bird Count of the National Audubon Society. Although this is usually sponsored by local bird clubs or Audubon Societies, most of those who make the counts are GOS members, and the results are sometimes reviewed and summarized in *The Oriole*. This, the oldest country-wide endeavor in bird study, was begun in 1900 by Frank M. Chapman of the youthful Milledgeville bird experiences.

It was during Tom Rial's term as president, 1971-1973, that the *GOShawk*, a GOS newsletter, was begun in which unconfirmed sightings, observations, and news of members are reported. It did not take the place of *The Oriole*, but was to replace "Oriole Chirps," a GOS newsletter of the early sixties. After almost thirteen years, Harriett DiGioia is still the able editor. For her work on the *GOShawk*, she received the first Earle R. Greene Award in 1975.

Also under Tom Rial, and through the efforts of R. E. Hamilton, the Georgia Ornithological Society was incorporated in 1972. The Board of Directors consists of the current president, first and second vice-presidents, secretary, and treasurer.

At the fall meeting in 1975, dedicated to Earle Greene who had died earlier in the year, President Wally Dreyfoos proposed an award be given in his memory. The Earle R. Greene Memorial Award was then established. This award may be given annually to a person who has made outstanding contributions to the society or to ornithology in Georgia.

In the late 1970s bird banding experienced a comeback in Georgia largely due to the work of GOS members. There had been considerable banding activity in earlier years. S. Prentice Baldwin, the pioneer of bird banding in America, came to Georgia in 1915, and while wintering each year near Thomasville, carried on banding operations for almost ten years. In the 1930s and 1940s, Herbert Stoddard banded thousands of birds in the Thomasville area. In 1939, Raymond J. Fleetwood came to the state with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and before leaving nearly ten years later, had banded over 70,000 Chimney Swifts, as well as thousands of other birds. When the winter home of the Chimney Swift was finally discovered in 1944, one of the bands recovered from swifts killed by natives in Peru was from a bird banded by Fleetwood in Macon in 1939. Fleetwood was a GOS member, and among his other contributions to knowledge of birds in Georgia were population studies in our pine forests as well as general notes on observations. George Dorsey and Gordon Hight conducted rather extensive banding at Rome in the fifties.

With Fleetwood leaving the state and the dwindling interest of other banders, bird banding in Georgia was more or less neglected during the sixties and early seventies. Fortunately, there has been an increase in activity in the last ten years. Perhaps the best known banders in this area today are GOS members Don and Doris Cohrs and Terry Moore. Each fall for the past eight years, they have banded birds on Jekyll Island. Other GOS members have helped with this or witnessed the banding operations when fall meetings have been held at the island. The Cohrs also conduct regular banding at their home in the Atlanta area.

To many members, especially those out of state, *The Oriole* is GOS and the society could hardly have a better representative. It has always maintained a high professional level and has earned a solid standing as a scientific ornithological journal. Some of the finest ornithologists and naturalists in the country have had papers in *The Oriole*. Among these were Else G. Allen, Dean Amadon, Frank M. Chapman, Francis Harper, Arthur H. Howell, W. L. McAtee, George Mayfield, Harry C. Oberholser, Alexander Sprunt, Jr., Henry M. Stevenson, and Lawrence H. Walkinshaw. And adding further to the standing of the GOS as a serious ornithological society are the Occasional Publications. They have done much to increase the knowledge about birds in the state, and have been helpful to bird students in the pursuit of further knowledge of them.

To observe and study birds in all parts of Georgia, and to bring the members together, were the purposes of the founders when they set up two meetings per year for business and field trips. For GOS members, the pleasure of a weekend of birding is enhanced by the company of fellow birders. Through the years these semi-annual affairs have been the chief means of bringing members together, where fellowship is renewed, notes and experiences compared, and the state explored. Interesting and informative programs in the evenings add much to the meetings. Jekyll Island is a favorite place to meet, and GOS was one of the first groups to meet there after it was purchased by the state, when the only public access to the island was by ferry. Fall is usually chosen for

these get-togethers when flocks of thousands of restless, crying, wheeling shorebirds, gulls and terns sweep the coastline in migration. Pelagic trips are sometimes a feature of these bird-filled weekends.

Joint meetings with bird groups in adjoining states have taken GOS to Brevard, North Carolina (Carolina Bird Club), Fontana Village, North Carolina (Tennessee Ornithological Society and Carolina Bird Club), and Tallahassee, Florida (Florida Audubon Society and Alabama Ornithological Society). Other out-of-state meetings were held in Gatlinburg, Tennessee in 1952 and 1960, when the Wilson Ornithological Society held its yearly meeting there, and at Eufaula, Alabama. At other meetings there have been field trips to interesting areas in nearby states. A trip to Tall Timbers Research Station near Tallahassee, Florida, was the highlight of a Thomasville meeting. The group assembled at a television tower there where Herbert Stoddard discussed his research on birds killed at the tower. Meetings at Augusta and Savannah had groups going into South Carolina. Meetings in Clayton and Dillard allowed trips into North Carolina, and a meeting in Columbus facilitated trips into Alabama.

A high point of the meetings from the beginning has been the programs presented at the Saturday night banquet. Many of the speakers have been nationally known and include Chandler Robbins, Arthur A. Allen, Elsa G. Allen, Albert F. Ganier, Alexander Sprunt, Jr., William Vogt, Oliver Austin, Thomas A. Imhof, Ben Coffee, Arthur, Stupka, Sam Grimes, Jim Fowler, and our own Herbert Stoddard and Eugene Odum. George M. Sutton spoke at the GOS luncheon at Gatlinburg in 1952 when the society met there with the Wilson Ornithological Society. There is also usually an informal program on Friday evenings, frequently presented by a local member telling of some aspect of ornithology of the area. And occasionally paper sessions have been held on Saturday afternoons.

The story of Georgia Ornithological Society would be incomplete without recognizing several members who have been important in the growth and development of the society. A charter member and still active is George Dorsey of Rome. One of the founders of The Atlanta Bird Club, he is the only survivor of the original members of this club. A careful student of birds, George has contributed many papers and notes to *The Oriole*, and served on the editorial board for a number of years. As a teacher, his influence has brought many young people to the study of birds. In 1983, Dorsey received the Earle R. Greene Award for his many and varied contributions to the society.

Another one of the few charter members who is still active in the society is Richard Parks. From 1949 through 1955 he was editor of *The Oriole*, the first year co-editor with William Griffin. He has contributed many notes to the journal. An artist, he designed the GOS arm patch, the decal, and made the drawings for several of the occasional publications and for the membership brochure and stationery. He received the Earle R. Greene award in 1976 for his various activities in GOS.

Another long-time member who has contributed much to the society and to our knowledge of Georgia birds is Milton Hopkins of Fitzgerald. He was editor of *The Oriole* for six years (1960-65), and has had many papers and notes published in it. He wrote *The Birdlife of Ben Hill County, Georgia, and Adjacent Areas* (1975), Occasional Publication No. 5, and was a member of the committee that compiled the *Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds* (1977). He received the Earle R. Greene Award in 1978 for his years of service to GOS and Georgia ornithology.

In the early years of the society, Robert A. Norris of Fitzgerald was active in the study of birds in south Georgia. Many of his papers and notes were published in *The Oriole*, and he was briefly the editor of that journal in 1942 before going into military service. His *Distribution and Populations of Summer Birds in Southwestern Georgia* was published in 1951 as Occasional Publication No. 3, and he wrote the "Physiographic and Biogeographic Regions of Georgia" for *Georgia Birds* (1958). Leslie Davenport, Jr., of Savannah served as editor of *The Oriole* much longer than anyone else, thirteen years (1966-1978), and for this he received the Earle R. Greene Award in 1980. He also was a member of the committee that compiled the *Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds* (1977).

After fifty years, the Georgia Ornithological Society is on a firm foundation with a good reputation, a credit to far-sighted men and women. And, as most members are not serious ornithologists, it is to their great credit that through the years they have supported *The Oriole*, which has established a national standing as an ornithological journal and has done much for the good name of GOS. As so often in the past, GOS is in the hands of leaders who will assure its continued progress and growth. With Tom Patterson as president and Terry Moore as editor of *The Oriole*, along with all officers and board and committee members, the society can look to the future with confidence.