

# GOShawk

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society



Georgia Rare Bird Alert: 770-493-8862

GOS on the web: [www.gos.org](http://www.gos.org)

## Report to the Membership

By Bob Sargent

I try not to wear you out with tedious reports about activities and decisions performed and made by our various committees, but, as elected officers, it's our responsibility to report to you. So please bear with me while I run through the highlights. First of all, we've completed another "grants season," and interest in applying for GOS financial support on behalf of research and management

remains keen. The competition among graduate students for the Howe and Terrell grants is especially strong these days. This winter six graduate students received \$20,000 to support their research on species such as Rusty Blackbirds, Black-throated Blue Warblers, Seaside Sparrows, and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. The society provided \$50,000 to the Georgia Chapter of The Nature Conservancy to support their prescribed burning efforts, and \$20,000 to the Georgia IBA Program to pay for new water management structures at Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area. We also funded an opportunity grant (\$3,000) for Atlanta Audubon Society (AAS), which will be used to create a booklet about declining grassland bird species in Georgia. Notably, many research scientists and land managers have written to tell us how much they appreciate these GOS grant options, noting that there are few other places to turn to for support of ornithological studies and conservation efforts, especially in these difficult economic times.

In addition to providing grants, educating future ornithologists and conservationists continues to be a "top shelf" priority for GOS. We've been working closely with AAS and Georgia DNR to organize the second Camp TALON (see the ad in this

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## SHOULD THE GOSHAWK GO PAPERLESS?

The GOS Executive Committee has proposed that the *GOShawk* newsletter go electronic, beginning with the September 2010 issue, in order to reduce costs and be more environmentally responsible. Members would be advised when the latest issue is available and then would view or download the newsletter via the GOS website. Do you support or oppose this proposal? Please contact GOS President Bob Sargent with your views: [kywarbler@cox.net](mailto:kywarbler@cox.net) and 1263 Clairmont Place, Macon, GA 31204.

## **Georgia Ornithological Society**

### **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

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<i>2nd Vice President</i>	Dan Vickers
<i>Secretary</i>	Darlene Moore
<i>Treasurer</i>	Jeannie Wright
<i>Business Manager</i>	Ashley Harrington
<i>Historian</i>	Phil Hardy
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<i>GOShawk, Editor</i>	Jim Ferrari
<i>GOShawk, Asst. Editor</i>	Mim Eisenberg
<i>Webmaster</i>	Jim Flynn

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<i>Howe Research Grant:</i>	
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<i>Terrell Research Grant:</i>	
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<i>Opportunity Grants:</i>	
Dan Vickers	770-235-7301
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of the month prior to publication.  
Text by e-mail is appreciated.*

## **Welcome, New Members!**

### **Northern Goshawk**

James Cox  
Al Mercer  
Little St. Simons Island, LLC

Tallahassee, FL  
Marietta, GA  
St. Simons Island, GA

### **Northern Bobwhite Members**

Robert and Carolyn Hing  
R. J. Berry and Jane Seward

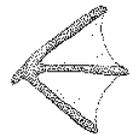
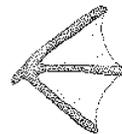
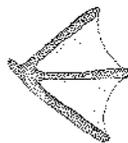
Savannah, GA  
Atlanta, GA

### **Bachman's Sparrow Members**

Lorna Campbell  
Jan Crook-Hill  
Bill and Margaret Dunson  
Sandra English and Woody Eakin  
Claude D. Falls  
Stephen Fox  
Richard Hall  
Paul McMahon  
Gordon McWilliams  
Michael K. Moore  
Steve Slayton  
Marvin T. Smith

Decatur, GA  
Cumming, GA  
Englewood, FL  
Hartwell, GA  
Cleveland, TN  
Richmond Hill, GA  
Athens, GA  
Mableton, GA  
Decatur, GA  
Macon, GA  
Lawrenceville, GA  
Valdosta, GA

*The 2010 GOS membership list is available electronically via e-mail or as a hard copy. Please send your request to [membership@gos.org](mailto:membership@gos.org) (Cathy Ricketts) for an e-mail copy or to GOS, 108 W. 8th St., Louisville, GA 30434 for a paper copy. Available to members only.*



### **MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

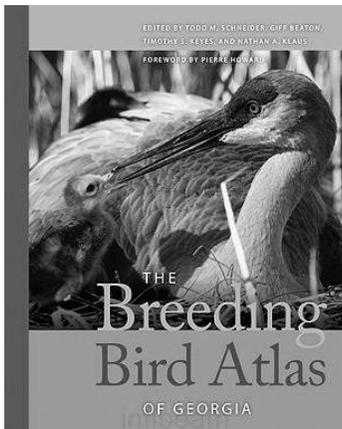
**GOS Spring Meeting**  
*April 16-18, 2010, Athens*  
(see page 14 for details)

**GOS FALL MEETING**  
*October 8-10, 2010, Jekyll Island*  
(see article on page 9)

## Report to the Membership (continued from page 1)

newsletter), will be sponsoring two scholarships to send teenagers to Audubon's famed Hog Island Camp this summer, will be co-sponsoring (with AAS) a scholarship to send an adult to the same camp, and we'll be very much involved in helping to finance and organize DNR's Youth Birding Competition in April. We're also tinkering with a formula for arranging a Christmas Bird Count strictly for young people – more on that later this year. Finally, Renee Carleton, our education chair, is working with a school in the Rome area to try to produce a video, orchestrated and narrated by teenagers, about how young people can

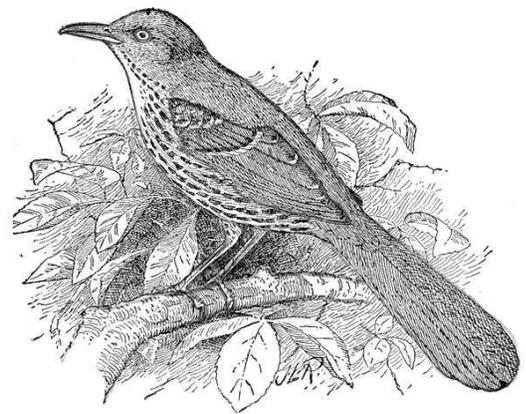
learn about birds. Speaking of promoting education, GOS also provided \$10,000 to the University of Georgia Press to help pay for the production of the *Breeding Bird Atlas of Georgia*. I'll be the first to admit that I kidded my friend Todd Schneider more than once about making a career out of the production of this phantom book, but like everyone else I felt a sense of awe the first time I held the book in my hands. To Todd, Giff, Tim, Nathan, and all of the other people who contributed so much to the creation of this truly landmark book: outstanding job, folks!



On the conservation front, GOS is networking with other organizations in an attempt to influence policy concerning "Lights Out," a team effort designed to convince owners of tall buildings in Atlanta to turn off the lights during migration seasons. As usual, some of our members have been in the thick of the Cats Indoors/Trap-Neuter-Release issue in Athens, and we've also been in contact with community leaders on Jekyll Island to educate them about this

same issue. Hopefully, you stopped by our display table at the last festival or at our January meeting to pick up a copy of our "Ethics in Birding" pamphlet. This pamphlet was the offshoot of discussions among several society members about how important it is for birders to be models of ethical behavior when pursuing their hobby. Finally, I do hope that you weighed in, as I did, with your vote to keep the Brown Thrasher as our state bird! Our thanks go to Pierre Howard and the staff of the Georgia Conservancy for carrying the banner on this issue.

I'll conclude with giving you an outline of our plan for GOS' 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary meeting, scheduled for January 14-17, 2011, on Tybee Island. This meeting will be much larger in scope than our usual winter meetings. There will, of course, be an abundance of great field trips, and we're planning to arrange a coastal Big Day competition on the first day of the meeting. We'll arrange three evening programs, two of which will take place on Friday night and will feature Giff Beaton and Todd Schneider speaking about the history of birding in Georgia, and the status and future of bird conservation in this state. Saturday evening's program will include a scientific poster session, and the banquet will be highlighted by guest speaker David Sibley. You can bet that we're planning to ask David, Giff, Todd, and other experts to lead field trips. It's our intention to recognize past winners of the Earle Greene Award and past GOS presidents at the meeting, and we will try to arrange art and photo exhibits, as well as a display about the history of GOS. Have you got a favorite poem or essay about birds you'd like to read, or are you especially gifted at imitating a Pileated Woodpecker or another bird species? If so, then the Sunday evening program will be your chance to take to the stage. I hope this whets your appetite for joining us for this historic meeting, but first we need to organize and host the spring and fall meetings. See you next month in Athens.



Brown Thrasher, the state bird of Georgia (from *Bird Day: How to Prepare for It*, by Charles A. Babcock, 1901, Silver, Burdett and Co., NY).

## Summary of GOS Winter Meeting January 2010

By Phil Hardy

The 2010 GOS winter meeting is now in the record books with the annual event, held on Tybee Island, being heralded as a resounding success. Some 77 members registered for the four-day event held January 15-18, 2010. The Ocean Plaza Beach Resort served once again as our headquarters for rooms, registration, banquet and programs.

Many members kicked the weekend off by first visiting Saint Simons Island, where they had the second confirmed sighting in Georgia of the Buff-bellied Hummingbird that is spending the winter there. Given the beautiful surroundings of the island and the yard of gracious hosts Richard and Martha Armstrong, I can't say that I blame the bird one bit.

Field trip destinations for Saturday, Sunday and Monday included Tybee Island north beach, Fort Pulaski National Monument, Savannah NWR, a "near shore" pelagic trip, Little Tybee Island, Savannah hotspots, Glennville Water Treatment Facility and Harris Neck NWR.

Our featured speaker Friday evening was Jim Cox of Tall Timbers near Thomasville, Georgia. His very informative slide presentation and program, entitled "Lightning Season Burning: Friend or Foe of Breeding Birds?" provided members an excellent overview of lightning season fires and their effects on breeding birds.

Saturday morning greeted eager GOS birdwatchers with a steady rain. Armed with appropriate rain gear and snacks, members departed for field trips beginning as early as 5:30 AM. One might say the weather was better suited for ducks than humans, but bird watchers learn to roll with whatever the weather conditions are. And speaking of ducks, many species were seen, such as Mottled Duck, Canvasback, Blue and Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked, Lesser Scaup, Mallard, and others.

Poster sessions at 5:00 PM followed by a social hour at 6:00 PM were the prelude to the banquet and meal at 7:00 PM. As an added feature at this meeting, GOS President Bob Sargent held a trivia contest. The contest involved answering questions that related to the formation and early history of GOS. Helen Ogren and Barbara Brigham got more questions correct than anyone else, winning themselves a GOS logo coffee mug.

It was no coincidence that Georgann Schmalz introduced the after-dinner keynote speaker, Dr. Sidney Gauthreaux, Professor of Zoology at Clemson University. You see, Georgann received her master's degree from Clemson and studied under Dr. Gauthreaux. His most informative presentation, entitled "Radar Ornithology at Different Spatial Scales," explained his groundbreaking research into the use of radar to "see" into the night skies as migrant species fly otherwise undetected to the human eye. Through modern technology, Dr. Gauthreaux has been able to locate areas of concentrations that migrant species use as roosts, as well as to make landfall after trans-Gulf migration. His research is also aiding the commercial airlines industry, as well as our military, to avoid aircraft collisions with birds. With the aid of Doppler radar, Dr. Gauthreaux has determined at what altitudes and densities birds migrate, thus giv-



Sidney Gauthreaux, Jim Cox, Bob Sargent, and Bill Lotz at the Winter 2010 GOS meeting on Tybee Island. Photo by Darlene Moore.

ing aviators a heads-up when the sky is crowded with birds. To learn more about the Clemson University Radar Ornithology Laboratory and Dr. Gauthreaux's accomplishments visit: <http://virtual.clemson.edu/groups/birdrad/people.htm>.

The presentation of the Earle R. Greene Award was the next order of business. As Bob Sargent read his prepared notes before the naming of this year's recipient, the listener almost concluded that two different people were to receive the award. And that's exactly what happened! Only four other times have simultaneous Earle R. Greene awards been presented: 1986, 1990, 2000 and 2007. This year's most deserving recipients were keynote speaker Dr. Gauthreaux and Georgann Schmalz. See Bob's remarks about their accomplishments in this newsletter.

As the rains continued through the night, becoming quite heavy at times, we wondered what weather conditions would be like in the morning for the scheduled field trips. As I departed my hotel room well before sunrise Sunday, I was greeted to the leftover drizzles from the passing front. The decision to leave my camera in my hotel room would turn out to be a mistake. As I climbed aboard Captain Rene Heidt's open boat for the field trip to Little Tybee Island, the darkness and fog dissipated, replaced by lovely blue skies and sunny conditions. With an adult Bald Eagle calling from a pine only a hundred yards away, I was now second guessing my decision to err on the side of caution and leave my camera in a drier habitat.

While participants caught naps or ate lunch at the local restaurants, the hotel staff was busy setting up for the "flocking" event that began at 5:00 PM Sunday afternoon. Flocking is merely a gathering of members over a cash bar and plentiful hors d'oeuvres to meet and talk about our favorite pastime ... birding. As members mingled, two members showed photographs they had taken of birds. The final event of the afternoon was the countdown conducted by GOS First Vice-President, Bill Lotz. We had observed a total of 155 species from Friday through Sunday, and we still had field trips for Monday to increase that number.

A winner was declared in the GOS logo contest Sunday evening. Members who had a flair for the arts had been encouraged to render their submissions for the contest. The Brown-headed Nuthatch logo, designed by Rachael Cass, was the winner. (See Steve Holzman's article about the contest in this newsletter.) For her efforts, Rachael received a check for \$250, a Peterson oriole print, a set of occasional publications, free registration at three GOS meetings, and a hat and coffee mug.

Monday morning found members checked out of the hotel and headed for the final field trips of the long weekend. I chose the Glennville Wastewater Treatment Facility with field trip leader Gene Wilkinson. At the facility, Gene drew our attention to a most secretive bird, the American Bittern. The bittern cooperated so well it was almost as if the bird knew we wanted to study every feather on its body and showed itself completely. Luckily, this time I had my camera!

And as though the American Bittern wasn't enough, Gene took the group to his friend's house, where we observed Baltimore Orioles coming to grape jelly feeders. At one point we counted nine different orioles in one tree! The gracious hosts, Gene and Virginia Griffin, were rightly proud of their winter guests, showing our group photographs they had taken of the orioles. At one point Mr. Griffin refreshed the grape jelly, which was akin to ringing a dinner bell for the orioles. They couldn't get to the feeder fast enough.

The total species count for the weekend was a whopping 168, eight of which were spotted in South Carolina at the Savannah NWR. In spite of the rain on Saturday, weather conditions were much warmer than the 25 degrees we endured in January 2009. Those attending had a wonderful time seeing old, familiar faces and meeting new people. And, of course, there were the incredible birds to enjoy.

If you missed the winter meeting, you missed a good time. If you have never attended a GOS meeting, don't miss another one. The spring meeting is just around the corner and will be held in Athens from April 16-18, 2010. Register early before field trips are full. I hope to see you all in Athens in April.

## Recipients of the 2010 Earle R. Greene Memorial Award

By Bob Sargent

*On Saturday, January 16, I presented our society's highest honor to Dr. Sid Gauthreaux and Georgann Schmalz during the banquet at the Tybee Island meeting. What follows are my remarks.*

On four previous occasions two recipients of this award have been recognized in the same year, and such is the case this year. You just saw one of this year's recipients behind this podium (Dr. Gauthreaux was the featured speaker), you heard Georgann (she introduced him) describe his remarkable accomplishments and awards, and I suspect that you are now both fascinated by and awed by what he has done with his career. (Note: Dr. Gauthreaux is considered to be the dean of radar ornithology, has published more than 100 papers, and received the William Brewster Memorial Award from the American Ornithologists' Union. His first graduate student was none other than Georgann Schmalz!) I hope you saw something else when you watched his presentation – something I saw when I first met him at the University of Georgia 15 years ago: his abiding passion for birds, research, and learning. This is why he's such a wonderful teacher. It's also why this is the fourth time he has been invited to speak at a GOS meeting, including at our 60th anniversary meeting on Jekyll Island in 1996.

As for this evening's other award recipient, you've seen this person at this podium tonight, too, and many of us in this room have benefited from her gifts. I say this because Georgann is also a wonderful teacher. She taught children and adults about birds, ecology, and animal behavior for more than 28 years at Fernbank Museum. She's a certified Project Wild, Project Learning Tree, and Project Wet instructor. She has also taught birding workshops for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources for 18 years, established a banding (MAPS) station at Fernbank, established the Master Birding Program for Atlanta Audubon Society (AAS), founded the All Women's Birding Bust, and founded her own company (Birding Adventures, Inc.), through which she has led birding trips all over the country and to countries in the tropics. In the back of the room you'll find copies of her CD set, "Bird Songs of Georgia." Did I mention that she's a three-time president of AAS, has chaired the GOS editorial committee, and has published more than 50 scientific articles?

Georgann, when I look at what you've done with your career I feel humbled and exhausted! A few days after Georgann spoke at our Rome meeting last spring, I wrote to tell her that she's the teacher I strive to be. And now you've met her teacher. What a remarkable legacy the two of them have established. Ladies and gentlemen, please congratulate the recipients of the 2010 Earle R. Greene Awards: Dr. Sid Gauthreaux and Georgann Schmalz.



Recipients of the Earle R. Greene Award, Georgann Schmalz (left) and Sidney Gauthreaux (center), with GOS President Bob Sargent. Photo by Dan Vickers.

## GOS Logo Contest Winner Announced

By Steve Holzman

GOS held a logo contest this fall. Although our old Laughing Gull has served us well these many years, we felt it was time to find a new design that incorporated a bird found throughout the state. Eight different artists submitted designs and the voting was held at our winter meeting on Tybee Island. The designs were quite beautiful and depicted birds such as the Loggerhead Shrike, Hooded Warbler, Great-horned Owl, Red-shouldered Hawk, and Carolina Wren. More than one artist submitted a design depicting a Brown-headed Nuthatch. When the votes were counted, the Brown-headed Nuthatch design submitted by Rachel Cass was the clear winner. The design will be used on our correspondence, and watch for some items coming soon featuring the new logo. Stickers have already been ordered and can be obtained for \$2 from our Business Manager, Ashley Harrington, at harriganj@yahoo.com. Please send a self-addressed stamped envelop to make Ashley's job a little easier. Thanks to all the fine Georgia artists who submitted designs: Paul Johnson, Michael Parrish, Woody Hickcox, Joel McNeal, Tracey Muise, Dan Vickers, Steve Fox and our winner Rachel Cass.



New GOS logo by Rachel Cass.

## A Visiting Angel from Way Up North

By Michael T. Barrett

On Monday, January 25th, Walt Chambers from Columbus, Georgia, spotted an Ivory Gull on the water at West Point Lake, in Troup County, Georgia. After hearing of his report, several birders were able to get to the lake in time to positively identify the bird before the sun went down. Being relatively new to birding, I didn't understand the significance of this find until the next evening, when a quick search on the Internet told me what the hubbub was about.



Ivory Gull in flight. Photo by Michael Barrett.

The population of the Ivory Gull has dropped more than 80% over the last 20 years, and 13 breeding colonies have vanished entirely. The Ivory Gull breeds in the high Arctic and winters as far south as Newfoundland. It is rarely found away from pack ice, let alone on a lake in Western Georgia two thousand miles to the south. It became clear that this was a once-in-a-lifetime chance to see one of the world's rarest birds.

We decided to make the trip to West Point Lake on Wednesday afternoon. I wanted to make sure that the avid birders of the family (our three boys) got a chance to see this magnificent rare bird before it flew back home. When we arrived, I thought we might have trouble spotting the bird, but the Ivory Gull stood out among all of the other gulls in the area. We stood on the West Point Dam with several other birders observing the bird. Every 30 minutes or so, it would fly from the boom area in front of the dam down the river and around the bend. Minutes later it would return to the boom area.

I decided to take Thursday off as an "educational" day for the boys. I figured we would get down there as early as possible to see the gull again and maybe view some of the other birds in the area. When we arrived on Thursday morning, there were half a dozen people already observing the gull, and we quickly

(continued on page 8)

## A Visiting Angel *(continued from page 7)*

learned that its behavior had changed dramatically from the three days before. We arrived around 9:30, and the bird had not flown to feed, or for any other reason, since the first birders arrived at sun-up.

Although it would stand occasionally, the Ivory Gull seemed rather lethargic. It did not feed throughout the day and flew only a few times when it was startled by a beaver, and some Double Crested Cormorants, and then when another photographer approached too closely. That last flight took it over the lake and down river. Then, just before dark, we observed it circling, soaring, and diving to the water with the other gulls. Watching it feed raised our spirits and eliminated some of the concern we held from earlier in the day.

We returned on Friday morning, but we could not locate the bird. We learned from another birder that it was located on another beach up the shoreline and that it was not doing well at all. When we found the Ivory Gull, we were saddened at what we saw. The bird was clearly in distress, and a wing was drooping, as if it were broken. We spoke to other birders and found it had not flown, or left the beach, since day-break. As we observed the bird, it was resting up against a tree and appeared to be praying, which brought a tear to our eyes.

We spent the entire day monitoring the bird. Someone brought raw chicken, hoping the Ivory Gull would feed, but it wasn't interested in eating. The bird seemed disoriented, and its breathing was quite labored. There seemed to be some confusion about who (if anyone) contacted a rehabilitation expert, and no one was contacted until much later in the day.



The Ivory Gull rests against a tree on the shore of West Point Lake. Photo by Michael Barrett.

A cold front was moving in, and after much consternation and some reassurance from the ranger that the bird would get help, we began our trek home. We were almost home when we received a call that an avian veterinarian had been contacted, but they needed someone to transport the bird. We turned around so we could assist if no one else was close to the lake. The Ivory Gull had graced us with its presence and allowed us, and hundreds of others, to enjoy its beauty for several days. The least we could do is take a couple hours out of our day to help save its life.

A short time later, we received another call informing us that the ranger and another birder had transported the Ivory Gull to a rehabilitation expert. We breathed a sigh of relief and continued the journey home. Our relief, however, quickly turned to sadness when we walked in the door and learned that the bird, the most beautiful and graceful looking bird I have ever seen, had died.

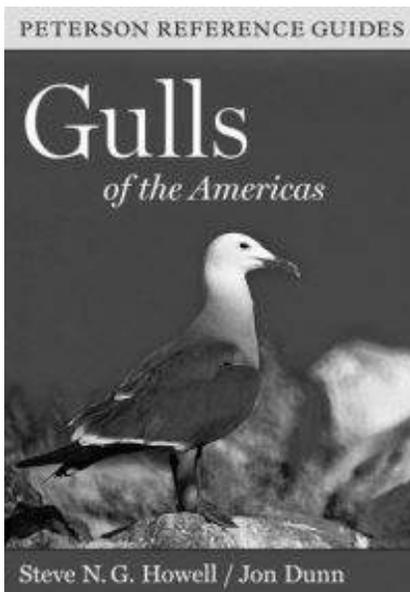
On the way home we passed a sign in front of a church that read, "God grants us blessings to be a blessing to others." I truly believe we were granted a blessing in being able to witness this beautiful bird, and I hope this article has conveyed the impact this bird made on me and my family. While my heart is filled with sadness that the attempt to save the Ivory Gull failed, I thank God for allowing us to see this tiny creation of His, to enjoy its beauty, and to realize once again that all life is fragile and precious.

## Write the October 2010 GOS Meeting on Your Calendars Now

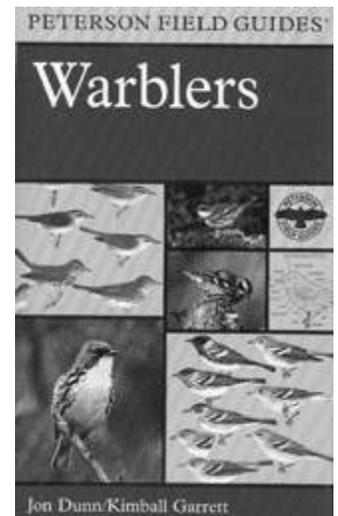
By Bill Lotz and Bob Sargent

The society's fall meeting returns this year following an eight-year hiatus. Come join us on beautiful Jekyll Island, site of our former traditional fall meeting location, for three days of superb programs, birding, and fellowship. You do not have to be a member of GOS to participate! The meeting is scheduled for Friday, October 8, through Sunday, October 10, 2010, and we'll be headquartered at Villas by the Sea on the north end of the island. If you're a fan of the coastal festivals and have never been to a GOS fall meeting, you might be wondering if this will be a much less activity-filled event. Rest assured, we will be offering most of the same great field trips you've come to expect on that weekend, including multi-day opportunities to bird some of the most popular islands, and trip participants will be guided by the same gifted leaders you've come to know. And, as always, the meeting that weekend will feature a dinner banquet and outstanding guest speakers.

Unlike our winter and spring meetings, this meeting will offer a full slate of field trips on Friday, and a social at the hotel that evening. The Friday evening program will be capped off with a presentation about Wild Turkeys by Dallas Ingram, a recipient of an H. Branch Howe Research Grant from GOS in 2007. The Saturday evening program will feature noted field guide author and birder extraordinaire Jon Dunn. Jon grew up in California, where he became a birder at age eight, an event triggered, he says, by the life-altering appearance of a bright male Hooded Oriole in his garden. Jon has extensive knowledge of the identification and distribution of North American birds and is widely published in ornithological journals. He has also long been interested in Asian avifaunas. Jon has been chief consultant and editor for all five editions of the National Geographic Society's *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. He is the co-writer and host of the two-video set *Large and Small Gulls of North America*, as well as co-author (with Kimball Garrett) of *Birds of Southern California: Status and Distribution*. He is the author of the *Peterson Field Guide to Warblers* and coauthored (with Steve Howell) the *Gulls of the Americas*. Jon is a member of the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature of the American Ornithologists' Union and the ABA Checklist Committee, and he has served more than 20 years on the California Bird Records Committee. Most importantly, everyone who has ever heard him speak raves about his exceptional teaching skills.



Jon Dunn/Kimball Garrett



Make plans now to spend this October weekend with GOS. We'll soon provide more details, including a list of field trips and registration information, on our website ([www.gos.org](http://www.gos.org)) and via listservers. See you on the coast!



# Camp TALON

(Teen Adventures Learning Ornithology and Nature)

## *What?*

- A week-long camp for teens interested in birds and nature
- Sponsors: Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Ornithological Society, and Atlanta Audubon Society

*When?* Tentatively June 5-11, 2010

*Where?* The camp will kick off with a Saturday night get-together at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center, before spending the week based on St. Simons Island. We'll be birding at Harris Neck NWR, Altamaha WMA, Little St. Simons Island, Ft. Stewart, Sapelo Island, and Jekyll Island.

*Who?* Will host 20 students, age 13-17



**How much?** About \$500 per student, which includes meals, lodging, and transportation. Some scholarships will be available. A chartered bus will pick up students at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center on the morning of the 5th, and will return them on the 11<sup>th</sup> for a last-night celebration.

For info, call Julie Duncan (770) 784-3059, or Bob Sargent (478) 397-7962.

## A MEMORABLE WINTER IN VALDOSTA

By Kate and John Swiderski

This winter in Valdosta will be memorable to many for the unusual weather we have experienced. There have been numerous heavy rain storms, below-freezing temperatures with two hard freezes, and even a snow flurry or two. For Kate and me, this winter season will be memorable for birds!

As we have done for many years, we kept a nectar feeder out in hopes of hosting a winter hummingbird. This year the feeder was just outside our living room window in a large patch of red shrimp plant in full bloom. During December we had 17 days with observations of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds. Typically they would come in to the shrimp plant and feed for a short time (ignoring the nectar feeder), and then disappear. On December 27<sup>th</sup> an obvious hatch-year male appeared and stayed on. Fred Bassett banded the bird on January 8<sup>th</sup>. This was wonderful – we finally had a wintering hummingbird in our yard.

Then on January 15<sup>th</sup> the unexpected happened. We observed a warbler coming to the nectar feeder several times that day and then again early in the morning on subsequent days. Kate took a video clip of the warbler two days later, which Jim Flynn reviewed and determined that our warbler was very special indeed, a Virginia's Warbler, just the second record for Georgia! It was later determined, from numerous photographs, to be an immature female. (A complete account of this rarity will appear in a future issue of *The Oriole*.)

Heavy birder visitation started immediately on January 18<sup>th</sup>, and as of this writing we have had 116 visitors come to see the warbler. For many it was a life bird, and for at least three it was the only warbler they had not seen. Early on, when the warbler was coming up close to the house, most got their first look from our living room, jockeying for position at the window. It was not a problem for us, as we really enjoyed seeing so many old friends from around the state, and we were pleased to give them an opportunity to see such a rarity. Paul Sykes remarked that this surely must be the first time a Virginia's Warbler and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird have ever been seen in the same binocular view.



Virginia's Warbler visiting a hummingbird feeder in Valdosta. Photo by Giff Beaton.



John Swiderski holds the Ruby-throated Hummingbird captured and banded in his yard in Valdosta. Photo by Fred Bassett.

If all this was not excitement enough, an adult Bald Eagle was seen overhead on several occasions and a very large flock of Cedar Waxwings (estimated at 500+ by Rusty Trump) appeared at the subdivision entrance on February 20<sup>th</sup>. A memorable winter indeed!

## Remembering One Special Day

By Jim Gilreath

If you have ever tried to recall the circumstances that led you to become a birder, you might remember someone who contributed to your interest in birds or nature or, if you are lucky, maybe even the exact day when this happened. After reading Bob Sargent's article about Milton Hopkins in the December 2009 issue of *GOShawk*, I began to reflect on what Bob said about his mentors and teachers and how they influenced him to become a birder. Many years ago there were three birders who had a similar effect on my interest in birds and nature, and there was a special day, long remembered, that changed my life.

In 1974 I was enrolled as a graduate student at Mercer University in Macon and fortuitously became acquainted with two men who would greatly influence my life and career. Mercer biology professor, James O. Harrison, a former World War II fighter pilot, research entomologist in Central America, and one of the founders of the Ocmulgee Audubon Society, and the late T.P. Haines, chairman of the biology department at Mercer, a herpetologist, nature photographer, and also a founder of the Ocmulgee Audubon Society, are two old-school birders and naturalists.

Going into the field with either of these men revealed eye-opening glimpses of the natural world. Birds, trees, wildflowers, insects, amphibians, reptiles, mammals and their environment were all of great interest to an old-school naturalist. It was during one particular field trip with T.P. Haines that led to my only meeting with another naturalist, the late Milton Hopkins, whom I had never heard of before that day. We met at his Osierfield farm near Fitzgerald, Georgia, for a day of birding and wildflowering in the spring of 1974. (Milton would later author "The Birdlife of Ben Hill County, Georgia, and Adjacent Areas," GOS Occasional Publication No. 5, 1975, as well as the autobiographical, *In One Place: The Natural History of a Georgia Farmer*, Saltmarsh Press, 2001.)

On that Saturday in late April, T.P. took the students enrolled in his field botany course to Fitzgerald on a field trip guided by Milton, which I assumed was a regularly-scheduled trip each spring quarter. The trip began before dawn in the parking lot of the Willett Science Center at Mercer, a time of the day mostly reserved for fishermen and birders. It has been said that you can be good at neither by sleeping past dawn.

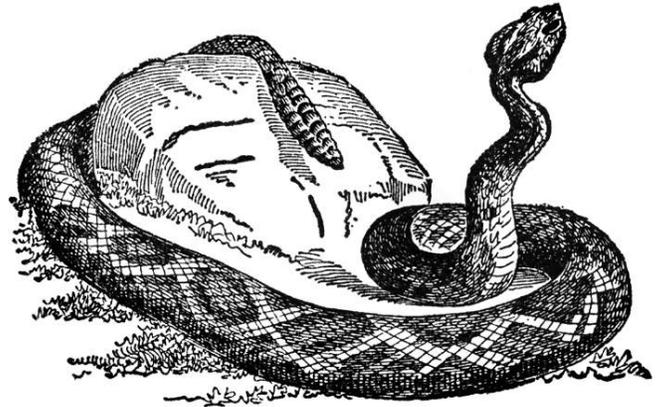
We left Macon in the predawn darkness en route to southern Georgia, ostensibly to identify and collect native wildflowers on Milton's farm, to press them between the pages of our plant presses, but early on it became obvious that this wildflower trip was destined to become a full-blown naturalist expedition. It culminated with the discovery, at Osierfield, of an isolated, pine woods nest of baby vultures, which promptly regurgitated a malodorous stew of partially-digested carrion as we observed them closely in their secluded, piney enclosure. This is very useful as a survival mechanism to discourage predators, which I must admit, worked very well on all humans present that day and of which skunks would stand in awe. Somewhere I have 35mm slides of the vultures, the regurgitation, and other photos of that day, but they are currently lost and may have to be rediscovered by some future archeologist. The memory of the odor is not lost, however, and will be with me always.

South of Hawkinsville we made several roadside stops along the way to observe and collect wildflowers, to observe the various species of pitcher plants and native orchids, and to observe numerous birds. After we arrived at Osierfield, introductions were made as we transferred to Milton's pickup truck to begin a magical day of collecting and observing. There was also a precautionary mention of encountering moonshiners somewhere on Milton's farm, which thankfully never materialized, but one could and did imagine banjos playing somewhere deep in the swamp.

The trunk of T.P.'s "big-as-a-whale" Buick was full of several cloth bags for collecting snakes, as well as binoculars, plant presses, and various digging tools. We actually collected two snakes from the road on the trip to Fitzgerald, much to the alarm of one of the students, when T.P. put a snake into a bag and

placed it in the back seat, under her feet. This also marked the first and only time that I have ever seen anyone collect a living snake from the center of the highway by simply opening the driver's door and reaching down and grabbing it behind the head and quickly placing it into a cloth bag.

T.P. and Milton, who had brought food for everyone, provided lunch at the farm that day (thankfully before we met the baby vultures). This was not a typical meal to be eaten quickly in the field but rather a sit-down feast, complete with many covered casserole-type dishes that T.P. had prepared earlier that morning in Macon. (It was rumored that he did much of the cooking at his house.) The food was delicious, and the company and eloquent conversation were fascinating. My impression was that the noon meal, like the trip, had been going on for years and had grown in both scope and delectability.



Rattlesnake (from *Everybody's Cyclopedia*, 1912, Syndicate Publishing Company, New York).

T.P. had quite a menagerie of both venomous and non-venomous snakes at Mercer for research purposes, and even though he was an excellent birder, his interests tended to lean toward herpetology. It was mentioned that day at Osierfield that whenever Milton found an interesting snake on the farm he would sometimes capture it, box it up and ship it to T.P. at Mercer via Greyhound bus. T.P. had a finger missing that was rumored to be the result of a venomous snake bite, a hazard of the trade.

Both T.P. and Milton had an encyclopedic knowledge of everything in the natural world. I was amazed by these two old friend's ease of interacting with nature, as I never saw them consult a field guide or dichotomous key; they simply knew what they were observing, be it animal, vegetable or mineral. It made quite an impression on a naïve graduate student who had lugged around the ten-pound Radford, Ahles, and Bell's *Manual of the Vascular Flora of the Carolinas* and Peterson's *A Field Guide to the Birds—Eastern Land and Water Birds* along for the day.

As the shadows lengthened and the sun set at the end of that glorious spring day, I knew that I had been privy to one of those days that come along when everything is just right with the world. I have never experienced another day in the field like that one special day when life decisions became obvious and were revealed to me.

On the trip back to Macon that evening after dark, I volunteered to help T.P. with the driving. While he slept, I had time to reflect on the roads that my life had taken and the ones that were to follow. As it turned out, after Mercer I embarked on a career in teaching biology and much later became a member of the GOS and of Ocmulgee Audubon Society, which T.P. had invited me to join back in 1974. It is through these organizations that I am able to continue to enjoy the excitement of that day so long ago. With my own students I never became the old-school naturalist that my mentors were for me. Although I've provided adequate instruction, I was never the sage and wise keeper-of-the-knowledge that the old-time naturalists tended to be. Those who survive are rare and growing fewer in number with each passing year.

Milton Hopkins and T.P. Haines are among those not here anymore, but I am forever grateful to them and to Dr. Jim Harrison for inspiring me to become a lifelong student of the natural world. For all our young people today, I sincerely hope that there are still some of the old-school naturalists out there somewhere to inspire them to look at birds and butterflies and wildflowers, and to be thrilled by the wonder of it all.

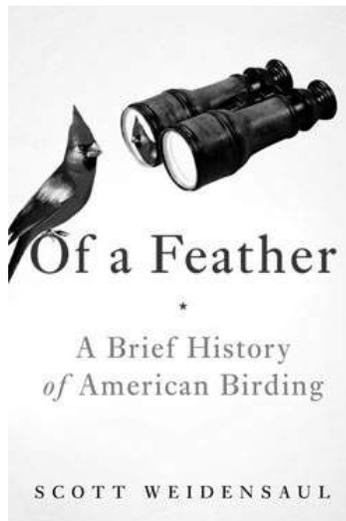
## SPRING 2010 GOS CONFERENCE IN ATHENS APRIL 16-18, 2010

The Spring 2010 Conference of the Georgia Ornithological Society will be held in Athens, Georgia, from Friday, April 16, through Sunday, April 18, 2010. Our headquarters hotel is the University of Georgia Conference Center and Hotel in Athens. The registration desk opens in the lobby of that hotel at 5:00 PM on Friday, April 16, 2010.

Dinner on Friday is on your own. The Friday night program begins at 7:00 PM with two presentations. Both presenters are graduate students at the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of Georgia, and are recent recipients of the Society's H. Branch Howe Research Grants. Jonathan Gray will talk on "Comparing Loggerhead Shrike Territories and Habitats between Two Landscapes." Cathy Ricketts will speak about her research on "King and Clapper Rails of the Combahee River, South Carolina." Following these presentations, we will preview the planned field trips for the weekend.

Field trip destinations on Saturday and Sunday include such wonderful birding sites as the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, Sandy Creek Nature Center, Dyar's Pasture, Whitehall Forest and other birding sites around the Athens area.

Saturday afternoon there will be a Paper Session from 3:30 to 5:30, immediately followed by a Poster Session from 5:30 to 7:00. The Social Hour and Book Signing (with cash bar) will be held from 6:00 to 7:00, and our Banquet begins at 7:00 PM. Our keynote speaker will be Scott Weidensaul, author and naturalist, who will trace the unpredictable history of bird study in America, in a talk based on his most recent book *Of a Feather: A Brief History of American Birding*.



Scott Weidensaul, keynote speaker at the Spring 2010 GOS meeting in Athens.

At the conclusion of Scott's talk we will review the planned Sunday field trips and hold the count-down of birds encountered on the weekend to that point.

Please plan to join us in Athens for what should be an exciting weekend of birding and fellowship.

### **GOShawk Now Available Online**

Past and current issues of the *GOShawk* are now available online in .pdf format at the following URL: <http://www.gos.org/newsletters/newsletter.pdf>

## 2010 Georgia Youth Birding Competition

### What is it?

The Youth Birding Competition (YBC) is a 24-hour birding event during the peak of spring migration. Youth teams spend the day finding as many species as they can as they compete against teams their own age. The competition is capped off with a Live Wildlife Show and Awards Banquet.

### When is it?

The competition runs from 5:00 PM on Friday, April 23rd, to 5 PM Saturday April 24th 2010. Feel free use as much or as little of this 24-hour period as you like. As long as you cross the finish line and turn in your list by 5:00 PM, you will be in the running for prizes.

### Why start at 5 PM Friday?

This allows younger or more low-key teams to look for owls in the evening on Friday rather than get up at midnight. It also allows older crazier teams to bird the coast on Friday, and then work up to Charlie Elliott on Saturday.

### Where is it?

Visit as much or as little of the state of Georgia as you want, as long as you make it to Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center by 5:00 PM to turn in your list. Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center is located in Mansfield, Georgia, about one hour east of Atlanta. All events will be at the Conference Center Banquet Hall.

### Do you need to be an expert?

No! We can pair your team with an experienced birder (Mentor) to help you learn about the birds before the competition. During the competition only the youth participants can identify birds.

### Who does it benefit?

Your team can use this event to raise money for The Wildlife Conservation Fund – the main fund for the Nongame Conservation Section, or for the conservation organization of your choice.

### Are there prizes?

Of course! For each age group (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12th grades) teams will compete for the most birds seen and the most money raised. Grand Prizes include new binoculars for the team finding the most birds. There will be door prizes for almost all of the participants.

### How much does it cost?

Participation is absolutely FREE, unless you plan to spend Friday night (April 23, 2010) at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center, in which case lodging costs \$25/person. All participants receive a free T-shirt.

### How can you register or get more information?

Register by March 31st 2010. Contact the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division, One Conservation Way, Suite 310, Brunswick, GA, 912-262-3191. Or visit the YBC website (<http://www.georgiawildlife.com/node/951>).

This event is primarily funded by The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (T.E.R.N.), friends group of the Wildlife Resources Division's Nongame Conservation Section. Donations were also provided by Eagle Optics, Atlanta Audubon Society, Georgia Ornithological Society, Birdsong Identiflyer, and Droll Yankees - "The World's Best Bird Feeders."



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Please complete the form and mail with your payment to: Georgia Ornithological Society Membership, 108 W. 8th St., Louisville, GA 30434

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### Annual membership rates for individuals and families:

- |                          |                                      |      |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> | Bachman's Sparrow (Regular)          | \$20 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Red-cockaded Woodpecker (Sustaining) | \$30 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Northern Bobwhite (Patron)           | \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Fledgling (Students only)            | \$10 |

### Life Membership Rates for individuals or couples:

- |                          |                  |       |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Northern Goshawk | \$400 |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------|

Yes, I would like to make an additional contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ in support of GOS and its programs.