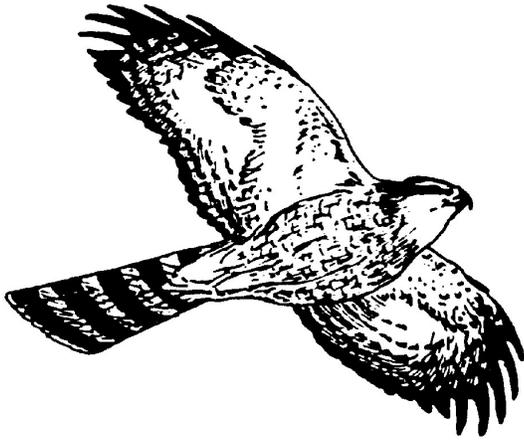


September 2013  
Vol. 40, No. 3



# GOShawk

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society  
www.gos.org

## President's Message

By Jim Ferrari

The upcoming fall GOS gathering will be my eighteenth GOS meeting, and my fifth on Jekyll Island, but somehow it never gets stale. What an indulgence, especially for someone from the mid-state, to explore the beaches and salt marshes and revel in the flocks of shorebirds and waders. In just a few weeks I'll be tooling down Interstate 16, ticking off the miles and eagerly anticipating the oystercatchers, Roseate Spoonbills, and even the confounded and confounding gulls. But this meeting represents a different kind of milestone for me because it is the conclusion of my two-year term as GOS president. At the banquet on Saturday evening, October 12, you will elect a new leadership team (see page 14 for the ballot) and I will shift roles to "past president," a minor character at best. I'm at peace with handing over the gavel; while I have relished my 10 years on the Executive Committee and eight years editing the *GOShawk* newsletter, I am also ready for new projects. In my final president's message, I want to reflect on my time on the GOS Executive Committee, offer up some heartfelt thank yous, and encourage any wallflowers

out there to get more active with the Georgia Ornithological Society.

Probably the best thing about being active in GOS is getting to know other birders on field trips. And what a curious, positive, cheerful, and knowledgeable group you are. Everyone, not just our stellar field trip leaders, wants you to get that life bird. You all desperately want the newbie to see the Painted Bunting in its full neon-tinted glory so you can bask in the glow of someone encountering this magnificent bird for the first time. You will share your scope and patiently ooh and ah over a male cardinal, no matter how many thousands you have seen before. It has been a genuine pleasure to learn with you and from you on field trips. I have also experienced a very different kind of setting for "getting to know" folks, namely GOS Executive Committee meetings. (Full disclosure: fewer birds and more recording of minutes.) You would be proud to see what thoughtful, committed, and creative people you have on the GOS leadership team. I know you know this, but GOS is in good hands. If you have not given much serious thought to becoming

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Ornithological  
Society**

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GOShawk is published quarterly  
(March, June, September, December)

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*Deadline for article submission is the first  
of the month prior to publication.  
Text by e-mail is appreciated.*

**Welcome, New Members!**

**Fledgling**

Emma Dickinson	Decatur, GA
Nicolette Roach	Clemson, SC

**Red-cockaded woodpecker**

Mary Bryans	Augusta, GA
Kathy Rarey	Hayesville, NC

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS**

**GOS FALL MEETING**

*October 11-14, 2013*

*Jekyll Island*

**GOS WINTER MEETING**

*January 17-20, 2014*

*Tallahassee, Florida*

**GOS GRANT APPLICATION DEADLINES**

**Bill Terrell Graduate Student Research Grants**

December 1, 2013

**Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grants**

December 31, 2013

**H. Branch Howe, Jr., Graduate Student Research Grants**

December 31, 2013

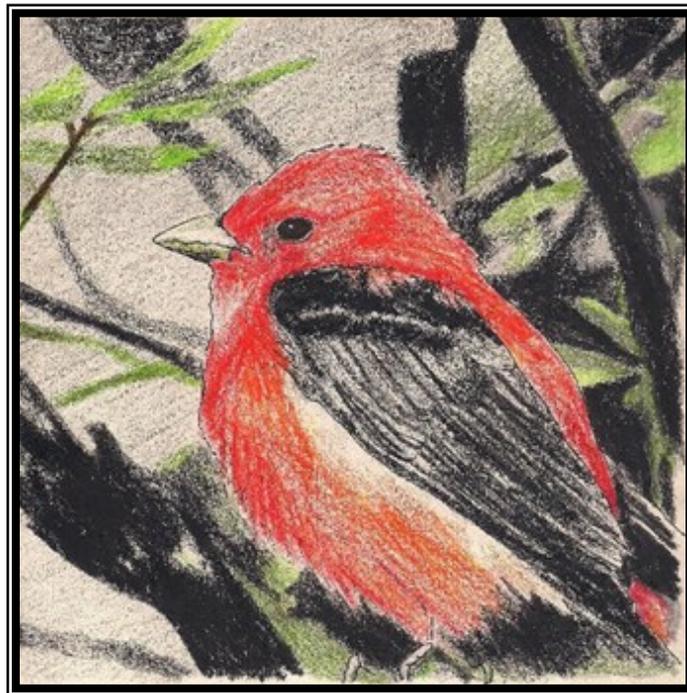
For information about the society's grants, visit <http://www.gos.org/grants/grant.html>

**President's Message** *(continued from page 1)*

more involved with GOS, the opportunity to work closely with and befriend the ExComm members ought to be incentive enough.

There are so many thank yous to express that it's hard to know where to start. To the Executive Committee: thank you for your professional planning and execution of our meetings, and for the care with which you have guided our society. To our skillful field trip leaders: the reason we rack up such great species counts at our meetings is because of your zeal for teal and your zest for VESP. (Sorry, couldn't resist.) To the membership: thank you for supporting GOS with your time, energy, and dues payments. To our younger birders: thank you for your enthusiasm, your participation in Camp TALON and the Youth Birding Competition, and your presence at GOS meetings. (Keep at it!) Finally, to our donors, past and present: thank you for giving GOS the financial strength to do amazing things for conservation, research, and education.

I will conclude by encouraging you to be a joiner. Granted, if you are reading this, then you are probably already a GOS member. Paying dues is great, attending meetings is even better, but if you are so inclined, get more involved in the doings of the society. My involvement in GOS has been the best professional development I could ask for. My teaching has been sharpened, my research has gone off in peculiar new directions (vultures! bird droppings!), and my life list of birds has burgeoned. If we have not yet met in person, I hope we will soon. I should have a lot more time to mingle at meetings after October. Finally, I have one last thank you: I am grateful to Bob Sargent for telling me about GOS and encouraging me to join, then prodding me to become more active with the society. It's been a very fulfilling two years as president, but you haven't seen the last of me. I hope to see you in the Georgia salt marshes this October, where we can bask in the glow of someone else's life bird, together.



Scarlet Tanager by Rebecca Mello.

## Camp Colorado 2013: Birding Another Planet?

By Sarah Adams

Birding at Camp Colorado was one of the most memorable experiences of my life. When we flew into Denver on Sunday, July 21<sup>st</sup>, little did I know how fast the next week would fly by with all of the birds we saw, places we went, people we met, friends we made, and the fun moments we had together. We all knew we were in for the experience of a lifetime and could not wait to start birding in Colorado.

Colorado was my first experience birding out West. I live in northern Georgia, where I have birded at high elevations, but Colorado's elevation—with the variety of habitats like groves of quaking aspen, alpine tundra, and vast grasslands with prickly pear and yucca dotting the landscape—made me feel like I was on a whole different planet. I was excited about these new environments I would be birding in and what birds would be there. Throughout the week, we went to many places. One of the most memorable was Endo Valley, where we saw American Dippers nimbly hopping from boulder to boulder around a waterfall at the alluvial fan, and during our snack break, a pair of Black Swifts gracefully soared in the sky. Steve Howell, one of our guides, pointed the birds out while we were all chowing down on our trail mix. We all learned the valuable lesson to always continue birding, even during a snack break; otherwise we might miss seeing rare birds like the Black Swifts.

Another favorite place of mine was Phantom Canyon. The hike down to the canyon was beautiful, and we constantly saw birds like Green-Tailed and Spotted Towhees popping up to the top of the brush. We had great views of a male Lazuli Bunting, Steller's Jays, and White-throated Swifts swooping down just above our heads, as well as Cordilleran Flycatchers calling by the river in the bottom of the canyon.

We also went to the Pawnee National Grasslands, where we saw Mountain Plovers, McCown's Longspurs, and Lark Buntings. We saw some Lark Sparrows, a favorite of mine, which has striking face patterns. When we were driving there, we approached a bird we thought was "just a hawk" perched atop a fencepost, but the bird turned out to be a gorgeous Golden Eagle, less than ten feet away from us. The inside of the van exploded with the sound of camera shutters pressed by birders excited at the sight of that magnificent bird.

Other highlights of the week included White-tailed Ptarmigan chicks with their mother at the alpine-tundra of Rocky Mountain National Park and an Olive-Sided Flycatcher along with Red Crossbills at Cow Creek. I enjoyed seeing all of these new birds, the very different habitats of the West, and learning all about the habitat-related behaviors of these birds.

The camp was an amazing experience for me, not just because of the birds, butterflies, wildflowers, and other wildlife, but because of the spectacular guides. All week, we birded with some of the best birders in the country who were also the organizers of the camp: Jennie Duberstein, Bill Stewart, Jeffery Gordon, Liz Gordon, Steve Howell, David La Puma, and Jeff Bouton. We had the opportunity to bird with guests like Ted Floyd of *Birding* magazine during the week. Some of the guides held workshops and presentations on topics ranging from radar ornithology to bird conservation. We also had a career panel one day with all of the guides and a few other guests. It was great to hear how they got started birding and their many birding stories, as well as the valuable birding advice they shared. It was a great experience to spend a whole week not only learning from them, but also getting to know them well, and sharing inspirations, discussions, and quite a few laughs, not to mention a practical joke or two!

(continued on page 5)

**Birding Another Planet?** *(continued from page 4)*

Making new friends was probably the biggest highlight for me at Camp Colorado. Many of us, including myself, came from places where there are few birders, let alone birders our own age. But at Camp Colorado, even though we didn't know each other, there was instant chemistry between so many of us. By the end of the week, we felt like we had known each other for years. Some of my favorite moments with my new friends were when just the campers went birding outside the YMCA lodge, where we were staying, and spotting birds like Mountain Bluebirds, a Williamson's Sapsucker, and even a female Broad-tailed Hummingbird on her nest! Thinking about all of the fun times we had at camp never fails to put a big grin on my face. I made so many new, close, potentially life-long friends, and I enjoyed birding, learning, laughing, even singing, and spending every minute of camp with them.

Since I returned, my new friends and I have established a network to keep in touch with each other and are already planning future birding trips together. As for us Georgia birders, we would ultimately like to start birding classes or even a birding day camp for young or beginner birders, and host walks for them in each region of Georgia, making birding across Georgia more accessible to others. In Dahlonega, we are already adding a birding dimension to our second Saturday morning Garden Bugs Club and our afternoon River Critters club meeting at Revival Gardens, our family farm.

Going to ABA's Camp Colorado is an experience I will never forget, and it would not have been possible were it not for the generous scholarship donors of the Georgia Ornithological Society. I appreciate their generosity, and I cannot express enough words of thanks to them for making this amazing experience possible. I would also like to thank my family, my birding mentor Georgann Schmalz, the Hilyer family, and the Lamb family, who have all been so supportive of my birding over the last four years. Last but not least, I should probably thank the birds for all their fascinating characteristics that unite so many people in a common appreciation for them.



Sarah Adams with a hummingbird at Camp Colorado.  
Photo courtesy Sarah Adams.

## Field Ornithology Camp at Hog Island, Maine

By Jim Ferrari

Scanning the placid bay near Hog Island, it is abundantly clear that I am not in Georgia anymore. From the brightly painted lobster buoys to the scarlet feet of diving Black Guillemots and the rocky shore plastered with glistening rockweed, these Maine waters are delightfully different. And it is cool out. It's about noon in mid-June and I've donned a fleece sweater, an unthinkable act this time of year in Georgia. I've come to the National Audubon Society's historic Hog Island Camp for a weeklong Field Ornithology camp. With a scholarship from the National Audubon Society and support from my employer, Wesleyan College, I'm here to indulge in a tradition dating to the 1930s: attending classes, taking field trips on land and sea, and immersing myself in the world of birds. My aim in this article is to report on my experiences at Hog Island and exhort you to go to Maine next summer and experience this magical place for yourself.

The legendary Roger Tory Peterson was Hog Island's first birding instructor in 1936, but his modern incarnations are no slouches either. Instructors during my week at camp included Kenn and Kimberly Kaufman, John Kricher, Scott Weidensaul, and Sara Morris. Ben Clock of Cornell's Macaulay Library, famed for its archive of bird song recordings, lent his extraordinary ear during our field trips. We were also treated to an evening program on Project Puffin by Steve Kress, the knight-in-shining-tam o'shanter who has helped restore nesting Atlantic Puffins to Maine waters. Not surprisingly, given the all-star cast, the instruction for my sessions on bird banding, flight, and ornithology was uniformly excellent.

Whether by land or by sea, birds were naturally the main (Maine?) attraction. The Field Ornithology campers visited Great Salt Bay Farm Preserve, Ross Pond, and Old County Road on the mainland, plus Wreck Island and its decades-old heron rookery, but the highlight for me was Eastern Egg Rock, home of nesting puffins, clouds of Arctic and Roseate terns, and hosts of guillemots. Other notable sightings included Common Eiders, Surf Scoters, and lounging harbor seals. We witnessed a chilling confrontation between a Great Black-backed Gull, the world's largest gull, and a pair of hen eiders that were protecting their small "crèche" of downy ducklings between them. The eiders managed to escape with their young (this time), but predation on baby eiders by the voracious gulls is alarmingly frequent, according to Hog Island staffers.

Camp life on Hog Island was charming, friendly, and deeply infused with tradition. Meals, served family style, offered opportunities to visit with the instructors and other campers. The food was fresh, creative, and delicious. I shared a room and a bathroom, which worked out just fine, but single rooms are also available. Campers were encouraged to solve the "mystery of the day" about bird biology. Mysteries were presented each morning in the laboratory, next to heaps of relevant books, and answers were revealed during dinner. My week at camp happened to coincide with session number one of Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens, which was wonderful because the teens (including one of our own Georgia birders, Evan Barnard) were so lively and energetic. It was gratifying to see the next generation of bird addicts soaking up all the ornithological sights and sounds of Maine, especially knowing that GOS provides scholarships for some of them. The week culminated in (what else?) a lobster dinner with all the fixings.

I hope I have convinced you to give Hog Island a visit. Many different camps are offered during the summer, from Joy of Birding to The Arts of Birding and more, so there is something for every taste (see [www.hogisland.audubon.org](http://www.hogisland.audubon.org) for details). Be sure to reserve a spot early, as the camps are popular and may sell out quickly. Another option is to attend as a FOHI (Friends of Hog Island) volunteer; FOHI staffers work in the kitchen, help with maintenance, and, when their work is done, get to tag along on field trips. I am grateful to National Audubon for making it possible for me to visit Hog Island, breathe the north-woods air for a week, and have my first encounters with that icon of the Maine coast: the Atlantic Puffin.



Jim Ferrari at Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine. Photo courtesy Jim Ferrari.

## Camp Colorado 2013: Georgia Goes West

By Sam Brunson

On July 21<sup>st</sup> I left Georgia for the ABA's Camp Colorado for young birders and what would turn out to be the most birding in a week I have ever done. Having the opportunity to go to Colorado and bird for a week with expert ornithologists, fantastic leaders, and other birders my age was amazing.

We stayed at the YMCA of the Rockies during our stay in Colorado, and the YMCA certainly had its share of amazing birds. When we first arrived at the YMCA, we were greeted by a host of Violet-green Swallows. Most of us had never seen the acrobatic birds, so we watched them fly around our dorm for a while. I got as many pictures that I could get of the swallows those first few hours of birding in Colorado, forgetting that I would be seeing them every day.

We ate, we slept, and we birded. Some mornings we woke up earlier than others, but each morning after everyone got all their gear together and were in the vans, we were ready for birding. Usually, we would eat breakfast at the YMCA, but on mornings when we got up extra early to get to far-off birding spots, we packed a breakfast. After we birded each day, we would usually have a talk back at our dorm. We had the privilege to hear great talks on topics such as bird conservation, field guides, and radar ornithology. Following the talks, we would go get dinner, bird a little around our dorm, and then go to bed, recharging for the next day.

We got to go to many fantastic locations throughout Colorado. One of my favorite places that we visited was Rocky Mountain National Park. We went to the park several times, but my favorite trip there was the day we went to Medicine Bow Curve. We had to drive a while on winding roads though the park, but the long van ride was certainly worth it. For one, the scenery was beautiful. Everywhere we looked we saw endless mountains with trees spilling over the steep slopes of the Rockies. One of our target birds for Medicine Bow Curve was the elusive and extremely camouflaged White-tailed Ptarmigan. After a short walk down the trail, we spotted the sneaky ptarmigans. The first that we saw were far away, but later in the walk we were able to see a female White-tailed Ptarmigan with several of her young relatively up close. Other great birds we saw that day were the Townsend's Solitaire, Vesper and Lark Sparrows, and a trio of Mountain Bluebirds.

Another of my favorite days at Camp Colorado was our trip to the Pawnee National Grasslands. On the van ride, I ticked a plethora of lifers, including the bird I most wanted to see on the trip: the Burrowing Owl. We checked several fields during the morning on the way to the grasslands, and struck gold when we saw the Burrowing Owls. They were quite a distance away, but getting to see the owls was amazing.

The Burrowing Owls weren't the only new bird for me on the van ride. A bird no one would have expected to see at such close proximity also made an appearance on the trip: the Golden Eagle. Everyone was searching the skies and neighboring fields for birds as we made our way to Pawnee. A little down the road, a raptor perched on a fence post caught everyone's eyes. We had been searching for a Ferruginous Hawk, and from a far off distance everyone thought it was some species of hawk. The closer we got to it though, the more and more we could tell the bird was much bigger than any hawk. It was an eagle. The Golden Eagle was just perched on a fence post, minding his own business, totally nonchalant, while 20+ young birders scrambled to get out their cameras and binoculars. Once our van approached the Golden Eagle, the bird became a little nervous and flew off to another fence post about 200 feet away from the road. Before the

*(continued on page 8)*

**Georgia Goes West** (continued from page 7)

Golden Eagle flew, we in the vans were about 15 feet away from him. Getting that opportunity to be so close to a Golden Eagle was definitely a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence, and the sighting was definitely one of my favorite parts of the Camp Colorado experience. Once we got to the Pawnee Grasslands, we started seeing new birds left and right. We saw a Sage Thrasher, many McCown's Longspurs, and a myriad of other amazing birds, including the Lark Bunting, the state bird of Colorado.

Without the Georgia Ornithological Society, I would not have been able to go to Colorado, and I would like to thank everyone in GOS, especially everyone who donated money for the scholarships for the group of us from Georgia to go the camp. There were campers from all over the United States, as well as a camper from South Korea, and it was great to get to know birders who are used to seeing different birds than we see in the Southeast. Georgia was very well represented at camp, and getting to know other young birders from Georgia was a lot of fun. Friendships were made that will definitely last, and in the future I hope to get to bird again with the great group of young birders from Georgia.



Sam Brunson snapping photos of lifers at Camp Colorado. Photo courtesy Sam Brunson.

**Go Paperless!**

Want to save trees and reduce printing costs by receiving the *GOShawk* electronically? Contact Cathy Ricketts, the GOS membership chairperson, at [gosmembership@gmail.com](mailto:gosmembership@gmail.com), and let her know that you would like to receive the *GOShawk* by e-mail. Cathy will make sure that you go electronic starting with the December 2013 issue.

## Hog Island Camp 2013: A Bounty of My Lifers

By Rosemary Kramer

I walked outside in the warm night, listening to the spring crickets and staring toward the stars. I was hoping for a call I had been waiting for weeks to get. Earlier, I had entered for a scholarship to go to the legendary Hog Island young birder's camp. I soon jumped as my phone rang, and tears came to my eyes and an unbreakable smile split my face as I was told that I would be going to Maine, all expenses paid.

What seems like only days later, I was at the airport waiting with my Youth Birding Competition team mate, Ethan Hatchett, to board our already one hour late flight. After changing planes and waiting about another two hours, we were above the clouds looking down on the magnificent landscape of the East Coast. The people I sat beside enjoyed nature and had even heard of Hog Island. I listened to stories about Maine and many other things just before I looked down at the rocky coast of the state I was so anxious to step into. We were there!

Our driver was waiting with two other campers. Along the way to the island, I saw my lifer Common Eider just beside the road. We soon arrived at the dock where the sun broke through the clouds and revealed one of the most beautiful Islands I have ever seen. Colorful buoys dotted the surface of the water, and we hadn't even gotten to the island before I saw my lifer Black Guillemot. We were some of the first birders to arrive (other than the leaders of the camp, of course); we met our hosts and fellow campers moments later. The bird that I had wanted to hear in the wild more than any other is the Common Loon, and before long I was covered head-to-toe with chill bumps as I listened to the wails and cries of a bird just offshore. We then found a Northern Parula nest with extremely fearless birds in it, and we could go within feet of the nest without disturbing them.

The buildings were truly antique and gorgeous as was the natural architecture of the island. The rocks were lined up in strips facing the waves, and we were granted extremely low tides caused by the "super moon," and in the early morning we went walking in the intertidal zone. We caught starfish, eels, fish, lobster, crabs, and hundreds of small, flat, long, and just plain weird creatures. After this was a fantastic breakfast with the rest of the campers. We were able to spot warblers at eye level and feet away from our faces, not to mention the famous Osprey nest viewed by thousands every day. If you watched it intently, you may have seen us swimming behind it in the chilly water.

Our home was the Crow's Nest, and we were the Corvids, which was appropriate for us, considering our tight friendships and mimicry of the birds we saw. We were lulled to sleep each night with songs played on the guitar and sung by our guides, Heather and Josh. We took daily hikes together and played fun trust games each night and got to know each other better and eventually became a tight-knit birding family. We went together everywhere and shared some incredible and sometimes hilarious experiences. Everybody knew everybody, and each meal we sat at a different table with different people to share our experiences and sightings of that day. Each night we had a fantastic speech from someone and also counted up the birds seen that day.



Rosemary Kramer holding a lobster at Hog Island in Maine. Photo courtesy Rosemary Kramer.

*(continued on page 10)*

**A Bounty of My Lifers** (*continued from page 9*)

Banding with Mr. Scott Weidensaul was wonderful even with only two birds. They were both beauties, though: male Red-breasted Nuthatch and Black-throated Green-warbler. While being held, the warbler decided to catch a fly and hold it until it was free. He promptly ate it on a branch just a bit away from us as he inspected his shiny new band. While in this pretty meadow we saw a Racket-tailed Emerald (dragonfly) and heard a flock of White-winged Crossbills hiding in the tops of the evergreens. Not long afterwards, we found a Hermit Thrush on her nest. During our first look she had two eggs and the next she had three. On some of our hiking trips, we found blueberries, Lady's slipper orchids, and many different lichens and mosses. One of my favorite songs of the forest was that of the Winter Wren, which had a jumbled but wonderfully clear song of whistles and chirps, and of course the Brown Creeper's sing-song jingle.

Julie Zickefoose was one of many people giving workshops. I chose her Drawing from Life workshop and was given the subject of captive birds, which included a beautiful Golden Eagle, a small Northern Saw-whet Owl, and a stern Great-horned Owl. They provided fantastic photo ops on the sunny day. Dark-eyed Juncos and their young hopped around, seemingly taunting the flightless raptors, and Purple Finches visited the feeders with a red squirrel I could pet!

On our day trip to the famous Eastern Egg Rock with Dr. Steve Kress, we were unable to land, but in spite of this we would be going out to see Atlantic Puffins and hopefully Arctic or Roseate Terns. If we were super lucky we might even see a Razorbill. We were super lucky because we saw Roseate Terns flying just past the boat and a far off but identifiable Razorbill, not to mention hundreds of Puffins—that's right, hundreds! Guillemots weren't even countable they were so plentiful, as were the many Common Terns and Laughing Gulls. We would be spending the rest of the day at Harbor Island. Harbor Porpoises jumped next to the boat, and we saw many eiders and both Leach's and Wilson's Storm Petrels on the way to the island. Harbor Island was very different from the other beaches and islands we visited. We took the dory to the flat rock beach to eat lunch on the lichen-covered cliffs. The water was so crystal clear it was hard to even see it where there weren't currents. The rocks were all flat and round and felt heavenly underneath my bare feet. Our group split in two, and I chose the group that went on a serious hike, learning about the rocks and the geography of the island with Mr. Eric.

Tired and cold, we headed back home, joyfully leaning into the wind and rain that we drove right into on the boat. The water became rougher with the approaching storm that made the ride even more fun for those of us who weren't seasick. We were back home on the island just a little while later, and we played a few games after huddling together for warmth and drinking some hot tea.

It was our last full day and a very cold one at that. The entire group made a trip to the DRA marsh where we heard Virginia Rails and Sora, and saw many Bobolinks. A very nice surprise was an American Bittern out in the open. We hiked together along the island and visited the cabins where Mabel Loomis Todd edited Emily Dickinson's poems many years ago. They were beautiful buildings, and we wrote letters to our future selves that would arrive one year later. I still can't wait to read it, as with my memory, what I wrote will be a complete surprise!

Our last day was quiet and solemn as we ate our breakfast and birded the island with our friends for the last time. In no time, I was looking back at waving people with big smiles on their faces. I was in the same shape that I was in when I received the call saying I had won the scholarship, but happiness battled it out with a strange sadness, and tears finally jumped down my face, with a smile across it. As Dr. Seuss said, "Smile because it happened, don't cry because it's over!" I want to thank everyone for making the scholarship possible, and I hope that anybody who ever wants to can go to Hog Island him- or herself. It was incredible!

## A Story of One Earthworm

By Patti Newell Nickerson

I have to begin this article with the cliché of fall leaves. Deciduous trees of many species make their transformation from that bright Southern green foliage to reds and yellows and oranges every year. Okay, so it may not be quite as intense as perhaps the Canadian fall foliage. But the change still symbolizes the beginning of our fall here in the South and with it, the migration into our area of many birds escaping those cold northern winters to acquire many more resources than they could when they are buried under deep snow in the North. Here in the South, we have more species of deciduous trees than in the Canadian North, which can boast of only one native oak species and a few birches, maples, and aspens. We even have many species of oak in the South that can grow in suburban areas. Maybe you have native oak species in your yard? Southerners plant Post Oak and Southern Red Oak and Water Oak and Willow Oak and Pin Oak and Scarlet Oak... and the list goes on! And each tree, one after the other, loses its offering of shade to us and transfers its wonderful thermal properties to organisms of the soil each fall, not to mention providing a bounty of nuts for animals that consume tree mast in the fall and winter.

Having slept through the dry part of the summer, an earthworm now awakens to the newly provided shade of leaf-fall and wiggles its way to the upper layers of the soil. It is the wet season now, time to disperse, reproduce, and forage. And the newly fallen oak leaves, its favorite food, also provide shelter from predators and the heat of the sun. The leaves covering the ground are just as beautiful as they were before they fell from their twigs; now they are just arranged on a single plane on the ground.

This earthworm and its kind will slowly forage on these fallen oak leaves as they decompose throughout the winter, retreating during cold, dry spells and proliferating during warm, wet periods. The worms are happy as long as they have food and shelter and are not eaten by their main predator, birds.

Yes, winter is a dangerous time for an earthworm. Many ground-foraging birds are flipping through the leaf litter, in hopes of finding their desired food, invertebrates of any kind. American Robins, Rusty Blackbirds, Common Grackles, Brown Thrashers, Northern Cardinals, thrushes, blue jays, sparrows, towhees, flickers—all of them would like to have a nice juicy earthworm meal. The more leaf litter, the more chances for a meal for all the birds trying to make it through the most limiting time of the year, winter.

But over the past 50 years or so, it has become common practice for homeowners to rake up or blow away fall leaves, as being unsightly, though they offer a smorgasbord of invertebrates and other food for birds. One of the best things we can do for wintering songbirds in suburban areas, which are still important wintering habitat for many bird species, is to provide habitat and a source of



Red Oak leaf. Photo courtesy Patti Newell Nickerson.

food for the things birds eat, like invertebrates of the ground. So if you would like to justify not raking up or blowing your leaves this fall, this is your chance to be lazy! You are conserving birds! And if you are thinking of planting a tree, think about making it an oak that provides a favorite food of invertebrates as well as acorns for other mast-eating species. Happy bird feeding!

## Camp Colorado 2013: Birds Are in the Cards

By Ben Williams

I first got the idea of going to Camp Colorado from a friend of mine who attended in the past and told me all about it. I applied for a scholarship this year and was thrilled when I heard that I had won it. I immediately began thinking about the camp and the birds I would see there.

After weeks of anticipation, it was finally time to head to Colorado. I flew from Atlanta with three other birders from Georgia and arrived in Denver, where we met Jennie Duberstein, one of the camp leaders, and a few of the other campers. I began birding as soon as the plane landed. The camp was located at the YMCA of the Rockies in Estes Park. As we drove there from the airport, I saw spectacular scenery, as well as some new birds, such as Western Kingbird, Western Meadowlark, Violet-green Swallow, Common Raven, and Swainson's Hawk. The birds were not the only things that caught my attention. Before going to Colorado, I had never seen such wide open grasslands, nor such immense mountains.

That evening, I met the rest of the campers and leaders. The campers were from all over the country, and one even came all the way from Korea! Georgia was the most represented state, being the residence of six out of twenty campers. It was great to be around so many young birders, and everyone got along wonderfully. After a few days of camp, it was as if everyone had known each other all their lives.

On the first full day of camp we had breakfast at the dining hall at the YMCA. Then we headed to two local birding spots called Endo Valley and Upper Beaver Meadows. Some of the birds we saw at Endo Valley included Western Wood-Pewee, Clark's Nutcracker, MacGillivray's Warbler, Lincoln's Sparrow, Northern Goshawk, American Dipper, and Black Swift. All of these were life birds for me. The American Dipper was a target bird for me and likely was for many of the other campers as well. The volume of our voices increased considerably when it was spotted. The Black Swift was an unexpected treat, and a few more were seen during the camp. At Upper Beaver Meadows, the birds included Red-naped Sapsucker, Dusky Flycatcher, Mountain Bluebird, and Western Tanager. The tanager brought about many oohs and aahs as it sat cooperatively in front of us, showing us its beautiful coloring of red, yellow, and black. After a great morning of birding, we headed back to camp and had lunch at the dining hall. After a short break, we had a very interesting workshop on how to use a field guide, led by Steve Howell, a well-known birder and author. Next we had dinner, and then, a workshop on how to lead a birdwalk.

That is how a typical day at camp went, except that often we had to get up much earlier because most of the places we birded were farther away. We usually had lunch in the field for the same reason. Each day included some sort of workshop. Workshops, other than the ones already named, were about using optics and digi-scoping, radar ornithology, bird conservation, and bird banding. Each workshop increased my knowledge of birds or birding in some way. At the banding station, it was incredible to see the birds so close, and each camp participant got to release a bird after it had been banded. Despite hours of watching birds each day, we usually spent our free time birding around the camp vicinity. Sometimes we played cards instead, but, of course, the cards had birds on them. Each day was put together so as to give us the best experience of birding and learning that we could wish for, and each day was better than the day before, as we got to know each other more.

*(continued on page 13)*

## Birds are in the Cards *(continued from page 12)*

One of my favorite aspects of the camp was getting to visit such amazing places. The diversity of Colorado was amazing. Each location was exceptionally beautiful and unique and offered its own selection of bird species. The places we birded, not previously mentioned, were Pawnee National Grasslands, Rocky Mountain National Park, and Phantom Canyon. On the last day, we split into two groups. My group visited Cow Creek in Rocky Mountain National Park. At each location, we did much more than just watching birds and identifying them. We were constantly learning more about birding and the birds we were seeing. For example, at Pawnee National Grasslands, I learned that while most songbirds sing on a perch, those that inhabit grasslands sing in flight because they have no perches. At Rocky Mountain National Park, I learned about the ptarmigan's efficient camouflage, and how to spot it among the rocks. At Phantom Canyon I learned that Western Scrub-Jays are duller in the eastern part of their range and brighter in the western part. I also learned to observe as many details of each bird as I could, even if I thought I was familiar with the bird. Doing this, I found that there is so much about each bird that goes unnoticed. This is only a small selection of all the things I learned at camp.

There was also the excitement of just seeing birds, especially new ones. The birds we saw at Pawnee National Grasslands and the surrounding areas included Lark Bunting, Western Meadowlark, McCown's Longspur, Sage Thrasher, Burrowing Owl, Golden Eagle, and Mountain Plover. This was an exciting time for me. The Mountain Plovers were a target bird for me, and Burrowing Owls are my favorite bird. Seeing the Golden Eagle was probably the best part of the day, and possibly the best part of the whole camp for some. It was sitting on a fence post right next to the road on our way to Pawnee. The van stopped just beside it, and everyone pressed to the window to see the huge bird. It stayed there long enough for everyone to see it and for some to get photos. It was a sight that most of us will probably never see again. The fun didn't end at Pawnee, though. The next day at Rocky Mountain National Park was just as good. Some of the birds we saw there included White-crowned Sparrow, Townsend's Solitaire, American Pipit, and White-tailed Ptarmigan. The ptarmigans were definitely the highlight of that day. After observing a couple of them for a little while, someone spotted a mother ptarmigan with her young. On this trip there was much more to look at than just the birds. Rocky Mountain National Park was arguably the most beautiful place I've ever seen. There were also the mammals to observe. There were Elk, Yellow-bellied Marmots, Bighorn Sheep, and Pikas. Phantom Canyon was also a beautiful location, and the birding there was as good as anywhere. Some birds we saw there were Cordilleran Flycatcher, Western Scrub-Jay, Steller's Jay, Spotted Towhee, Rock Wren, and Lazuli Bunting. At Cow Creek, we saw Red Crossbill, Warbling Vireo, MacGillivray's Warbler, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Williamson's Sapsucker. I loved each place we went and thoroughly enjoyed every bit of it.



Ben Williams releasing a bird at a banding workshop at Camp Colorado. Photo courtesy Ben Williams.

After having one of the best weeks of my life, it was hard to see it end. I saw amazing birds, learned much, made great friends, and left with many good (and some humorous) memories. My birding skills improved much at Camp Colorado, and I feel that I can identify any bird more easily now, even those that don't come to Colorado. I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to attend Camp Colorado, and I am sure that I will never forget it.

**Slate of Officer Nominees for 2013-2015**

*By Bob Sargent*

It is almost election time again. I don't know about you, but it seems to me that we just elected Jim and the others to serve the society, didn't we? The membership will vote on the slate of proposed GOS officers for the next term on banquet night at the October meeting on Jekyll Island. The nominees are the following:

Steve Holzman	President
Larry Carlile	1st Vice President
Ed Maioriello	2nd Vice President
Ellen Miller	Secretary
Jeannie Wright	Treasurer

The next term will run from October 2013 to October 2015. Other members of the GOS Executive Committee (i.e., the various committee chairs) are appointed by the society's president. Thank you to my fellow members of the nominating committee (Giff Beaton and Bill Lotz) for your dedication on behalf of GOS, ensuring that the future of the society is in the hands of an especially talented, energetic, and experienced group of leaders.



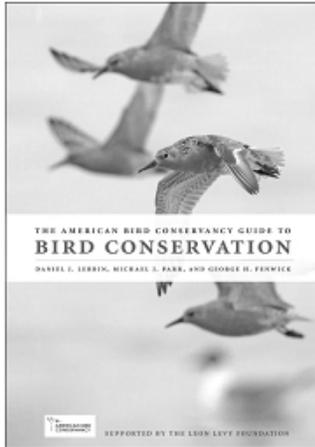
Common Tern at Eastern Egg Rock. Photo courtesy Rosemary Kramer.

**The Georgia Ornithological Society's**

**FALL 2013 MEETING**

**October 11-14, 2013**

**Villas By The Sea  
Jekyll Island, Georgia**



**KEYNOTE PRESENTATION**

**"Bird Conservation in the 21st Century"**

**GEORGE H. FENWICK**  
President and CEO  
The American Bird Conservancy



Atlantic Puffins at Eastern Egg Rock during Hog Island Camp in Maine. Photo courtesy Rosemary Kramer.

## Camp Colorado 2013: Lazuli Bunting and More

By Rebecca Mello

I will never forget the awesome time I had at Camp Colorado 2013. The whole experience is indelibly stamped on my memory because, to tell the truth, it was one of the most adventurous, crazy, fun, and inspiring weeks of my life. To begin with, I almost missed my flight to Denver. I got on the plane in the nick of time and wondered if the whole trip would be this tumultuous. And it was, though in a much more positive way. After meeting camp directors Bill Stewart and Jennie Duberstein and my fellow birders, I knew the trip would be fantastic. I just didn't know how fantastic.

First of all, Colorado's natural beauty is astounding. I had never seen anything to compare with the Rockies, and was absolutely stunned by the sheer greatness of the mountains. On a single mountain there could be many different ecosystems, from aspen woods to coniferous forest to open tundra. Outside the Rockies we saw grasslands and even some desert-like areas full of cacti. The diversity was incredible.

Then, of course, there are the birds. Practically all of them were lifers for me, as I had never birded in the West before. I don't believe there is such a thing as a boring bird, but the birds on this trip really outdid themselves. I have a few favorite birding experiences, such as the time we saw the Golden Eagle perched on the post beside the road, the day we saw a field full of Lark Buntings, and the day we came across a McGillivray's Warbler and a female American Three-toed Woodpecker in the same area—not to mention the Common Nighthawk, the Western Tanager, and the White-tailed Ptarmigan, some other highlights of the trip.

My very favorite Camp Colorado experience, however, was the day we went to Phantom Canyon. The place was astoundingly beautiful, and the day was perfect. From the top I could see a steep descent into a sunny meadow with a river running through it and a wall of cliffs on the other side. When we reached the bottom of the canyon, one birder in our group spotted a male Lazuli Bunting sitting on a branch on the other side of the river. Immediately there was a scuffle as everyone pulled out scopes and massive cameras to capture the bird before he flew away. But he didn't. He posed for the pictures, changing his pose every once in a while to show off his bright blue and orange plumage. I stared at him through the scope for what seemed like half an hour, and the bird stared back at me. Of all the birds I saw in Colorado, this is the one I remember the best.

Of course, if I ended here I would be leaving out the most important aspect of the whole trip, the people who made it so memorable. Bill Stewart and Jennie Duberstein did an awesome job planning and making it happen. Jeff Bouton, Steve Howell, Jeff and Liz Gordon, and David La Puma all helped to make that week the best it could be. I learned something from all of them, as they shared their personal experiences, birding adventures, and field skills. My fellow birders also taught me a lot, helping me identify birds and also contributing to the general atmosphere of camp with their creativity, originality, and sense of humor. I had good times with all of them, and made many good friends among the staff and birders. I would also like to thank GOS for the generous scholarship that made this awesome trip possible for me.

Camp Colorado has inspired me to learn more and practice my skills, to use what I know to reach new heights. If you're like me, don't be afraid to admit that you don't know a lot or can't figure out what bird that is. There is always someone who is willing to help you become a better birder, and you, in turn, can help others become better birders.



Rebecca Mello with some Western geology. Photo courtesy Rebecca Mello.

## 2014 Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz

By Judith Scarl

Citizen scientists such as Georgia eBirders helped contribute to a better understanding of Rusty Blackbirds on their wintering ground through the Rusty Blackbird Winter Blitz from 2009 to 2011. (Learn more about Winter Blitz results at [http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/research/rusty\\_blackbird/blitz\\_results.cfm](http://nationalzoo.si.edu/scbi/migratorybirds/research/rusty_blackbird/blitz_results.cfm))

Little is known about the **migratory** requirements and habits of this species, and citizen scientists can help again to answer important questions such as: Are there hot spots where many individuals congregate during migration? Are similar migratory stopover areas used by Rusties each year? Are important migratory stopovers protected, or might these areas be a limiting factor in Rusty Blackbird survival?

To address these questions, the Rusty Blackbird Working Group is bringing back the Rusty Blackbird Blitz for migration in **March-April of 2014**.

Please help provide information on Rusty Blackbird migration by searching for Rusties in any potentially suitable habitat and reporting those sightings to eBird. You can scout anywhere throughout the Rusty Blackbird's range: across the eastern United States, throughout the Midwest, and into Canada ([http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rusty\\_Blackbird/id](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Rusty_Blackbird/id)). This species can be found in some surprising places, so don't exclude places you wouldn't consider a birding hot spot. Rusties can be found in many habitats, from beautiful bottomland hardwood swamps, to waterfowl management areas, to pecan groves, to suburban areas and even horse pastures, so feel free to get creative in your search for this bird. It's easy. Bird as you normally do, but make a special effort to record Rusty Blackbirds and report your sightings to eBird. We look forward to hearing where you spot this elusive bird.

Stay tuned for more information in the December issue of the GOShawk.



Male and female Rusty Blackbirds foraging in the parking lot behind McDonalds in Athens GA in mid-March. Photo courtesy Jennifer Bruce.

# GOShawk

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