

June and September 2014
Vol. 41, No. 2 and 3

GOShawk

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society
www.gos.org

President's Message

By Steve Holzman

I think fall might be my favorite time of year. I don't do very well in the hot, humid summer, so when the first cool night hits, my spirits soar. I know that I'll soon be able to spend more time enjoying the outdoors without a profusion of sweat making my glasses fall down my nose. Sure, the warblers are a little drabber than in the spring, but that's fine with me. I like a challenge. As I write, the fall meeting is fast approaching, and I am looking forward to seeing old friends and hitting those familiar coastal haunts. Okay, and maybe eating a few local shrimp or a flounder or two. If you haven't come to a meeting before, you really need to. We are a welcoming bunch of folks, and birding with others can be great fun. You always learn something new, and more eyes sometimes means more birds.

I know this is the Georgia ORNITHOLOGICAL Society, but I'd like to spend a few moments to talk about monarch butterflies. September 1, 2014, marked the 100th anniversary of the death of Martha, the last Passenger Pigeon. This species might have been the most abundant bird species in the world, and it was

reduced to zero in a relatively short period of time. Recently, I watched a documentary about the birds (*From Billions to None*) and couldn't help think about what we might be doing to another very abundant animal. If you know one butterfly, you know the monarch. Kids as young as four can identify them. This summer it was reported that their population has declined 90 percent in the last 20 years. Ninety percent!!!

Tierra Curry, a senior scientist at the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a press release: "The 90 percent drop in the monarch's population is a loss so staggering that in human-population terms it would be like losing every living person in the United States except those in Florida and Ohio." The butterfly has lost vast amounts of milkweed habitat in the Midwest due to changes in agricultural practices. Midwestern gardeners are being asked to rip up some lawn and plant a milkweed patch to help restore the species. We can help monarchs in Georgia by visiting the Environmental Education Alliance of Georgia (EEA) at <http://www.eealliance.org/> mag to learn about their Monarchs Across Georgia work. Partner with a local school to

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Ornithological
Society**

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of the month prior to publication.
Text by e-mail is appreciated.*

Welcome, New Members!

Bachman's Sparrow

Chandra Bruce	Athens, GA
Barbara Gray	Decatur, GA

Quail Covey

Gary and Catherine Pichon	Marble Hill, GA
Warren Howe	Cumming, GA
Mike and Joyce Owsley	Americus, GA

Red-cockaded Woodpecker

Harriet H. Langford	Darien, GA
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Ellen Miller represented GOS at Master Gardener Plant Sale and Fair in Conyers, GA on September 27, 2014. Photo courtesy Ashley Harrington.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

GOS FALL MEETING
October 10-14, 2014
Jekyll Island

GOS WINTER MEETING
January 16-19, 2015
Savannah, Georgia

President's Message (continued from page1)

convert some of their unused space into a butterfly garden. The EEA even has grants available. Maybe we are not the most crucial region for milkweed restoration, but there are other butterflies that could use our help. Pick a species, go online, and find out which nectar plants it uses. Find out what host plant is essential for its caterpillars, and then rip up some lawn. That lawn is a pain anyway, always needing water, fertilizer, and herbicides. Do we really need that much lawn on our properties? Sure, keep a little for the kids to play on, or for that hammock, but, seriously, get rid of some of it. There is nothing more satisfying than seeing a bird or a butterfly using the plants that you planted in your own soil. Let's not be the generation that lets monarchs disappear.

Have a great fall, and we hope to see you in Savannah in January.

In Memoriam: Robert R. Sargent

By John Swiderski

Robert R. Sargent, 77, died at his home in Trussville, Alabama, on September 7, 2014. Known to most as Bob Sargent, or perhaps more appropriately (on his banding apron) as Chief Hummer, he was genuinely a friend to all and especially to hummingbirds. He was in good form at the 2014 spring session (see photo below) at the Fort Morgan Banding Station in Alabama, but later suffered from cardiac and gall bladder problems. Toward the end of his life, an infection blinded him.

It was entirely appropriate that he was at home when he died, since his wonderful back yard was a hummingbird heaven. There, he and Martha Gail watched, enjoyed, and banded hundreds of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds every summer. They also used the back yard for a training and mentoring ground for more than 100 banders aspiring to earn a hummingbird banding permit.



Bob and Martha Sargent receiving the 2007 Earle R. Greene Award at the Tybee Island winter GOS meeting. Shown with John Swiderski, award chairman. Photo by Kate Swiderski.

Bob and Martha discovered each other, and a romance blossomed into marriage in 1983. It is unlikely they knew what was about to take over their lives for the next 30 years. Bob indicated that during their courting time neither had more than a casual interest in birds, but Martha did have bird feeders in her yard and Bob enjoyed watching the birds. Not long after joining Alabama Ornithological Society they experienced a Dauphin Island spring migrant fallout and were hooked

on birds and never looked back. Along the way they have banded thousands and thousands of hummingbirds, reactivated the Fort Morgan Banding Station for spring and

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In Memoriam: Robert R. Sargent (continued from page 3)

fall migration, trained new hummer banders, and made a lot of people very happy to just be close to and learn about hummingbirds.

There is so much more to their story than this brief summation. Please access the Alabama Ornithological Society website (<http://www.aosbirds.org/>) and click on the "AOS History" button, where you will find a 50th anniversary publication that includes Bob and Martha's chapter on "Hummingbirds."

They have been life members of GOS since 1992 and received the Earle R. Greene Memorial Award in 2007 for ornithological achievement. A memorial service to celebrate the life of this remarkable man will take place from 2 to 5 pm, October 25, 2014, at the Trussville Civic Center, 5381 Trussville-Clay Rd., Trussville, Alabama.



Bob Sargent describing the recaptured eight-year-old Great-crested Flycatcher banded at the Fort Morgan Banding Station as a first-year bird on April 9, 2014. Photo by Kate Swiderski.

Save the Date!!

Please plan on joining us for our **winter 2015 meeting**, January 16-19, in Savannah, Georgia. We will be staying at the DeSoto Hilton in the historic district of Savannah with convenient access to many great birding locations nearby. Attendees can make reservations at the group rate of \$109 per night (plus parking) by calling 877-280-0751 or by visiting www.desotohilton.com. Use the group code "GOS" to get our rate either way. The cut-off date for our rate is December 30, 2014.

Bachman's Sparrows Highlight Grassland Restoration Success

By Rick Lavendar

(Article reprinted with permission from Enews Georgia Wild, <http://www.georgiawildlife.com/news/e-newsletters>)

What do you call the discovery of Bachman's Sparrows at Joe Kurz Wildlife Management Area? Department of Natural Resources senior wildlife biologist Nathan Klaus calls it "the ultimate measure of success" for native grassland restoration at the Meriwether County Wildlife Management Area. Here's why: Not only were two of the iconic grassland sparrows, state-listed as rare and uncommon in the Piedmont, banded and released July 25, 2014, at Joe Kurz, but both were juveniles. And two other males were heard singing. All suggests Bachman's Sparrows are nesting at the WMA near Gay, Georgia. The closest known population is at Fort Benning, Georgia, some 60 miles away.

"Over the years we've had some good results, but this takes the cake," wrote Klaus, who works for the agency's Nongame Conservation Section. Klaus and game management section biologists who manage Joe Kurz (Theron Menken) began transforming old agricultural fields and Bermuda grass pastures into native warm-season grasslands 13 years ago. Southeastern grasslands, often referred to as savannas, consist of open areas and forests with low, diverse groundcover. Such grasslands once covered swaths of the eastern United States. Development and agriculture hammered them, along with many songbird species and other wildlife tied to the fire-adapted habitat. (Pastures and hayfields do provide some lesser-quality grassland habitat for birds.)



Bachman's Sparrow at Joe Kurz. Photo by Charlie Muise.

Work to restore grasslands at Joe Kurz and Panola Mountain State Park has been supported by the Georgia Ornithological Society and Georgia's Important Bird Areas Program. The award of several Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grants is an investment from members that is paying off. DNR is extremely grateful for the GOS grant program.

Regional game management supervisor Kevin Kramer said the goal at Joe Kurz is "improving the habitat for all wildlife," from songbirds to game species such as Northern Bobwhites and Wild Turkeys. Tracts planted in species

such as big bluestem and maintained by prescribed fire have drawn scores of birds. A Northern Bobwhite was banded there this year and a "hatch-year" Loggerhead Shrike in 2013. Other wildlife, including deer, are also attracted to the new habitat. Then came the Bachman's, a grassland-loving, ground-hugging sparrow rated in decline, largely because of the loss and degradation of longleaf pine savannas.

Charlie Muise, Georgia Important Bird Areas Program coordinator, heads the Joe Kurz banding station and had hoped for a Bachman's, considering the thriving grassland and a thinned pine

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Bachman's Sparrows Highlight Grassland Restoration Success (continued from page 5)

tract nearby. But when the first juvenile turned up in a mist net, he took extensive measurements before convincing himself it was a Bachman's. Then another juvenile was caught, and two adult males were heard singing.

Klaus says the sparrows and other evidence, such as native grass species that weren't planted showing up in restoration areas, affirm that the restoration is on target. The hope now is that Joe Kurz becomes a source for Bachman's Sparrow populations across the region.

Watch volunteer Anne Armstrong's video of the banding (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qs3n-X3TLVg>)

Hear a Bachman's singing at Joe Kurz (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELPTvZH2yRw&feature=youtu.be>)

If you would like to help, you can volunteer at Joe Kurz and Panola Mountain to harvest native grass seeds for restoration, maintain banding stations, and conduct bird surveys. Email Charlie Muisse for details. You can also buy or renew an eagle or hummingbird license plate. They are only \$25 more than a peach plate, and they provide vital support for the Nongame Conservation Section, which receives no state funds for conservation.

To visit Joe Kurz, the check station is at the 3,700-acre WMA and is less than three miles east of Gay in northern Meriwether County. Visitors who are hunting or fishing need appropriate licenses. A Georgia Outdoor Recreational Pass, needed for other uses at some state lands, is not required at Joe Kurz.

What's in a name? There's no debate that Bachman's Sparrow is named in honor of the Rev. John Bachman, a South Carolina minister, naturalist and collaborator with John James Audubon. The disagreement is how to pronounce his name: Back-man or Bock-man? Authorities come down on both sides.



Anne Armstrong holding a Bachman's Sparrow. Photo by Charlie Muisse.

Hog Island Adventure

By John Mark Simmons

I have known about the Hog Island Audubon Camp for a few years now. Ever since I heard about it, I began impatiently waiting for a chance to go. Seeing puffins, guillemots, eiders, and three tern species 10 feet away seemed like crazy fun! Stories from friends who have been there made it sound even more incredible. Amazingly, during the month of June 2014, thanks to a remarkably generous organization called the Georgia Ornithological Society, I was able to go. On June 22, a fellow young birder from Georgia and I were driven from the Portland airport by Audubon staff to the boat docks. From there we took a short ride across the cove to the legendary Hog Island. I already knew it was a beautiful island, but seeing it in person was quite stunning. Surprisingly, I got my first lifer of the trip on the way to Hog Island! There were a couple of Black Guillemots foraging in the bay among the many boats. One of these boats was the *Snowgoose III*, which is the one that would be taking us on many “birdy” adventures that week.

We landed on the island and immediately started making new acquaintances and learning about the island. Another group that would be participating in some birding activities was an adult class called Arts and Birding. They would be joining us on bird walks, seminars, and many other exciting things. Sixteen overly talented teens made up the CMBS (Coastal Maine Bird Studies) group. We learned quickly that every teen and adult on the island had his or her different skill levels, skill sets, and talents. Being the oldest teen there, I had many opportunities to share with younger teens what I knew about bird identifications and behavior. However, everyone on the island knew something that no one else did, which made the experience more fun and helpful.



Arctic Tern at Eastern Egg Rock. Photo by Patrick Maurice.

The day we arrived was spent going over the plan for the next day, getting settled, and meeting everyone. The next morning, many of us awoke at 4 am to attend the sunrise photography session led by Bill Wallauer (a long-time chimpanzee researcher in Africa). We took a few shots of the lobster boats in front of the orange sun along with huddles of Common Eider families swimming about. After a great breakfast we began preparations to board the *Snowgoose III* to head out to the famous Eastern Egg Rock.

Eastern Egg Rock is a small, seven-acre island that hosts a small variety of nesting seabirds. Atlantic Puffins are certainly the highlight for many people, but three tern species, Laughing Gulls, Common Eiders, Black Guillemots, Song Sparrows, and Savannah Sparrows all nest on the island as well. The weather was superb, so it meant we could land on the island in our old-fashioned dories without much worry. The boat ride to the rock produced some interesting species, such as a large flock of White-winged and Black Scoters along with a couple of Common Loons, Razorbills, Guillemots, and Puffins as we neared the rock.

All the teens were allowed to land on the island and spend an hour and a half in one of the photo blinds. To the other group's dismay, they were not allowed to land, as the staff make it a special
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Hog Island Adventure (continued from page 7)

opportunity for young birders only. The CMBS group spent all morning on the island, where we got to meet the summer interns that stayed there. Their job is to monitor the seabirds, keep away predators, and work on research mostly surrounding the Atlantic Puffins. After learning what the interns do, I immediately was interested in doing the same. Next summer I hope to volunteer for four or more weeks on one of the seabird islands like Egg Rock.

On the way back to Hog, we spotted a Red-throated Loon flying out of the bay (rare in summer in Maine) as well as my overdue life bird Surf Scoter. Usually the Egg Rock trip is saved until the end of the week. Since the weather was perfect, we decided to do it that day, which turned out to be a wise choice as it got stormy later in the week.

The next day most of the islanders got up early again and prepared to head to the mainland for some warblers and other inland species. Tom Johnson led us on walks through deciduous forest, marsh, and grassland habitats, where I scored two sweet life birds. At the Great Salt Bay Farm Wildlife Preserve my lifer Black-billed Cuckoo flew across a field and offered some quick but decent views. Bobolinks were performing their flight displays everywhere, a baby Hooded Merganser explored the marshes, and American Black Ducks stood by lazily. Later that day we visited Weskeag Marsh, where we had an amazing quantity of six Nelson's Sparrows. They flew back and forth from the tall grass to the muddy creek bank faster than you could focus on them. Another great life bird!

Our previously energetic but not so much anymore group returned to the island and had another great meal prepared by the island staff. That night Steve Kress, the founder of Project Puffin, gave a PowerPoint presentation about his efforts to restore the population of puffins to Maine. It was quite a fascinating story and one I hope to be a part of if I work on one of the seabird islands next summer.

The Corvids (teens' nickname) happily slept a little bit longer the next morning than four o'clock, but there was still no time to waste when you are in such a cool place! That day, June 25, we spent solely on Hog Island. We did some hiking across the island and heard a couple of Red Crossbills voicing their flight calls. Then we searched once again, to no avail, for the Merlin nest that was "somewhere" on the island. No one had found it yet, and the Corvids were determined to be the discoverers of it.

After dinner Scott Weidensaul gave a presentation focusing on some of the migrants that we receive here in North America during migration season. He brought up big issues like sun-grown and shade-grown coffee farms, habitat destruction, and breeding ground preservation. The habitat that migrants are found in during migration are important but not nearly as important as the habitat they need for breeding and wintering. Central and South America are vital for migrants because they provide birds' wintering grounds, which are slowly being destroyed. The Boreal forests in Canada are important breeding grounds as well as the breeding grounds in the Eastern U.S. Buy shade-grown coffee!

The last day (it went by really fast!) we did not go on any birding trips, as many of us had to catch planes. My new friend Patrick and I had our flight later in the day, so we had the awesome opportunity to hang out on the island for the day with the staff. We staked out the Merlin nest (yes, the Corvids did eventually find it!) and got some photos of the female tearing apart what appeared to be a fledgling Tree Swallow. After hanging out on the island for the day, we were finally ready to leave. It's a sad feeling when you are on the boat leaving the island. But not as sad for people who will be coming back someday.

I want to thank GOS once again for their generosity in sending Patrick and I to an iconic place. Both of us learned a great deal about birds that we will put into practice in future experiences, however soon they may be.

Pecked on the Head by a Lifer

By Patrick Maurice

On June 22nd I arrived in Portland, Maine, just trying to soak everything in. The week was going to be one of firsts, and I was excited to finally be in the Pine Tree State. There were going to be some lifers (Atlantic Puffin, I'm coming for you) and some new adventures, like going out and checking the lobster pots and getting up-close views of some Maine lobsters. When I got into the Hog Island van with three other campers, we drove up the coast of Maine to Bremen and soon thereafter got onto Audubon Road (you know this is a birding camp when the road leading up to it was named after John James Audubon, the famous French ornithologist and painter). When we were first getting onto the island, I got two lifers from the boat dock, Black Guillemot and Common Eider! After getting onto Hog Island, the new recruits got a quick debriefing of the island from our camp director, Scott Weidensaul. He quickly explained to us the bell schedule and where the buildings were, and then gave us an interesting piece of information, that the newest building on the island was built in 1939!

The next day, many others of the adventurous type and I were up before the sunrise at 4 am to go to a photography workshop about the "magic light," the time when sun isn't too bright, or too dark, but is just right for photography (kind of the Goldilocks situation). With two of the instructors, we watched and photographed the sunrise. It was a great way to start the day. I'm glad that I chose to go out at that time in the morning.



Atlantic Puffins at Eastern Egg Rock. Photo by Patrick Maurice.

After a wonderful breakfast, the teens and half of the adult group were taken to Eastern Egg Rock Island. The boat ride was sort of like a pelagic trip with Tom Johnson on the loudspeaker pointing out the birds and other natural life, such as a Harbor Porpoise that swam near the boat. When we neared Eastern Egg Rock, I got four lifers from the shore: Razorbills, Roseate Terns, Arctic Terns, and, of course, the Atlantic Puffins.

The Corvids (the teen group) left the boat and got into a couple of dinghies and were rowed out to land at the island. The Corvids were met by the volunteers who live on the island, and we were carefully brought to the base camp to avoid Common Tern nests on the ground and the ones that buzzed our heads from above. How many people do you know can say that their lifer Arctic Tern pecked them on their head? After getting to the volunteers camp, the group was split in two, so half of the group went to the blinds on the island and half of the group stayed at the camp, and then we switched.

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Pecked on the Head by a Lifer (continued from page 9)

I got a blind to myself just to enjoy sitting and listening to the sounds of the Laughing Gulls calling on the roof and watching the large rafts of Common Eider chicks. The blinds were a great idea because the birds didn't seem to care too much about you. At times I had Atlantic Puffins, Black Guillemots, Laughing Gulls (on my roof), and Common Terns just a few feet away from me.

This experience is going to stick with me for the rest of my life, and I am so thankful to be picked to receive the GOS scholarship. If you are a teen who is interested in birds, I encourage you to apply for the GOS scholarship for Hog Island. The experience has taught me so much, gave me new friends, and gave me adventures to cherish from a beautiful island in Maine.

GOS Announces a T-shirt Design Contest

By Steve Holzman



Gray Kingbird at Camp TALON. Photo by Sam Murray.

Submit your original artwork for our new t-shirt. The shirt should have our logo on the front and your image on the back. Hints: It should probably have a bird or birds on it and should say "Georgia Ornithological Society" somewhere in the design. Do you like the artwork of Charley Harper, Andy Warhol, or David Sibley? Well, all designs will be considered. Images should be no larger than 8.5 x 11 inches and can be submitted as a hard copy painting/drawing or a digital/scanned image (300 dpi minimum).

Submit artwork to Ellen Miller at swallowtailem@gmail.com or contact her for directions on mailing in a hard copy. The winning design will be selected by a panel of three judges, and the design and shirts will be unveiled at our winter meeting in January 2015. All designs must be submitted by October 20, 2014. The winner and all submitting artists retain the rights to the original material and grant GOS the right to create t-shirts with the image at no charge. The winner will receive a free registration and banquet for two at our winter 2015 meeting in Savannah, Georgia, and a free t-shirt with their design on it.

Please Meet Anne Mursch

By Phil Hardy

If I asked you to name someone who loves grand opera, attended nursing school, used to fly single- and twin-engine planes, plays the piano, and held a master bander's license, who would be your guess? If your answer was GOS member Anne Mursch, you would be correct. But wait, there's more, lots more about this talented and gifted birder.

Anne was born and raised in Georgia's oldest city and arguably its most beautiful— Savannah. As a child living in an upstairs apartment, Anne learned to recognize Blue Jays and Northern Cardinals, two of Georgia's most basic birds. She attended Savannah High School and absolutely loved English classes. After two years of nursing school, Anne later studied sociology at Georgia State University.

Anne's working career took her to Georgia Pacific, where she kept books on accounts receivable worth millions of dollars. Later during her career, she was employed at Southern Company as a proofreader and worked with the library and records of the utility giant. It was during her tenure with Southern Company that she met a famous board member, Bobby Jones, one of the designers of Augusta National Golf Club.

When she was about 30 years old, Anne began watching her backyard birds. At the invitation of a birding friend, she attended an annual January meeting of the Atlanta Audubon Society somewhere around 1970 and joined right then and there. It wasn't long after acquiring her AAS membership that she was invited to an engagement party of some friends. It was at this party that an event took place that would impact Anne's birding world to this day, for it was there that Anne met a humble man and one of the charter members of GOS by the name of Dick Parks. Their friendship never ended.

We have all heard the expression "love at first sight." Perhaps Anne's introduction to Dick Parks could be called "friends at first meeting." She says they talked for a very long time at this cocktail party. Anne had no idea about Dick's affiliation with the Georgia Ornithological Society. She recalls that Parks had just had surgery to correct an acoustical neuroma, a condition that affects hearing and balance. Anne told me that once Dick was out birding with a doctor who noticed that Dick could hear out of his left ear but not his right. Hence a diagnosis was made, and Parks underwent surgery, although he never regained complete hearing. So with Anne's keen sense of hearing and musical background, she would tell Dick the birds she could hear. She acted much like a seeing-eye dog that assists the blind but in an auditory manner.



Wood Stork at Camp TALON. Photo by Sam Murray.

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Please Meet Anne Mursch (continued from page 11)

Anne told me that at one point in her life she and her former husband invited Dick to come to their lake house. Upon arrival, Dick presented Anne with a framed magazine print of a Woodcock he had drawn.

Anne and Dick's friendship extended beyond the many birding trips they enjoyed together, especially when Parks lived near Piedmont Park in Atlanta. Even Anne's children appreciated Dick as an artist and tried their best to impress him with their drawings. Mursch and Parks attended operas together (at Anne's invitation), went to birding friends' parties, and even weddings. They were such close friends that some people thought Anne was Mrs. Dick Parks! I must admit that I made that same incorrect assumption back in 2001 when I joined GOS.

After attending a few field trips, Anne realized that the sense of hearing was just as important as sight while birding. She acquired some bird song tapes and quickly mastered them. Recall that in the opening paragraph I told you that Anne has a musical background. The reason she studied tapes is because the Internet, iPods, or MP3 players had yet to be invented.

When I asked Anne if there was a particular bird that sparked her interest in birding, she replied "Warblers—all of them." I can't say that I blame her. After all, it was up close and personal looks at Hooded Warblers that hooked me. And as for any special bird she might remember, Anne recalled a Common Redpoll in her Woodstock, Georgia, backyard in 2012 after Hurricane Sandy had devastated New Jersey and New York. Her biggest surprise was watching a Great Blue Heron approach her deck from a creek in a wooded area behind her house to investigate a bobbing, plastic Great Blue she had. Talk about curiosity killing the cat. But Anne's most memorable birding moment was when she was "dumped on" by a Brown Pelican. Fish, anyone?

Over the years Anne has given back to birding more than she has taken. She served on the GOS Executive Committee as GOShawk newsletter editor for five years and as second vice president (meeting planner) for six years. Anne spent fifteen years volunteering at JIBS (Jekyll Island Banding Station) and eventually earned her master bander's license under the tutelage of Don and Doris Cohrs. Anne helped with breeding bird surveys in Wadley, Georgia, for at least 15 years, she recalls. And while she worked for US West, Anne entered a volunteerism contest that was companywide...and won! She unselfishly designated the prize money to go to fledging a service many of us take for granted, the GOS rare bird alert. At that time, she realized that Georgia was among the few states that did not have an RBA. We all owe a big "thank you" to Anne for her generous gift.

I asked Anne what changes she has noticed over the years since she began birding. Not surprisingly, she admits to seeing fewer warblers and other passerines today than she did forty years ago.

Anne and her husband Russell live in Woodstock when they aren't at their second home in Darien. She has a son and daughter who live in Atlanta as well as two granddaughters. Anne enjoys operas performed by the New York Metropolitan Opera and the Atlanta Opera Company. Anne has enjoyed birding in the Galapagos and parts of Europe. Her most enjoyable birding trips were with the late Joe Greenberg on trips to Arizona and California, and to Churchill, Manitoba. I'm glad the Polar Bears didn't get you while you were in Churchill, Anne.

And now you know who Anne Mursch is.

Join Us for the Georgia Ornithological Society's Fall Meeting

October 10-14, 2014
Villas By The Sea
Jekyll Island, Georgia

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

"My Conservation Big Year"

by

LAURA ERICKSON

<http://lauraerickson.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.lauraerickson.com/>

Laura Erickson, recipient of the American Birding Association's Roger Tory Peterson Award for 2014, has been an avid birder since 1975 and has had a varied career writing and speaking about birds, counting migrating birds, and serving as a licensed wildlife rehabber. She was awarded the Frances F. Roberts Award at a joint meeting of the Wilson and Cooper Ornithological Societies for a paper she presented about bird migration along Lake Superior. A columnist for *BirdWatching* magazine, she's served as science editor at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and has written seven books, including *National Geographic Pocket Guide to the Birds of North America* and *101 Ways to Help Birds*. Her radio program, *For the Birds*, has aired on several radio stations from New York to Wyoming since 1986. She lives with her husband and a licensed education Eastern Screech-Owl named Archimedes.



We'll have many field trips to choose from to premier coastal Georgia birding locations. See you there!

Go Paperless!

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To Be a Better Birder

By Steve Holzman

(Reprinted with permission from the American Birding Association's Birder's Guide to Conservation & Community—May 2014)

To be a better birder, be better to birders. Where did I hear that? My wife, Rachel, just came up with it. We were trying to figure out where this article was going, and she summed it up nicely. Maybe, instead of publishing this article, I could just put that simple message up as my Facebook status. I spend too much time on the Internet—reading blogs, Facebook, and the comments section of news articles (big mistake, by the way)—and it seems that no matter what someone says, there's always someone else ready to tear it apart.

“Windmills are great for reducing our carbon footprints and slowing global climate change.”

“You heartless SOB, windmills will kill all the birds.”

“You shouldn't take flights to foreign birding destinations. Don't you know how much carbon is spewed out by airplanes?”

“Not so fast, mister; ecotourism might help convince developing nations to protect their biodiversity.”



Swamp Sparrow. Illustration by Ernest Thompson Seton from *Bird-Life* by Frank M. Chapman.

“I can't believe you are driving 100 miles to chase that Common Merganser just for your state list! What a waste of gasoline!”

“But I'm going to thoroughly cover an under-birded area along the way and enter my data in eBird so we get a more accurate picture of bird distribution.”

The issues are not so black and white. Perhaps we should cut each other some slack and save our angst for those who don't even care if birds continue to exist. There are people and organizations out there right now who believe that every feral cat should live wherever it wants to, including wildlife refuges, nature centers, city parks, and your own yard. They are pressuring local governments to prevent you from removing unwanted feral cats from even your back yard. They don't see any difference between a native Sharp-shinned Hawk taking a Hermit Thrush in order to survive and a non-native feral cat being fed by humans that also kills Hermit Thrushes because it's just in its nature. It may be instinctual, but it's not natural for a predator to receive daily food from humans and then roam free to kill wildlife. Instead of sniping at each other over things that have little effect on bird populations (for instance, judicious use of playback, playing the listing game, the occasional flushing of a bird), we should be banding together to prevent or discourage behaviors that actually kill birds outright.

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To Be a Better Birder (continued from page 14)

There's another group of people—and it is probably the majority—who just don't see the value of having wildlife around. If species go extinct, they think, "Well, that's just the way of the world. I can't be bothered to do anything about it." I was noticing students on campus the other day, walking to class with their faces looking down at their phones. They didn't notice the American Robin on the branch next to them or even the Red-tailed Hawk looking down from a nearby oak. They go through their lives never noticing that each season brings different birds to town. They do not care that the woodlot was bulldozed for a new strip mall. They are not bothered that airports are killing Snowy Owls when there are better ways to protect planes. It does not matter to them that hawks are being poisoned by ever-increasingly-potent rat poisons. When they run across a Facebook post about killing rats to protect seabirds, they will not know what a seabird is, but they'll know they are against killing, and that's all that will matter. Without educating them, we will be left to fight these battles alone. We could make fun of them when they walk into trees while engrossed by yet another wacky cat video on their phones, or we could try to get their eyes to see the beauty around them. Organizations like the Georgia Ornithological Society and the American Birding Association, among many others, have active programs trying to encourage and promote youth birding. These programs show kids that there are others just like them and that it's pretty cool to be passionate about something, because, as the author John Green said, "Nerds like us are allowed to be unironically enthusiastic about stuff." That stuff may include their first self-found rarity or being able to distinguish a White-throated Sparrow from a Swamp Sparrow. So don't downplay a new birder's excitement over common birds; encourage them, and engage them in local conservation projects. We'll need their help to assure birds have a place on tomorrow's landscape.

My wish is for birders to celebrate their similarities, their shared passion. I want us to avoid infighting on the Internet. Remember, it wasn't too long ago that bird enthusiasts shot birds and stole their eggs. Even if we occasionally use an mp3 player or flush a bird trying to get a better photo, we've certainly come a long way. Who knows how birding might change in 50 years? In the not-too-distant future, as we are wearing our Tilley hats with matching drab-colored nanotech jumpsuits and flying with jet packs to see a cloned population of Passenger Pigeons, birds may be "countable" only if you've done something tangible for their survival. The big listers of the future may be those whose lists reflect how much habitat they've helped restore, how many feral cats they've removed from the environment (with bonus points for socializing them and giving them a new indoor home), and how many kids they've mentored. Don't take all this the wrong way; it's absolutely correct to point out where we can do better. But remember, we all want wildlife to thrive and all species to survive. Let's quit the sniping and get to work.

GOS GRANT APPLICATION DEADLINES**Bill Terrell Graduate Student Research Grants**

December 1, 2014

Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grants

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

December 31, 2014

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

And Leave the Leaves!

By Patti Wohner

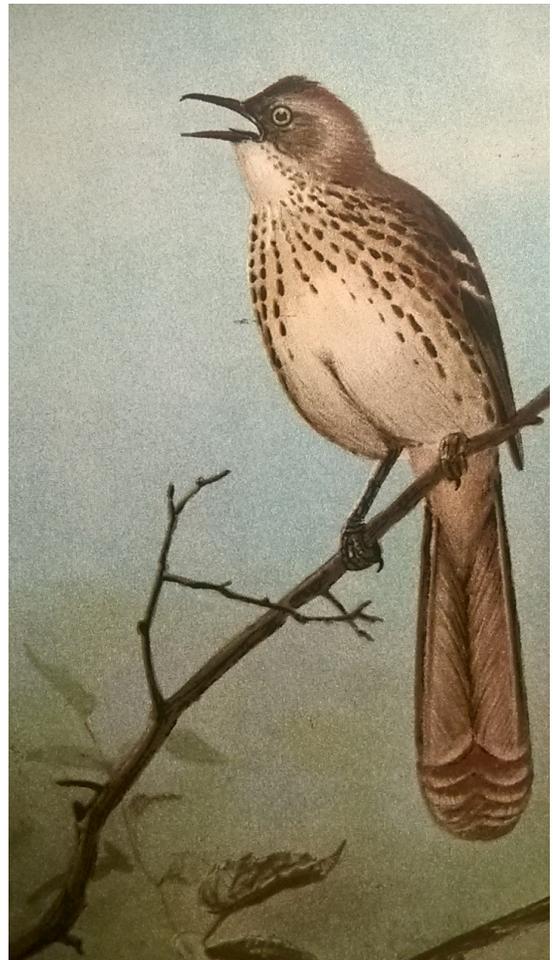
Perhaps some of the readers are tired of all these suggestions to help the birds. Don't let your cat outside, be nicer online, buy a peach plate, come to the fall meeting, dig up some yard... Maybe you're thinking helping the birds is for the birds, even. Or maybe you are a reader who is constantly looking for ways to help out and appreciate suggestions other birders make. I am writing this blurb for those of you who have seen that small acts by many individuals can help. I have written about this in the past, but I wanted to remind *GOShawk* readers, now that fall is approaching, that your own backyard can be a source of wintering habitat for many species of songbirds that winter in the southern United States in rural, urban, or suburban areas.

Most birders supplement their winter yards with feeders for seedeaters, yet a very natural way to provide a source of invertebrates for species consuming earthworms, spiders, and insects is to leave the leaf fall where it lands in your yard. I know leaving those brown, decaying, withering oak and maple leaves alone is a very difficult prospect. What will the neighbors think when they walk their dogs past your untidy lawn and see the leaf-blower barely distinguishable below a layer of fall leaves? Or what will you think when you look outside the kitchen window and instead of seeing a perfectly cleared lawn, the hint of green luxury that will come next spring, you see clusters of nature's debris? You might change your mind with the potential to add a few bird species to that backyard list because you have attracted ground-foraging migrants such as Rusty Blackbirds, American Robins, Common Grackles, Brown Thrashers, Northern Cardinals, Blue Jays, thrushes, sparrows, towhees, flickers and who knows what else.

If you are still worried about neighbors' opinions, perhaps you could inspire others by putting out a simple sign that says "Bird Habitat" by the street and explain in a few words that you are creating bird habitat and they can help too by leaving their leaves.

And if you are still opposed to leaving the leaves, at least consider leaving acorns, pecans, or other tree mast in your yard. Not only are these nuts keeping the squirrels busy all winter, but they provide bird food as well. Squirrels feed on stored acorns and are very inefficient diners. They will often crack open an acorn, only to eat a small bit and drop the rest of it on the ground. Watch them sometime if you haven't, and you'll wonder how any squirrel can ever survive being so inefficient! The small acorn pieces that drop from the mouths of squirrels are then found by small songbirds that cannot break the acorn themselves. Songbirds will search for small but very fatty acorn morsels to help them through periods of the winter that are particularly cold or wet.

This has been a message from someone who has big walnut, oak, and maple trees and DOES NOT RAKE her lawn and is proud of it!



Brown Thrasher. Illustration by Ernest Thompson Seton from *Bird-Life* by Frank M. Chapman.

Winners of Youth Birding Competition T-Shirt Contest

Reprinted with permission from Robert Sutherland

(More stories from Robert can be found at LakeAllatoona.com and LakeLanier.com)

Four young artists are winners of the t-shirt art contest in Georgia's Youth Birding Competition, according to Georgia's Department of Natural Resources. Art contest coordinator Linda May praised participants and stressed that the focus "isn't just about art. It's about getting kids interested in the outdoors and connected to the environment." May is an environmental outreach coordinator for the DNR's Nongame Conservation Section and says, "Birds are a great hook since they're beautiful, abundant, and easy to watch."



This belted kingfisher painted by Amelia Courson, age 8, a home-schooled second grader from Cleveland, won the Primary School Division (pre-K through second grade).

The t-shirt art contest is part of the Youth Birding Competition, an annual event in which teams of children and teens find as many bird species as possible in Georgia in 24 hours. This year, the free bird-a-thon began at 5 pm on Friday, April 25th and ended at 5 pm on Saturday April 26th.



Sophia Bobo's Red-bellied Woodpecker won the Elementary School Division (third to fifth grades). Bobo, age 8, is a third grader at Rock Spring Elementary School in McDonough.

As Linda May knows, research shows the benefits of youth spending time outdoors, from enhanced learning to improved communication skills. But it's even more exciting when the birding art contest helps make that connection. "I was so thrilled to hear one parent say that this art contest piqued her daughter's interest in nature, and how she now plays outside more and goes birding for fun!" May said.

(continued on page 18)

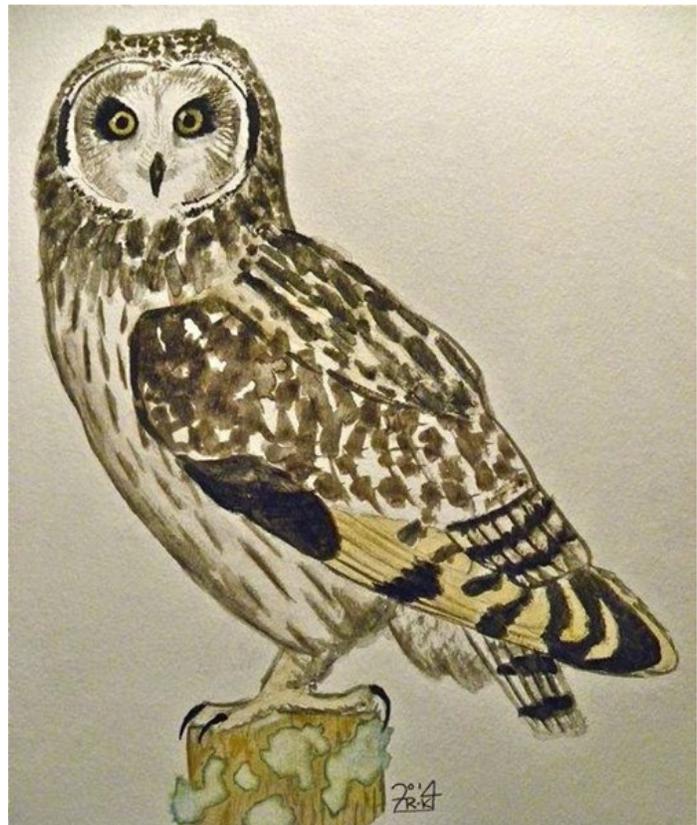
Winners of Youth Birding Competition T-Shirt Contest (continued from page 17)

The birding competition and t-shirt art contest are sponsored by DNR's Nongame Conservation Section, The Environmental Resources Network Inc. (TERN), Friends of the Nongame Conservation Section and others, including the Georgia Ornithological and Atlanta Audubon societies.



A Yellow-rumped Warbler (left) drawn and painted by Decatur's Angus Pritchard led all 121 contest entries. As the grand prize winner, Pritchard, age 14, a Renfro Middle School eighth grader, earned a \$100 Michaels gift card and had his painting featured on t-shirts at the Youth Birding Competition. Angus Pritchard has been a regular in the art contest and the birding competition, including as a member of the winning team in 2013. His art entry this year also placed first in the Middle School Division.

The High School Division winner (ninth to twelfth grades) was a Short-eared Owl (right) by Rosemary Kramer, age 16, an eleventh grader from Upson-Lee High School in Thomaston. Rosemary also won the Middle School Division and Grand Prize in the 2011 Youth Birding Competition t-shirt art contest, not to mention her success on the Chaotic Kestrels birding team. (Kramer was also a teammate with Pritchard and three others on last year's top birding team.)



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