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GOShawk

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society
www.gos.org

President's Message

By Larry Carlile

Dear Birders,

I sincerely hope this newsletter finds you safe and secure as we all try to deal with the stressors related to the COVID-19 pandemic. If this were a normal year, I'd launch into a description of the great speakers and fantastic field trips we'd experienced in Hiawassee during the spring meeting and, more likely than not, how some of our field trips had been rained out. But GOS decided to cancel our spring meeting out of concern for the health of our members. That decision was particularly painful for me because, while all of our meetings are enjoyable, I appreciate spring meetings most of all since I get to see and hear warbler species that can be hard to drum up on the Georgia coast. Spring meetings also give me a go at mountain flycatchers, tanagers, ravens, and juncos.

I was fortunate to be able to telework for the entire months of April and May, and, so far, the first full week of June. I've gone a bit stir-crazy on occasion, but virtual meetings and conducting business on the telephone kept me somewhat grounded. My home office



One of the views from Larry's home office. Adult and juvenile Downy Woodpeckers. Photo provided by Larry Carlile.

window provides a fine view of four seed feeders, two suet feeders, a hummingbird feeder, and a bird bath. I was able to witness a lot of breeding behavior and, subsequently, a lot of hungry fledglings that I would not have seen had I been going to the office every day. I kept my camera at the ready to capture images of fledgling woodpeckers, mockingbirds, bluebirds, wrens, finches, buntings, gnatcatchers, and two "flavors" of nuthatches, some of which are included in this edition of GOShawk.

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Georgia Ornithological Society

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

Welcome, New Members!

Brown Thrasher (Individual/Family)

Joan Coles
Vin Gleespen
Joseph Knoll
Crystal Lambert
Albert Teel

Duluth, GA
Brookhaven, GA
St. Marys, GA
Franklin, GA
Hoschton, GA

Red-cockaded Woodpecker (Patron)

April Whatley

Rome, GA

The Oriole

Please consider writing a General Note of YOUR observations or patterns of observations you have extracted from eBird or other sources for *The Oriole*. We need submissions to complete the next and upcoming issues. There are some great stories out there; please share them. Send your General Note (one to three pages with photos, if available) to Dr. Renee' Carleton (rcarleton@berry.edu) or Dr. Jim Ferrari (jferrari@wesleyancollege.edu) Have questions or nervous about writing? We're here to help you get your observations published in the journal.



Brown Thrasher. Photograph by Matthew Anderson.

Go Paperless!

Want to save trees and reduce costs by receiving the *GOShawk* electronically? Contact Shannon Fair at gosmembership@gmail.com and tell her that you would like to receive it by e-mail.

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

I have a Flowering Dogwood in my backyard that is on its last leg and has a lot of dead limbs. On several occasions, I watched an adult White-breasted Nuthatch come to the sunflower feeder while its offspring provided constant harassment. The adult would carry a seed to a dead limb on the dogwood, hammer it into a crack, and then back off and observe its chick extricate the nugget. Sometimes the chick was successful; but more often it was not, and the adult would step in to lend...a bill. Another uplifting moment amid my COVID isolation came during a rare commute to the office in early May. I was crossing the bridge over the Vernon River in Savannah at midmorning—a commute that normally takes place in the dark. On a hammock in the river I saw a Bald Eagle nest that I had never noticed before. After consulting with our own Dr. Bob Sargent, who conducts statewide eagle surveys for Georgia DNR, he said that it was indeed a new nest for Georgia. On a subsequent midmorning trip to the office, I saw an adult eagle perched on the rim of the nest. These beautiful birding moments were a welcome respite from staring at my computer screens, and they certainly kept my spirits up during a trying time.

On 8 June 2020, the GOS Executive Committee held an online meeting to discuss the possibility of convening a general meeting this fall. We decided that, given the uncertainty associated with future pandemic protocols, it would not be wise to have a full-fledged meeting with check-in, badges, Flockings, speaker presentations, and a banquet. However, we did conclude that we could safely conduct field trips if we and the membership were committed to abiding by physical



More "Larry TV." Juvenile and adult Eastern Bluebird. Photograph by Larry Carlile.

distancing protocols, reducing the maximum number of participants on each trip, and perhaps conducting outdoors bird identification workshops (e.g., shorebirds or sparrows). We also decided that it would be a good idea to conduct a membership poll to determine if you, the members, would be willing to participate in a field-trip-only meeting. You will have received that poll by the time this newsletter is published. After we have reviewed the results of the poll, and after we have conferred with the conference venue staff regarding safeguards they have instituted for our safety, we'll publish our final decision via e-mail,

the GOS Facebook page, and, of course, the September edition of *GOShawk*.

If we can manage to check all of the boxes and determine that we can safely convene a fall meeting, the dates will be 9-11 October 2020, and our meeting venue will be the Villas by the Sea Resort and Conference Center on Jekyll Island. Here's hoping we can enjoy birds and fellowship on Jekyll Island this October.

In conservation,
Larry Carlile
President, GOS

Where Are They Now?

By Patrick Maurice

(Editor's note: I continue to contact past recipients of GOS scholarships and past participants of Camp TALON, asking them to write articles describing what they are doing in their careers.)

I'm currently a third-year Wildlife Sciences major at the University of Georgia (UGA). I would not be where I am now without the support of my family and the Georgia Ornithological Society.

I'm very lucky to have grown up as a birder in Georgia because of the opportunities provided by GOS and other bird-friendly organizations. Before graduating high school, I participated in the incredible Youth Birding Competition 10 times; in our last year, my team (Chaotic Kestrels) won the competition with 160 species. Every YBC was a blast, but one of my most memorable events during that competition was finding a White-winged Dove in 2014 near Glenville, Georgia.

I also had the privilege of attending Camp TALON (Teen Adventures Learning Ornithology and Nature) six times. TALON is an awesome camp in which participants get the chance to explore multiple barrier islands and coastal habitats while birding and learning about island ecology. I had tons of great birding experiences during those camps, but one of my favorites was when we spotted a rare Western Grebe one June from the Sapelo Island Ferry.

In 2014, I was awarded the GOS Parks Scholarship to attend the Hog Island Audubon camp in Maine. My favorite experience from the camp was visiting Eastern Egg Rock to see the original Atlantic Puffin colony and a host of other breeding seabirds. These experiences have helped me grow my birding skills and network with incredible birders from Georgia and across the country.

Thanks to GOS, my drive to bird across the United States and the world has continued to grow. I love to travel and explore new places. In the summer of 2018, I spent two months in South Africa, and for a few weeks I volunteered at Vulpro, a vulture rehabilitation organization. In addition to cleaning cages and feeding the vultures, I participated in field surveys of an active Cape Vulture colony.

My most recent adventure was a study abroad trip that I took in the spring of 2019. It was an incredible journey to the South Pacific, where we visited Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, and Fiji. Although it was a school trip, I still brought my binoculars and camera along and managed to see about 250 species.

In the summer of 2019, I worked as a nest searcher for a UGA project that focused on warbler nesting in the southern Appalachian Mountains. We looked for nests of Black-throated Blue Warblers, Hooded Warblers, and Canada Warblers. Over the month that I was there, I found nine nests, but was able to practice bird banding and conduct point counts, too.

In 2019, I also participated in my first Biggest Week in American Birding Festival as a guide. It was an incredible festival that was full of love for birders and the magic of migration. I highly recommend it. I would have guided



Patrick Maurice with bluebird friend on 22 October 2017. Photo provided by Patrick.

Where Are They Now? *(continued from page 4)*

again, but the pandemic got in my way.

Currently, my career goal is to continue traveling the world by becoming a bird guide and leading birding tours. I am on the board of UGA's Lilly Branch Audubon Society as the field trip coordinator. Before the pandemic struck, I was supposed to travel to Ecuador and work at a lodge for the summer as a guide. Unfortunately, those plans were cancelled this year, but my fingers are crossed that I will be working there next summer.

GOS has been instrumental in shaping my life and career goals, and I am not sure where I would be without the support from the Georgia birding community. Thank you, GOS!

Patrick Maurice on a beach, pursuing his passion. Photo provided by Patrick.



The Great Grosbeak Invasion

By Robert L. Crawford

On 28 December 1968, while conducting the annual Christmas Bird Count for Thomasville, a pal and I were at a bridge over Oquina Creek, a favorite birding haunt of ours. We spotted some birds perched in a bare Sweetgum tree, and after a brief look through binoculars, he proclaimed them to be American Goldfinches. I wasn't sure. While I studied those birds, a group of them, nine or so, flew down to the edge of the creek and began to drink. One among them was quite different from its grayish yellow companions: it was bright yellow, with large white wing patches, and a massive beak. I had seen that species before, in Washington State in 1965; it was a male Evening Grosbeak.

I hesitated to call it because Evening Grosbeaks were essentially accidental anywhere in Georgia, and especially so in the south of the state (it was unrecorded in the state until 1955). I said, "Look at these birds. I don't think they are goldfinches." "Crawford, they are goldfinches," he replied. "No, look. Look at that one," I said as I pointed to the bright male on the sand bar. He looked at it and noticeably stiffened. "Those are Evening Grosbeaks," he said. "That's exactly what I think," I said, wishing I had had the self-confidence to say that in the first place. We counted 35 of the birds, an extraordinary, unprecedented occurrence in the county for this northern species.

Unknown to us, two ornithologists from Tall Timbers Research Station had seen the species in Thomas County a few days before our observation. They and we continued to independently record the species over the course of the winter, during which the grosbeak numbers waxed into the near incredible: hundreds, thousands, inundated feeders gobbling up sunflower seeds by pounds per day.

The Great Grosbeak Invasion *(continued from page 5)*

Evening Grosbeaks, Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and to a lesser extent, goldfinches, are periodic irruptors; they extend their normal winter range southward when their winter food source is scant. (Note: Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets, and Snowy Owls would fit into this category, but with different food items.) That winter Purple Finches and Pine Siskins were also locally present in record numbers.

But never has there been, before or since, the fabulous numbers of Evening Grosbeaks as there were that winter. The fantastic extent of the invasion was manifested, at least to me, during 8-9 February 1969 when I was home for a weekend from college. I remember looking at our side yard, where there were hundreds of grosbeaks and Purple Finches on the ground and swirling around in the pine canopy. I drove around town that Sunday morning and recall seeing a never-ending swarm of grosbeaks, with their constant “Jeer, jeer” calls making a din. One had only to stop somewhere and promptly count (or estimate) many hundreds of the birds, sometimes perhaps into the thousands, each time. I have published my thoughts about the numbers of grosbeaks present that weekend in all of Thomas County as being in the “tens of thousands.” That statement has raised some eyebrows over the years, but I stand by it. You had to see it to believe it. There were a couple of “echo flights” by grosbeaks in years after 1969, but nothing approaching the numbers of the great invasion of 1968-69. As I understand it, the eastern populations of Evening Grosbeaks, which were studied during 1980-1999, declined significantly, so we may never see such a thing again.

And I never, ever, let my buddy forget that he had called the grosbeaks goldfinches. It made for a nice riposte whenever he pointed out one of my shortcomings, for which he had many opportunities.



Let's try to imagine what was communicated here. It might have been, “I told you not to come back without a fish.” Or, “You think you can simply move in after I did all this work?” What about, “Did you get your pilot's license in a cereal box?” Osprey action at Carters Lake. Photo by Robert Johnson.

Grassland Birds Research Update

By Kayla B. Allen

In January 2019, I received one of the GOS H. Branch Howe, Jr., Graduate Student Grants to fund my master's thesis research on reproductive success of birds at the restored grassland site within Panola Mountain State Park, Georgia (PANO). Grassland birds have been undergoing extreme population declines over the last 50 years, so I wanted to assess the trends for birds in this guild at this restored site. During the breeding season of 2019, I conducted nest searches five days a week to find as many nests as I could of the species that were breeding at the site. Some of the birds I found included Field Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, Eastern Bluebird, Red-Winged Blackbird, Indigo Bunting, and Blue Grosbeaks. Also, I volunteered at the PANO year-round banding station to assist master bander Charlie Muise, and I added color bands to the non-banded leg of birds that I knew were actively breeding at the site. I absolutely love helping out at the PANO banding station. Before starting graduate school, I knew little to nothing about birds, and volunteering has allowed me to get an up-close look at how amazing these animals really are.

Along with quantifying reproductive success, I wanted to determine what vegetation characteristics were influencing nest success so that they could be increased in future restoration projects. Providing the most optimal habitat characteristics will help with increasing grassland bird populations at these restored sites. When the breeding season was over, I began analyzing the reproductive success data as well as the vegetation characteristics. I found that reproductive success of the birds at PANO was similar to what has been seen on other restored grassland sites. The characteristics that increased the likelihood of a nest's success included taller vegetation in general (as well as above the nest), the nest being built farther from the habitat's edge, and the earlier a nest was built during the breeding season. With these results, I successfully defended my thesis in April 2020, and my research advisor (Dr. Katie Stumpf) and I are in the process of submitting the manuscript of this project for publication. Also, I am continuing to assist at the PANO banding station for as long as I'm still residing in Georgia. This research would not have been possible without the help of GOS; I am truly grateful for this grant and the opportunity to work with such a remarkable group of people and birds.



From the left: Common Yellowthroat, banded Field Sparrow, and White-eyed Vireo nestlings. Photos provided by Kayla Allen.

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Brown Thrasher (Individual/Family Membership)	\$35
Red-cockaded Woodpecker (Patron)	\$50
Fledgling (Students only)	\$20

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Why aren't you a member of the flock? Brown Pelicans. Photo by Ron Goldfarb.