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GOShawk

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society
www.gos.org

President's Message

By Larry Carlile

Dear Birders,

On July 26, 2020, the GOS Executive Committee held our second meeting of the year and our first ever virtual meeting. We made the unpleasant decision to cancel the annual fall meeting on Jekyll Island. I trust that all of you received an email or saw the Facebook announcement of the cancellation. We were reluctant to decide whether to conduct a winter meeting, hoping against hope that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic will have abated by the time that the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday weekend rolls around. We also decided to schedule an uncharacteristic third EXCOM meeting of the year in late October/early November to reassess the pandemic climate and safety concerns associated with in-person meetings. I will announce the EXCOM's decision about a winter meeting via an email blast and a Facebook notice as soon as we adjourn our meeting.

Because we are nearing the end of the calendar year and application deadlines are rapidly approaching, I'd like to remind GOS



This episode of "Larry TV": Adult and juvenile White-breasted Nuthatch. Photo by Larry Carlile.

members of the many grant opportunities that GOS offers. Visit the links associated with each grant to get more information about application requirements.

H. Branch Howe Grant (<https://www.gos.org/h-branch-howe>): Graduate research grants of up to \$15,000. The deadline for application submissions is December 31st.

Bill Terrel Graduate Research Grant (<https://www.gos.org/bill-terrell>): Graduate

CONTENTS

- 1 President's Message.
- 2 Welcome, New Members.
- 2 *The Oriole*. Jim Ferrari.
- 4 Earle Greene Award. Georgann Schmalz.
- 5 Birds Are for Everyone. Isaiah Scott.

- 7 Where Are They Now? Rich Hull.
- 8 Where Are They Now? Angus Pritchard.
- 10 Post-breeding Dispersal. Josiah Lavender.
- 11 To Eat and Be Eaten. Liz Conroy.
- 12 My First Bird. Max Brown.
- 13 Tern and Plover Colony. Lydia Thompson.
- 15 Least Tern Art. Natalie Bailey.



Georgia Ornithological Society

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For a list of grant, scholarship, and award committees (and their contact information) visit gos.org/executive-committee

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(March, June, September, December)

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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)

Pierre Frouin
Lana Johnson

Atlanta, GA
Brookhaven, GA

Red-cockaded Woodpecker (Patron)

Sam Austin
Peter Followill

Stone Mountain, GA
Tucker, GA

Manuscripts Requested for *The Oriole*

Have you documented an unusual bird behavior or some other ornithological observation that would advance the understanding of birds in Georgia? Perhaps you've conducted a scientific study on some aspect of avian ecology, behavior, or morphology. If so, consider submitting your work for publication in *The Oriole*, the scientific journal of GOS. Publications are of two types: General Notes and Full Articles. Book reviews are also welcome. Our own Malcolm Hodges also writes the "From the Field" section that summarizes notable sightings each season. *The Oriole* is published twice a year. Contact Jim Ferrari at jferrari@wesleyancollege.edu if you have questions about a potential manuscript or are ready to submit your work.



Plain-capped Starthroat on the nest. Photo by Ed Maioriello.

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)*

research grants of up to \$15,000. The deadline for application submissions is December 1st.

Norene Boring Undergraduate Grant (<https://www.gos.org/norene-boring-undergraduate-grant>): Undergraduate research grants of up to \$1,000. The deadline for application submissions is September 15th.



"Larry TV" continues. Fledgling Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. Photo by Larry Carlile.

Opportunity Grant (<https://www.gos.org/opportunity-grant>): Up to \$5,000 available for projects designed to benefit the conservation of Georgia birds. The Opportunity Grant Committee accepts applications at any time of the year.

Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grant (https://www.gos.org/bt_conservationgrants): \$35,000-50,000 available only to government agencies and non-profit organizations. The deadline for application submissions is December 31st.

I am looking forward to birding my local patches during the fall migration and testing myself on the confusing fall warblers. One of my favorite fall activities is listening for thrushes flying overhead in the night sky. There is a great internet resource at <http://oldbird.org/pubs/fcmb/species/thrushes/thrushes.htm> to help you tune your ear to detect the nocturnal calls of thrushes. Give it a try. It is challenging and a lot of fun.

I hope all of you have an opportunity to do your favorite types of fall birding and that we can all be together again, sooner than later. Until then, stay safe and enjoy the birds.

In conservation,
Larry Carlile
President, GOS

Fledgling Carolina Wren. Photo by Larry Carlile.



Malcolm Hodges Receives the 2020 Earle R. Greene Award

By Georgann Schmalz

Malcolm Hodges was born in 1957 in coastal Mississippi and grew up in Ocean Springs. He started his life list at age 10 but didn't bird with other birders until the age of 19; after that, his family didn't see him much. He always knew he wanted to work in the life sciences, so, in fits and starts, he received a B.A. in Biology from Rice University in Houston in 1981.

A major turning point for Mal was a stint as a Peace Corps Fisheries Specialist in Ghana from 1981 to 1983. He learned much about himself, life, and relationships (not to mention West-African cultures and birdlife) in those two years. After a few years of post-Peace-Corps biological migrant labor, he bit the bullet and went to grad school. In 1989, he got his M.S. in Zoology from Mississippi State and started his career.

Mal's next job was as a natural resources consultant for a major Atlanta firm, which taught him about nature from the perspective of land developers and corporate interests. This job brought him to Georgia and gave invaluable experience that informs his ideas about land protection. He jumped at the chance to do bird surveys for The Nature Conservancy along the Altamaha River, and so he packed up and moved to Darien in 1992.

Mal began working in 1995 for The Nature Conservancy in Atlanta, as a state-wide ecologist and land steward, protecting and managing land for habitat maintenance and restoration, and conserving rare plants and animals. It was a very rewarding career, despite the sobering nature of modern environmental protection and pre-apocalyptic planning. He cut back to part-time work in 2017 and fully retired in summer 2020, to work on personal projects.

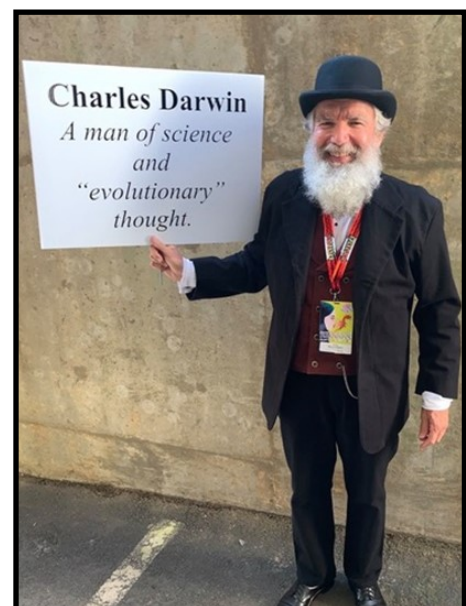
Mal loves the Breeding Bird Survey and has been helping with and conducting routes since the 1970s. He also has participated in Christmas Bird Counts since the 1970s, helps lead field trips for GOS meetings, and helps with Camp TALON a bit. For the last couple of years, he's been compiling "From the Field" seasonal birding summaries for *The Oriole*.

For the past few years, Mal has joyously, if ineptly, cosplayed Charles Darwin for the Dragon Con parade on Labor Day weekend.

In 1995 Mal created the Greater Atlanta Gay and Lesbian Birders, which is the only local bird club for queer folk (and friends) in the country. With increasing numbers of people around the country joining the Gaggle, he saw the need to create the Gay Birders of North America in 1997 (now called LGBTQ+ Birders of North America, or QBNA), which has close to 600 followers on Facebook alone.

In 2005 Mal made a big mistake, participating in a teacher-training workshop on lichens. He fell in love with lichens and, with his mentor and fellow Georgia lichenologist, Sean Beeching, has systematically gathered data for a state atlas of lichens, which they hope will be published as a webpage before long.

Mal and life-long partner, Keith Poole, live in Riverdale with their little dog Pip and their many chickens.



This is what Malcolm Hodges looks like when he isn't leading field trips at GOS meetings. Photo provided by Mal.

Birds Are for Everyone

By Isaiah Scott

Birds are for everyone. From the first moment that I raised a pair of binoculars to my eyes, peering through to marvel at the rich yellows and deep velvety blacks of the American Goldfinch, I knew that birds were for me. Yes, a nappy-headed black boy. I knew without a doubt that my love for birds was not a mistake, but I also understood that it was very uncommon for me to have this interest. When I first got into birding, I already knew the stereotype of birders. Basically, they are middle-aged to older white people who were biologists that do research or retired senior citizens who birdwatched in their free time because it was therapeutic. Obviously, this did not fit my description. When I visited Cornell Lab of Ornithology a few years ago, my mom and I noticed that there were very few people of color. As we glanced at the wall of biologists, researchers, and ornithologists, none of them looked like me. I understood that there was a lack of diversity in the birding community, yet my passion superseded any fears of rejection, fears of awkwardness, fears of being invisible.

The lack of ethnic diversity is a nationwide issue in the field of ornithology. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in 2011, 90 percent of American birders were white, 5 percent were Hispanic, 4 percent were African-American, and 1 percent was “other.” Even though the numbers have changed a lot since then, this just gives a general idea of the diversity in the birding community. Ethnic diversity is very important because our country increasingly consists of cultural, racial, and ethnic groups. In order to continue birdwatching and bird conservation, it is essential to be more inclusive of other groups of people and to increase diversity. With that being said, there are simple strategies to promote diversity in your organization. I do not have all the answers, but here are some of my thoughts.



December 10, 2019: Isaiah Scott receives a spotting scope and tripod donated by the Friends of Hog Island, Ogeechee Audubon Society, and GOS. Larry Carlile shakes Isaiah's hand as Bob Sargent and Leslie Weichsel look on. Photo by Mary Lou Dickson.

Two years ago, I was interviewed by Kim Gisby on WSAV-TV in Savannah. To my delight, the president of the Ogeechee Audubon Society, Leslie Weichsel, contacted me and came out to Ebenezer Retreat Center to attend Ike's Birding Hikes Winter Edition. WOW! She kindly gifted me with a free honorary membership. I will never forget that day. I felt as though I had won the Pulitzer Prize or an Olympic medal. Diversity to me is simply about kindness, respect, and empathy for others that do not look like you, and outreach is a simple way to show kindness. Outreach is the act of providing a service to someone or a group of people that does not have access to those services. Last Christmas, the Ogeechee Audubon Society and the Georgia Ornithological Society gave me a birding scope. I was extremely honored! Even though I wasn't in need of this amazing gift and my parents could afford it, there are other potential birders that couldn't afford this type of equipment. But it's not always "free stuff" but making it accessible to those who have a real interest. The gear required to have a great birding experience is

Birds Are for Everyone *(continued from page 5)*

expensive, such as books, binoculars, scopes, and cameras. There is also this perception that you need to have these tools to be able to bird. Your organization can provide information about equipment that is more affordable and accessible for other groups of people.

Secondly, I think creating educational programs that introduce young children at predominantly black or POC schools to the concepts of birding, conservation, and environmental science will create more diversity in the birding community. Moving toward your audience with an authentic need to share your passion of birding will communicate kindness and respect. Many of these eager minds have never considered birding as a worthy hobby or career. This would give other groups of the people an equal opportunity for them to consider birdwatching.

Finally, your organization can celebrate the heritage of POC throughout the year—for example, Black History Month, Asian-American Heritage Month, and Native American Heritage Month. This would show that your organization respects and supports other cultures and will make it more comfortable for people to join. I also think it would be interesting to highlight birds that play a significant role in various cultures. I am Gullah. My roots are in Hilton Head Island and Barbados. How exciting would it be to know more about the birds that my forefathers saw every day? Perhaps one of them was a birder too.

As an uncommon birder, my goal is to make this term obsolete in the near future. In order to create a bright future for the birding community, we must remove fear and embrace change—celebrating history while preparing for a future that includes a more diverse and colorful birding community, because birds are for everyone.



Isaiah Scott at Hog Island Camp in Maine, summer 2019. Photo provided by Isaiah.

Where Are They Now?

By Rich Hull

(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.)

During the summer of 2016 I had the great privilege of attending Camp Colorado due to the generosity of the GOS. Although I was an avid birder from a young age, I had never really been exposed to birding with other young birders, an experience this trip provided that I enjoyed immensely. Furthermore, the amazing birds we were able to witness (including species such as Black Swifts, Chestnut-collared Longspurs, and Prairie Falcons) inspired me to delve further into the world of birding and, eventually, that of natural history.

The summer after my Camp Colorado experience I ultimately decided on a career path that would in some way involve nature and the outdoors, a decision influenced by my passion for nature as well as my many positive experiences in the field of natural history, including that of Camp Colorado. Despite my love for birding, I decided against becoming an ornithologist and started a biodiversity project for my home county of Cherokee County, Georgia, in order to both document biodiversity and to learn more about the natural history of other organism types. During this process I learned how to identify and document vascular plants, dragonflies, and butterflies.



Rich Hull, keeping his eyes on the future, birding in New Mexico. Photo provided by Rich.

Later that year I found out I had been accepted into the Odum School of Ecology! Over the last three years I have worked diligently to learn more about our world ecologically and the importance of environmental stewardship. I recently graduated *magna cum laude* with a B.S. in ecology and a minor in plant biology, while also having conducted two independent research studies as an undergraduate: one project focused on the vascular plant natural species richness of Cherokee County, while the other project focused on the lampyrid (firefly) natural species richness of the same county. Despite my focus on these other naturalist areas academically, I worked as an avian field tech last summer in New Mexico, a job I enjoyed greatly.

This position lasted for three months and involved surveying a 130-mile stretch of the Rio Grande repeatedly for both the western form of Yellow-billed Cuckoos and the southwestern subspecies of Willow Flycatchers.

Currently I am in a transitional phase in my life, as I am between the completion of my undergraduate degree and the beginning of the pursuit of my doctorate in biology at Indiana University (EEB program). Starting this fall I will be studying the impacts of climate change and other human-caused disturbances on vascular plant distributions in Indiana while also conducting a large-scale vascular plant survey under the mentorship of Dr. Eric Knox.

Where Are They Now? *(continued from page 7)*

Although I may not be pursuing a career in ornithology, my past and still current interest in birds has played an integral role in my pursuit of a career in the natural sciences, as have several of my experiences in the field of natural history, including that of Camp Colorado. Toward this end, I greatly encourage both the GOS and its members to continue to support young birders in the hope that they, as I once did myself, will strengthen their passion for nature so that it will carry into their adult lives, whether it be as a hobby or career.

Where Are They Now?

By Angus Pritchard

As a “former” young birder (now age 20), I have to say that I am extremely grateful to have grown up under the wing of the Georgia Ornithological Society. Since age seven, when I first started to get into birding, GOS has been responsible for many of the most formative events that led me to eventually choose to study ecology and biodiversity in college and will continue to guide my path toward a career in conservation.



Angus Pritchard gets scaly. Photo provided by Angus.

I say that I first started to get into birding at age seven, but what I really mean is that was the first year that I participated in the Youth Birding Competition, a GOS-funded Big Day birding program for K-12 kids, which quickly became the major highlight of each year until I was off to college. The YBC is really what gave me the nature bug. The feeling of driving across the state with the Chaotic Kestrels (my team name) trying to see if we could break 170 species in a day was pretty addictive.

In 2015 GOS accepted my application for the Richard A. Parks Scholarship for Young Birders, which allowed me to attend the ABA's Camp Colorado. There I got my first taste of western birding, and I'm still in touch with some of the other young birders I met there. This was also my first time flying alone, but the week of Rocky Mountain birding was well worth it.

The other GOS program which spurred my interest in nature was Camp TALON, run by the incredible Bob Sargent and Julie Duncan. I participated for six summers, and in those years I gained a profound, lifelong appreciation for the Georgia coast, 90-degree heat and deerflies included. I got to see some truly incredible

islands and ecosystems, where I began to look not only at the birds, but at the larger picture of the ecosystems they inhabited, learning to identify plants, insects, and more. Leaving college-level instruction in ornithology and ecology aside, if I learned nothing else from TALON it would be two things: 1. Long sleeves are better than bug spray and sunscreen combined, and 2. Don't be afraid to visit places that might make you uncomfortable, because discomfort almost always pays off in incredible experiences.

Where Are They Now? *(continued from page 8)*

Taking those mantras to heart, in 2018 my brother (15 years old) and I (18 years old) somehow persuaded our parents to let us take a summer trip to Ecuador. In a journey more than 25 days, we visited the western lowlands, the cloud forest, the Andean tundra, and finally Parque Nacional Yasuni on the banks of the Napo River, the easternmost point of our journey. We totaled 655 species, seeing some of the most sought-after species in South America, including a Masked Saltator on the ridge of a high Amazon cloud forest reserve. My life list before Ecuador sat at 640 species, and by the time we returned to the states it was 1,229. Staying true to our TALON roots, we wore long sleeves and were definitely less-than-comfortable at times on a high-school graduate's budget of \$30/day for two people. But without a doubt, it was one of the most incredible experiences either of us will have in our lives. Getting buzzed by an Andean Condor at the edge of a 1,000-foot cliff is not something I'll soon forget, and neither was a surprise meeting with several hundred thousand Amazonian army ants.

Since then, I've focused on more strictly academic pursuits during my time at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. I've expanded my interests to plants as well as animals. (Note: I've always been a sucker for herpetology and entomology, but botany was a hurdle I had to wait until college before attempting.) I've been working with a professor on several long-term projects focusing on how plant populations persist over time, and it's definitely led me to take a different perspective when I'm walking in the woods. And I'm not just learning the literature; there are lots of practical tips and tricks I'm picking up, such as if you're counting hundreds of thousands of individual seedlings, you'd better use a clicker.

Before I graduate, I hope to have authorship on one paper about how climate change is having an impact on trees in a local Tennessee swamp, and a genetic study outlining the extent to which a population of *Sassafras* is not made up of distinct individuals but is actually large clusters of root-sprouted plants that are part of the same organism.

When I first competed in the Youth Birding Competition, I was a kid who was kind of into nature and birds. But by the end of the 24-hour period spent tallying hawks, nuthatches and finches around Atlanta, I was a kid who would be hooked for life on the incredible feeling of exploring nature, from finding species at local wildlife reserves to traveling the world. GOS supported me during the critical phase where I was craving more adventure and learning, and gave me the chance to learn about Georgia's birds and nature. With this strong base in southeastern ecology, I was primed to dive head-first into international travel and undergraduate research as soon as I had the opportunity.



Looking back: Angus is the tall one in the back row of this Camp TALON group with co-leader Mal Hodges on Sapelo Island, June 2017. Photo by Bob Sargent.

Post-breeding Dispersal: A Break in the Doldrums

By Josiah Lavender

Every year in July and August, thousands of wading birds populate the swamps, rivers, and lakes of the Georgia Piedmont. The vast majority are juvenile birds that hatched just weeks earlier from



Great Egret. Photo by Josiah Lavender.

rookeries in Florida, south Georgia, and along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. For birders, these dispersing birds provide a welcome relief from the “summer doldrums,” a time when bird activity and the potential of seeing unusual species is low. The resident Great Blue Herons are joined by hundreds of Great Egrets, Little Blue Herons, and White Ibis, as well as some Snowy Egrets and Wood Storks. Occasionally, these are accompanied by more unusual species, such as Roseate Spoonbills, Tricolored Herons, and Glossy Ibis. The phenomenon of birds scattering far and wide after nesting is termed post-breeding dispersal.

The U.S. Forest Service’s Dyar Pasture Recreation Area, located on the Oconee River just north of Lake Oconee, is a magnet for dispersing wading birds that flock to its 60-acre wetland. I have visited multiple times during late summer in the past several years and have seen a variety of wading birds. One of the most prevalent waders is the Great Egret. While this species can be seen throughout the year in the Athens area, it occurs far less frequently during winter. Great Egrets start showing up at Dyar Pasture as early as April, but they increase in numbers as peak post-breeding dispersal approaches.

Yellow-crowned Night-Herons are perhaps the most difficult to see of the wading birds that disperse during late summer. They are most active at night, as their name suggests. However, at Dyar Pasture they can sometimes be seen during daylight hours, stalking prey in the wetland’s emergent vegetation. The juveniles’ streaky pattern makes them even harder to locate. Yellow-crowned Night-Herons seem to disperse to the Piedmont in much greater numbers than their close relative, the Black-crowned Night-Heron.



Immature Yellow-crowned Night-Heron. Photo by Josiah Lavender.

Roseate Spoonbills are a great example of how exciting post-breeding dispersal can be sometimes. The most I have seen at one time at Dyar Pasture is five. The birds were foraging among several Great Egrets and Little Blue Herons at the back of the marsh. These were the first birds recorded in eBird in the Athens area, and possibly the first ever documented. Data suggest these birds are pushing farther north in their post-breeding dispersal in recent years. This could

Post-breeding Dispersal: A Break in the Doldrums *(continued from page 10)*

Swallow-tailed Kite. Photo by Josiah Lavender.

be partly due to their ongoing recovery from the brink of extinction during the illegal feather trade and/or climate change.

Wading birds are not the only group of birds that exhibit post-breeding dispersal behavior. Some raptors do as well, such as the Swallow-tailed Kite. Since mid-July, a flock of Swallow-tailed Kites has gathered along on Colham Ferry Road in Oconee County. Many birders, myself included, have visited the site to watch the graceful birds hawking insects over the pastures.

To Eat and Be Eaten: Eastern Fence Lizards, Their Prey and Their Predators

By Liz Conroy

To me, the Eastern fence lizard is our cutest native lizard. No wonder some people like to keep these arboreal reptiles as pets.

They are pleasing to gardeners, too. After all, they eat pesky insects such as beetles, moths, stinkbugs, and grasshoppers. And, according to nwf.org, the female loads up on even more insects in the spring for extra energy needed for egg laying.

Fence lizards make good meals for many predators (or provide entertainment for well-fed pets) since they don't offer much of a fight with their small teeth and claws and lack of venom. Who eats these little guys? Free-roaming cats*, snakes, and birds, for starters. In early August, I watched Swallow-tailed Kites fly gracefully through the branches of big pecan trees and grab prey with their talons from the trees. Later, I learned that it's not just large insects, but even snakes, tree frogs, and fence lizards that are sometimes snatched right from the trees by these beautiful birds.



Eastern fence lizard. Photo by Liz Conroy.

*The GOS has a position statement that discusses the devastating effect that free-roaming and feral domestic cats have on wildlife: https://www.gos.org/conservation_cats

My First Bird

By Max Brown

It is 1983 in Himachal Pradesh. Hiking in the Dhauladhar mountains above McLeod Ganj and Dharamsala, I saw a large bird that looked like an eagle. What was that on top of his head? When I got back to the inn where we were staying, I consulted a Brit who had a field guide. We found a Crested Serpent Eagle. He became enthused and asked for directions up the trail into the forest. He rushed off to see if he could find the bird too.

Later, he advised me that, since my wife and I were going south to Agra and Jaipur, we should be sure to go to Bharatpur and the famous Keoladev National Park, where we could see some more great birds. There we rented bicycles and rode from the village into the renowned bird preserve, but with no binoculars and no field guide! Even so, we were able to see some beautiful birds: Siberian Cranes, Sarus Cranes, Open-billed Stork, White-breasted Kingfisher, Pied Woodpecker, and many more. Most were visible from the paths and levees that the Maharaja had built many years ago. I did see two rather large Indian pythons and a jungle cat. I am glad to report that tiger hunts were no longer carried out on the backs of elephants there, nor did the British Raj conduct massive slaughters of waterfowl anymore.

In the lodge that serves as the base for many birders in the park, I purchased my first field guide, *The Book of Indian Birds*, by Salim Ali. That is how I managed to start birding in one of the world-wide destinations for birders.

Later, we travelled north to Nepal, where I was fortunate to trek in the Himalayas and to see more great birds, including the Fire-tailed Sunbird and Monal Pheasant, and to purchase another guide, *Birds of Nepal*, by Robert L. Fleming and illustrated by Hira Lal Dangol. In Katmandu I learned that the illustrator had a studio nearby, so we found our way there as well. We were able to purchase original watercolors of local birds that we enjoyed, the Yellow-billed Blue Magpie and the Hoopoe.



Max Brown on another adventure, this time in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska. You can bet that there's a field guide in that pack. Photo provided by Max.

I was hooked. What great fun to explore nature and to observe fauna and flora, especially birds. On the trip back to the U.S., I shopped in Hong Kong. Please excuse the stereotype, but I thought that bigger means better, so I purchased binoculars that were 20 x 50. You probably know how difficult they were to hold steady. When I made friends at Orleans Audubon, I learned the error of my ways and purchased a 10 x 42 Audubon Society-endorsed Bausch & Lomb model, when we still used porro prism designs.

I purchased the National Geographic Society field guide and pored over it daily, planning and dreaming about my next adventure in the field. *The Wonder of Birds* was a large-format photo book that also came with four floppy vinyl

My First Bird (continued from page 12)

discs of bird songs and calls, the *Guide to Bird Sounds*. I made my first birding tour with the Orleans Audubon Society to Costa Rica.

For a fledgling such as myself, New Orleans was a great base that enabled me to join the Louisiana Ornithological Society field trips to Cameron, Holly Beach, and Grand Isle. I became spoiled with the incredible spring migrations on the coast of Louisiana. Doesn't everyone get to see fallouts with warblers, tanagers and grosbeaks, for what we called Christmas tree ornament birding?

Now Decatur is home, so I am able to bird Kennesaw Mountain and Clyde Shepherd Nature Preserve regularly, enjoying Georgia birding and making friends on field trips here. Atlanta Audubon Society [now Georgia Audubon] gave me the opportunity to improve my skills through our Master Birder program. My favorite Georgia Ornithological Society trips were to the marshes around Little Tybee Island for Saltmarsh and Sharp-tailed Sparrows, plus a loggerhead turtle in the surf. The pelagic trip had Snowy Plovers, Northern Gannets and Manx Shearwaters, and a breaching northern right whale!

Other field trips included Hawaii, Gamble, Barrow, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, New Mexico, Big Bend, Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks, Rio Grande Valley, southern Ecuador, Paraguay, and Colombia. Expeditions are great, but did you see the Black-billed Cuckoo right here at Clyde Shepherd? Or the Yellow-crowned Night-Herons at Constitution Lakes? It doesn't get any better than that.

I tell people that I may not be a great birder, but I have been fortunate to see some great birds and to visit great places and to get to know great people.

Gould's Inlet's Tern and Plover Colony, 2015-2020

By Lydia Thompson

Two creeks flow into the Atlantic Ocean between St. Simons and Sea Island. Sand shifts back and forth between the two islands like a coachwhip. This dynamic area is Gould's Inlet. In 2015, the sand bar started building up on the St. Simons side, and Least Terns found this perfect for nesting. DNR shorebird biologist Tim Keyes roped an area off, but the problem with the terns nesting is people love this beach. Paddleboarders, surfers, kayakers, sunbathers, swimmers, and dog walkers all think this area is theirs.

Beginning in 1999, I noticed that there were fewer nesting Wilson's Plovers on Jekyll Island. For the years that followed, I read, learned, and experienced how to educate people on the plight of nesting shorebirds. The idea jelled into a group of stewards to function as ambassadors for the plovers. In 2011, I partnered with the Jekyll Island Foundation and the Georgia Sea Turtle Center.



New beach signage. Photo by Lydia Thompson.

Gould's Inlet's Tern and Plover Colony, 2015-2020 *(continued from page 13)*

Together, we built a group of volunteers called the Plover Patrol. We learned to be ambassadors for these birds. With the rope line and signs in place, our volunteers were able to show folks the birds. We were getting the message out.



Nesting Least Tern. Photo by Lydia Thompson.

Jekyll Island Authority took over the Plover Patrol in 2015. The timing was right because Tim Keyes asked me to coordinate a volunteer group for the Gould's Inlet colony. We organized the volunteers, gave them information and talking points, and set up a table with information about the nesting birds. At first, folks asked us about the sea turtles. They had no idea birds were nesting. We had scopes and binoculars to show them the birds with their chicks. The birds nested in these growing dunes for three years, from 2015 to 2017, but 2018 was an odd year. The terns came back but failed to nest. The volunteers and I were disappointed.

However, there was another project: Virginia Tech scientists are looking at beaches and how birds and people mix. The first part of this study is a weekly point-count survey from Gould's Inlet to Massengale Park. The volunteers assisted me in these surveys.

Abby Sterling started working for Manomet, a sustainability nonprofit in New England, as a shorebird biologist, and she and I worked together in conducting the surveys here in Georgia. The terns returned to nest in 2019. The shorebird patrol was on the job. We were becoming a fixture on the beach.

Then came 2020 and the pandemic. The beaches were closed in March. Wilson's Plovers had the month of March to nest in peace. In April, the economy shut down. People were off work. On April 3 at 6:20 p.m. Governor Kemp opened the beaches for exercise, and people flocked to the beach. Abby Sterling and I scrambled. There was no time to think. We just had to put up the rope line that would define the bird colony. With social distancing and a raging virus, we couldn't put up our tables or use our scopes to show the nesting birds and the chicks. We still needed the stewards to watch the colony, and the stewards were ready to work.

Volunteers took days to walk the rope line. Their main task was to ensure the poles were up. I gave them assignments to help me understand how to improve our stewardship methods. It was a time to watch and learn the social structure in these colonies of terns. This year there were higher dunes, so it was harder to observe the energetic exchanges between terns and plovers. We numbered the posts to tell each other where the birds were within the colony. The Least Terns arrived around May 1. The highest count we surveyed was around 50 terns. There were eight pairs of Wilson's Plovers. A familiar Wilson's Plover returned. Banded white, yellow, white, she had nested on Jekyll once. In 2017, she moved to Gould's Inlet. That year, she fledged two chicks. This year her nest failed. The terns, however, fledged chicks, and the last chick

Gould's Inlet's Tern and Plover Colony, 2015-2020 *(continued from page 14)*

fledged around July 20. In August, the terns and plovers flew over to the large sandbar between the two islands. The highest count of Least Terns on that sandbar in August was 170.

Because we had done the stewardship work in past years, people came up and asked us how the birds were doing. Groups like our Georgia Shorebird Stewards are valuable to help the general public understand that our beaches are an active living area for all kinds of animals. We must learn to Share the Beach with the birds.



"This piece was inspired by the Least Tern colony in the dunes of St. Simons Island. After what seemed like hours of crouching in the sand this summer (getting strange looks from beachgoers, as birders do) and taking hundreds of photos, I knew I had to base a painting off of it." Art and quote by Atlanta artist and former Youth Birding Competition participant Natalie Bailey.

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Georgann Schmalz presents the 2020 E.R. Greene Award to Mal Hodges. Photo provided by Georgann.