



December 2020
Vol. 47, No. 4

GOShawk

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society
www.gos.org

President's Message

By Larry Carlile

Dear Birders,

In case you missed it, I sent an email to the membership on October 13, 2020, to inform you that the Executive Committee had made the very difficult decision to cancel our regularly scheduled winter meeting in January 2021 due to our concerns regarding the pandemic. Since then, the virus has continued to rage across the country, and in retrospect we seem to have made the best decision we could have made with the information we had at hand. The Executive Committee also discussed the possibility of convening an out-of-schedule spring meeting in April or May of 2021, but because we are all faced with so much uncertainty about what the winter and spring will bring, we thought it imprudent to make plans for a spring meeting. As of this writing in mid-November, it seems as if there will be one or more vaccines available by the end of 2020 or more likely, early in 2021. Even then, most of those early doses will probably be reserved for first responders, and



This month on "Larry TV" the guests are juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Herons. Photo by Larry Carlile.

and rightly so.

The Executive Committee has high hopes that we will be able to hold our next meeting in the fall of 2021. Unfortunately, we will not be able to meet over the Columbus Day weekend, as has been our tradition. Our normal meeting venue, Villas by the Sea on Jekyll Island, will be undergoing renovations, and they will not be able to accommodate us. Therefore, our tentative plans are to move the meeting dates to September 24-26, 2021. Let's hope that it

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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

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

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

Welcome, New Members!

Fledgling (Student)

Evan Alger-Meyer	Raleigh, NC
Jordan Harris	Buford, GA
Olivia Prejeant	Cumming, GA
Kirsten Walsh	Phenix City, AL

Brown Thrasher (Individual/Family)

John and Donna Ennis	Newnan, GA
Sonya Massey	Columbus, GA
Phillip Prichard	Dallas, GA
Karen Seminary	Bluffton, SC

Red-cockaded Woodpecker (Patron)

Sarah Smith	Monroe, GA
Jeffrey Taylor	Decatur, GA

The Oriole Requests Manuscripts

The scientific journal of GOS, *The Oriole*, is in need of manuscripts for its next issue. *The Oriole* accepts both General Notes as well as scientific manuscripts about the avifauna of Georgia. Here are some potential ideas to give you a nudge if you need one: Consider writing up your unusual observation of _____ (behavior, vocalizations, distributions, nesting, conservation, predation, habitat selection, dietary habits, etc.) by a Georgia bird species. Book reviews and opinion pieces are also welcome. If you really want to get your creative juices flowing by reading old issues of *The Oriole*, visit the GOS website under Publications/Periodicals. Contact Jim Ferrari jferrari@wesleyancollege.edu if you would like to discuss your ideas about a potential manuscript.

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)*

will be safe to meet by then so we can enjoy some great birding and one another's fellowship.

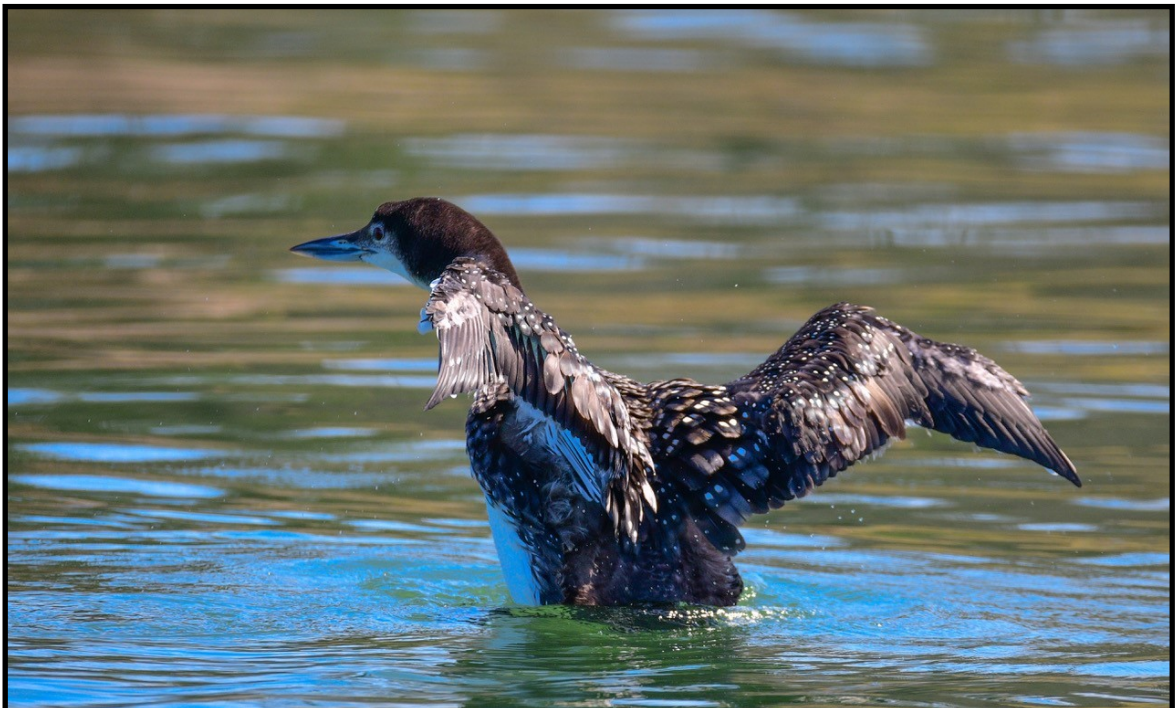


Fledgling Northern Cardinal. It's always spring at Larry's house. Photo by Larry Carlile.

Without the prospect of a GOS meeting this winter, I'm doubly excited to participate in some Christmas Bird Counts. For a list of count dates, locations, and compilers, you can visit the GOS website (<https://www.gos.org/christmas-bird-counts-119>) to find a count near you. As you probably know, the National Audubon Society has stated that CBCs should either be conducted in a socially distanced manner or, if that is not possible, they should be canceled. All of the counts I plan to participate in will abide by CDC guidelines. I encourage you to participate if you can do so safely.

Finally, I'd like to wish each of you a safe and happy holiday season, and I sincerely hope that 2021 brings some sense of normalcy. Until we can meet again, be safe and enjoy the birds!

In conservation,
Larry Carlile
President, GOS



A birding highlight of Georgia's winter season: Common Loon. Photo by Ron Goldfarb.

Color Our World

By Nancy H. Crosby

In the southeastern U.S., our Painted Bunting population has been declining at about three percent each year for the past 50 years. Researchers like Paul Sykes, who was a migratory bird specialist for the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Athens Field Station, located on the campus of the University of Georgia, studied why the birds are declining at such an alarming rate.

Each year in early spring and again in late summer, Paul traveled more than 16,000 miles, beginning in Florida and working his way up the coast through Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina. His research involved 20 study areas, five each in the four states. The sites in Georgia included Darien, Blackbeard NWR, Harris Neck NWR, St. Catherines Island, and Wassaw NWR. A cooperative was established at each site to assure that the bird feeders were maintained and kept filled with white millet, which is known to attract Painted Buntings from as far away as two miles. Some feeders were on private land and were manned all season by volunteers, while others on public lands were attended by state or federal agency personnel. In late June after the buntings established a “comfort zone” at these feeders, they were trapped using mist nets.

Early one morning in mid-August of 2002, we were privileged to experience netting and banding firsthand. Paul arrived in a Chevrolet Suburban, which could be described as a mobile research laboratory with a specially designed tube to hold the long net poles attached to the luggage rack. His years of experience in the field was evident as he gave instructions to raise each pole and net precisely and described the triangular net array surrounding the feeder with access for entering and collecting netted birds. The nets were in place well before daylight, and the first flock of birds to arrive flew directly into the nets from nearby trees. He taught us to untangle and remove the birds without harm.



Nancy Crosby holds a male Painted Bunting at Harris Neck NWR, July 27, 2007. Photo provided by Nancy.

Each bird was carefully examined with his expert hands to determine the age and sex. He also measured the length of the wing and the prominence of the brood patch of females. Then the bird, if not previously banded, was given a unique set of three colored leg bands and one USGS-numbered aluminum band. The entire process was brief, and the bird was released. Several returned to the feeder the same morning for the favored white millet.

Most of the birds were molting, and the appearance of bright red pin feathers on an otherwise green bird was proof positive that this second-year male was at last getting his “colors.” Even with his missing and muted feathers, we were impressed by the beauty of these small songbirds. The female displays emerald green upper parts with an almost chartreuse underside. There is some variability, with some females showing a rosy blush on the otherwise yellow-green belly. The male’s bright plumage includes a royal blue hood, a back with a triangular chartreuse patch, and a red eye ring. His bright red underparts extend from the bill to the tail but become more subdued on the underside of the tail feathers. He is undoubtedly North America’s most colorful songbird.

Color Our World *(continued from page 4)*

In the spring, Paul and his volunteers returned to observe activity at the feeders. A telescope was set up so that birds could be identified by their unique color band combinations. The re-sighting data was carefully recorded to determine the annual survival rate of the Atlantic Coastal Plain's breeding population by age and sex. Researchers need this information to determine if the population is still declining and, if so, whether is it on the breeding grounds or elsewhere.



Painted Bunting banding with Paul Sykes. Photo provided by the author.

Loss of habitat due to coastal development is undoubtedly associated with the birds' decline. Fragmentation of the buntings' habitat and increased predation also play a role in the decline. Paul remains keenly aware of the large numbers of all birds that fall prey to feral cats that run wild in our neighborhoods. Brown-headed Cowbirds are known to replace Painted Bunting eggs with cowbird eggs in the nest. Paul has corresponded with trappers in Cuba, some of whom catch eighty or more individuals annually to subsidize their income by selling them in Cuba and to the European market as caged birds. Other problems may exist on the wintering grounds but have not

been investigated. The eastern population of the Painted Bunting winters in the southern peninsula of Florida, Cuba, and the northern Bahamas.

Unfortunately, the Painted Bunting's future may not be as bright as his plumage. That is precisely why Paul Sykes and other researchers continue to look for answers here in the bird's breeding habitat on the Georgia coast. His field work on the Painted Buntings started in 1999, and thousands of buntings were banded. Paul remains optimistic that the findings will help in development of a long-range plan to assure the Painted Bunting will be here to color our world in the future for our grandchildren and for all time.

Painted Buntings arrive in Georgia in early spring and are found here as late as October. Some may overwinter along the immediate coast. Explore Georgia's Colonial Coast Birding Trail and spot one of these vibrant songbirds illuminating the rich, green landscape. It is just one of the hundreds of birds that can be sighted along Georgia's coast. In fact, 75 percent of all bird species found in Georgia can be seen on the Coastal Birding Trail. From wading birds to terns, rails, pelicans, ducks and gulls, hundreds of winged wonders and excellent viewing opportunities abound on Georgia's Colonial Coast Birding Trail.



John Crosby and Painted Bunting. Photo provided by the author.

A Tribute to John Mauldin Paget, DVM

By Jan Crook-Hill

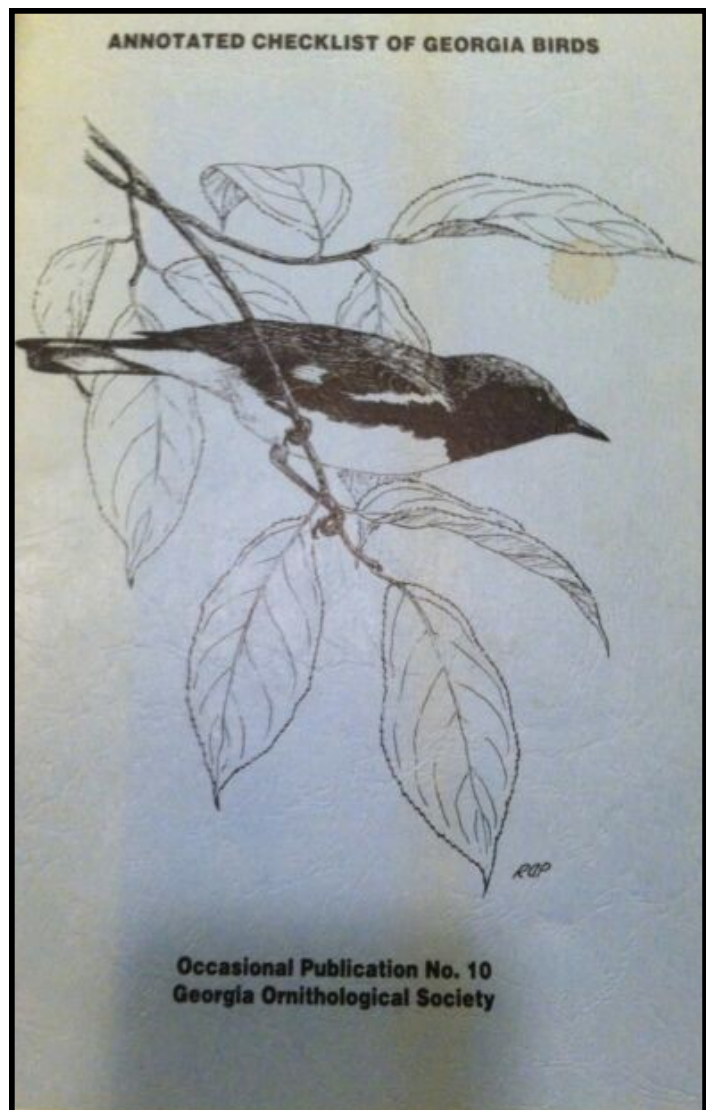
During a recent move from his home in Gainesville, Georgia, Dr. John Paget donated a vast collection of notebooks containing handwritten bird observations, collected over decades, to the University of North Georgia. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the work and contribution of Dr. Paget in this public forum.

As a young boy, John was an outdoor enthusiast and explorer. In high school, he caught pigeons at night in the church steeple in his home town of Greer, South Carolina. He brought them home to see if they would mate. Once they started a nest, he would drive the male 10 miles out of town to see if it would return. As he told it, the pigeon beat him home every time. His early interest in birds matured into a full-fledged passion when his high school sweetheart-turned-wife gave him his first field guide, *Birds of North America: A Guide to Field Identification*. In it, he read about the Red-eyed Vireo being “the most abundant bird in the eastern deciduous forest,” and was amazed he had never seen the bird. In Dr. Paget’s words, “It set me on fire.” It was his point of no return. He then purchased his first pair of binoculars with the Holden Red Stamp saver book.

John moved to Georgia in the 1960s and became a longtime member of the Georgia Ornithological Society. He frequently contributed field observations to *The Oriole* and was a committee member for the *Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds*, 1986.

He traveled the U.S. and other parts of the world pursuing his passion, often with his birding buddy, Jack Carusos. His children remember him getting up early every morning to listen to and watch birds before he left for work. Some of his favorite local birding sites were Chicopee Woods, Dawson Forest, and the Gainesville Railyards.

The University of North Georgia is grateful for the gift of Dr. Paget’s notebooks. Because they contain decades of observations of Georgia birds, they may be a valuable resource for tracking climate change in the state. They provide a research opportunity for the next generation of ornithologists as our undergraduate students glean and analyze information from the notebooks and digitize Dr. Paget’s sightings on eBird, where they will be accessible to researchers everywhere.



1986 edition of the *Annotated Checklist of Georgia Birds*.

One Hundred Birds in 100 Days—Paste Editor Finds a Salve for Social Distancing**By Josh Jackson***Reprinted by permission of the author*

Back in April, after a couple weeks of working from home, I hung a bird feeder that had been sitting unused in my garage. While missing the energy of the *Paste* magazine (<https://www.pastemagazine.com/music/paste-studio/paste-studio-atl-opens-today/>) office and the bands who'd stop by to perform in the new Paste Studio in downtown Atlanta, I started noticing the birds in my small, urban backyard and realized I often didn't know what I was looking at. It turns out the colorful bird hopping on the ground just outside my window wasn't some funny-looking Robin, but an Eastern Towhee. That flock of exquisitely colored birds with little black masks that were darting en masse from tree to tree were Cedar Waxwings. I'd lived in Atlanta most of my life, but I realized I hadn't really paid attention its flying fauna.

The stress of isolation—of closed offices and crashing advertising markets—was making it harder to go back to sleep after waking up in the middle of the night, so I began going for early-morning walks and carrying a pair of binoculars with me. I started visiting places I didn't even know existed before the pandemic. It seemed there were as many great parks and nature reserves around Atlanta as there were birds that I had no idea ever visited my city. From the granite outcroppings of Davidson-Arabia Mountain to the marshy wetlands of Constitution Lakes to forests around the Chattahoochee River, there are so many places to experience nature in and around Atlanta, one of the greenest cities in America. And barely five minutes from my house, Legacy Park in Decatur has turned out to be an oasis for birds of all kinds.

I used the Merlin app to identify the birds and the eBird app to keep track of what I'd seen. By the end of June, I bought a telephoto lens for my wife's camera and started carrying it with me and soon after started the Birds of Atlanta project, seeing how many different species I could photograph and post to Instagram and Twitter.

My goal was to make it to 100 days. Thanks to all the sparrows, raptors, warblers, wading birds, ducks and colorful visitors that pass through during their migration to more tropical climates, I've made it. My newest "lifer" bird, the Blue-headed Vireo I saw on the way to the *Paste* office yesterday morning, was Atlanta Bird of the Day #100. I'll keep going until I run out of birds. Here are some other birds I've found along the way.



Atlanta Bird of the Day #2: Northern Parula, a tiny warbler that can be found in Atlanta from March through November, if you're lucky. Photo by Josh Jackson.

One Hundred Birds in 100 Days *(continued from page 7)*



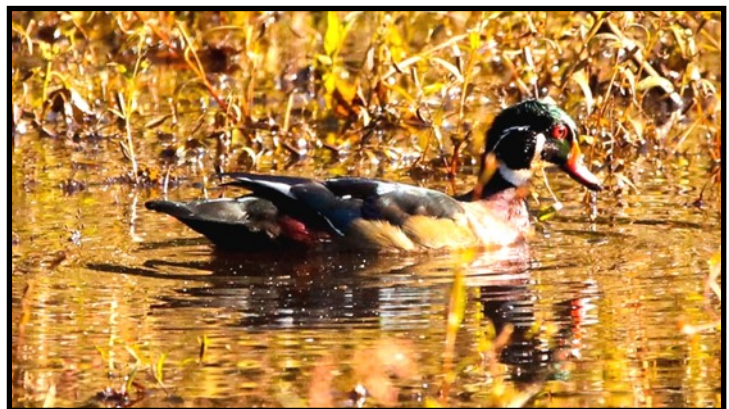
Atlanta Bird of the Day #42: Red-tailed Hawk, the biggest of Atlanta's hawks and a terror to just about every kind of rodent in the city. Photo by Josh Jackson.

Atlanta Bird of the Day #78: Eastern Phoebe singing its song in the wetlands of Clyde Shepherd Nature Reserve. Photo by Josh Jackson.



Atlanta Bird of the Day #81: Green Heron showing off its expert fishing skills on an early morning at Legacy Park in Decatur. Photo by Josh Jackson.

Atlanta Bird of the Day #84: Wood Duck, one of the only year-round ducks in Atlanta and a pretty spectacular example of the artistry of nature. Photo by Josh Jackson.



Black-capped Vireo

By Robert L. Crawford

I've expended considerable effort to see some species of birds for the first time, but struggling for a Black-capped Vireo near Kerrville, Texas, about took the cake. In the United States these birds breed only in Texas and Oklahoma, and they are declining, mainly from loss of their prime breeding habitat, described in *The Bird Life of Texas* [two volumes, published in 1974 by Harry C. Oberholser] as "dense, low ..., ragged-topped thickets growing in brilliant sunlight on hilly, stony ground...—**the hottest imaginable places.**" [Emphasis added]. In 1988 a patch of this type called Dewberry Hollow survived just northwest of Kerrville and was a recommended place to try for the vireo.

It's one thing to read descriptions of a habitat and it's another to recognize it in the field. I checked several places that seemed right before I stumbled onto the real thing: "chest-high" (on me, neck high) dense oaks, very much like a hedge. I heard a bird singing from within the thickets that was certainly a Black-capped; I could understand Roger Tory Peterson's characterization of the song as having "an almost angry quality." I set out to stalk the singer.

Well, it was not easy going. The vegetation was thick from top to bottom with leaves and limbs; you couldn't crawl under the stuff, though I spent a lot of time trying—you just had to fight through it. Worse, the bird did not sing from an open perch, but rather from below the "canopy," so a clear sighting from a distance was unlikely. I realized I would have to get close to the bird, and that would be difficult because I made so much noise going through the brush. It was very frustrating and hard work, and it was hot by that May 3rd in the Hill Country.

The bird was moving constantly, singing as it went, and after a time, I saw that its movements had a pattern: a large, rough circle that I assumed was the periphery of its territory. Also, part of this territory extended across a narrow dirt road; the bird would cross the road, sing for a bit, and then cross back over. I could never see it, but that is what it was doing.

This gave me an opportunity to trap the bird. I crouched near the road, waited until I heard the vireo singing on the other side, and then crossed over and got in between the bird and the road. It would have to go by me to get back to the main part of its territory. I kneeled and waited.

I could hear it singing more and more loudly as it approached me, and then the song abruptly stopped. It had seen me. There was a rustle to my left, and another, and then the bird popped into view, not five feet away and slightly above me in the brush. And what a beautiful little bird it was, with a jet-black head and big white goggles. It cocked its head to one side and glared down at me with a ruby eye, then darted back across the road. I had chased that bird for an hour and a half, ending up drenched with sweat and exhausted.

That is the only Black-capped Vireo I have ever seen, and if that's what it takes, I am unlikely to see another.

DNR LAUNCHES UPDATED GEORGIA BIRDING and WILDLIFE TRAILS

Excerpt From a Georgia DNR Press Release, September 22, 2020

Seeing wildlife while exploring historic sites along Georgia's coast is easier and more engaging thanks to a new website and app features announced recently by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

The launch of georgiabirdingtrails.com and the addition of a trail function to the Go Outdoors Georgia app are part of DNR Wildlife Resources Division efforts to expand its Georgia Birding and Wildlife Trails program. The upgrades offer improved accessibility to wildlife viewing resources and support Georgia's strong interest in birding and other wildlife watching, activities that pack a \$2 billion annual economic impact state wide.

The Colonial Coast Birding Trail, developed in 1999 and Georgia's premier state wildlife trail, is the first trail updated under the new Birding and Wildlife Trails program.

The Colonial Coast Trail includes 17 sites stretching from Fort Pulaski National Monument and the beaches of Tybee Island south to Cumberland Island National Seashore and the swamps of the Okefenokee. Shorelines, salt marshes, old rice fields, woodlands, tidal rivers, and freshwater wetlands offer an array of habitats that showcase unique communities of birds and other wildlife. The trail includes federal, state, and local sites that provide the opportunity to encounter wildlife, connect with nature and visit historic places.

This program is made possible through partnerships. Colonial Coast Trail partners include the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites, Jekyll Island Authority, the Savannah-Ogeechee Canal Society, local governments, and area tourism organizations.

The Georgia Birding and Wildlife Trails website introduces each trail site with access tips, a map, a list of amenities, wildlife highlights, and a link to eBird hotspots. Wildlife viewing resources include a printable species checklist with seasonality data, as well as information on birding basics, Georgia Audubon chapters, citizen science projects, bird curricula, and conservation organizations. A new program logo showcases the Great Blue Heron, a familiar species found throughout the state.

Funding for some outreach items at trail sites and visitor centers was provided through a federal Recreational Trails Program grant.

The Colonial Coast Birding Trail has also been added to the free Go Outdoors Georgia app developed by Brandt Information Services. The mobile platform provides an on-the-go resource for trail users to learn about trail sites, get directions, keep a species checklist, and browse recent eBird sightings. The app can be downloaded on mobile devices through the Apple or Google Play store.

The program improvements provide the foundation for updating DNR's Southern Rivers Birding Trail, developed in 2003, and for adding new trails to encourage wildlife viewing in Georgia.

Visit georgiabirdingtrails.com to learn more about Colonial Coast Birding Trail sites, brush up on birding basics, download the mobile app, and print a species checklist to carry with you. Hit the trail and discover why so many people are Wild about Georgia!

Contributions from Bird Artists



"These Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks were inspired by a photo I took at Altamaha WMA in 2018. I first saw whistling-ducks there while I was competing in Georgia's annual Youth Birding Competition. I was only eight years old, and whistling-ducks were still a rare occurrence anywhere in Georgia." Art and quote by Atlanta artist and former Youth Birding Competition participant Natalie Bailey.



Title: "Dale's Crows/Two Souls." Medium: acrylic on 12" x 24" canvas. "I had several inspirations for this painting. My brother has worked for a couple of years to befriend his neighborhood crows. It took a long time; they were very skittish. Also, my brother's backyard faces west to an air strip, and he gets great sunsets (he's a private pilot in a fly-in neighborhood). Lastly, he is a super fan of Pink Floyd, so I based the composition on the famous album cover for *Wish You Were Here*." Art and quote by Roseanne Guerra.

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U.S. Postage
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Athens, Georgia
Permit No. 11

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society
PO Box 122
Culloden, GA 31016



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Cliff Swallows. Photo by Ron Goldfarb.