



March 2021
Vol. 48, No. 1

GOShawk

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society
www.gos.org

President's Message

By Larry Carlile

Dear Birders,

As I traveled from Savannah to the Sapelo Island Visitors Center early on the morning of February 15, 2021, I was hoping that the weather would finally accommodate the Mid-winter Shorebird Count on Sapelo Island. You see, the count coordinators had been compelled to cancel previous count dates due to rain or high winds that resulted in small craft advisories, which made it impossible to access many of the Georgia barrier islands that are only accessible by boat. My heart sank as I passed the Midway exit on I-95 and I had to turn on my windshield wipers. Although it was not raining awfully hard, I was not looking forward to conducting the count in my rain gear while protecting my binoculars and scope from precipitation. As luck would have it, when I arrived at the Meridian Dock the drizzle had abated and had morphed into a dense fog. As I waited for the Piedmont contingent of the shorebird party, I tallied a singing Marsh Wren, cackling Clapper Rails,



Marbled Godwit. Photo by Ed Maioriello.

twittering Tree Swallows, a silent flock of 50 Fish Crows flying down the river, and several small flocks of Snowy Egrets, Little Blue Herons, and Tricolored Herons. I heard the whistling wingbeats of Hooded Mergansers before I saw them as they wheeled around the dock and splashed down in a tidal creek. Before long, GOS 2nd Vice President Ed Maioriello arrived, as did count leader Todd Schneider (GA DNR Wildlife Biologist) and GA DNR Wildlife Technician Alex Isenberg. We boarded a DNR vessel, and while Todd sat at the

CONTENTS

- 1 President's Message.
- 2 Welcome, New Members.
- 2 *The Oriole*. Jim Ferrari.
- 5 Memoriam: Walt Chambers. M. & M. Jarrett.
- 8 Walking to the Sound of Winter. D. Roper.

- 9 159 Counties. Cathy McGraw.
- 10 Never Bird in the Road. Phillip Prichard.
- 11 My Clarkston Birding Year. D. Whitelegg.
- 12 Youth Birding Competition 2021. T. Keyes.
- 13 The Distracting Pleasure of Birding. D. Roper.
- 14 H. Branch Howe Grants. G. Schmalz.
- 15 Camp TALON 2021.



Georgia Ornithological Society

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

<i>President</i>	Larry Carlile
<i>1st Vice President</i>	Steve Wagner
<i>2nd Vice President</i>	Ed Maioriello
<i>Secretary</i>	Mike Weaver
<i>Treasurer</i>	Jeannie Wright
<i>Business Manager</i>	Bob Sargent
<i>Past President</i>	Vacant
<i>Membership Chair</i>	Shannon Fair
<i>Editorial Chair</i>	Jim Ferrari
<i>Education Chair</i>	Bob Sargent
<i>Conservation Chair</i>	Nathan Farnau
<i>Earth Share of Georgia</i>	Mark Beebe
<i>Checklist/ Records</i>	Jim Flynn
<i>GOShawk Editor</i>	Bob Sargent
<i>GOShawk Asst. Editor</i>	Mim Eisenberg
<i>Historian</i>	Sue Peters-Ferree
<i>Webmaster</i>	Jim Flynn

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)

Bob Sargent, Editor
bobsargent.ncs@gmail.com

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

Welcome, New Members!

Fledgling (Student)

Anthony Cheang	Martinez, GA
Heather Gaya	Athens, GA
Maina Handmaker	Columbia, SC
Katie Maddox	St. Simons Island, GA
Matthew Tatz	Athens, GA
Alex Troutman	Austell, GA

Brown Thrasher (Individual/Family)

Sue Aughey	Kennesaw, GA
Josh Jackson	Decatur, GA
Jason Jones	Atlanta, GA
Tom Laubenthal	Marietta, GA
Lisa Makow	Marietta, GA
Cathy McGraw	Suwanee, GA
Frank Mills	Canton, GA
Wayne Phillips	Marietta, GA
Michelle Sessions	Kennesaw, GA

Red-cockaded Woodpecker (Patron)

Janell Cleveland	Boston, GA
Gus Kaufman	Atlanta, GA
Taylor Screws	Eastman, GA

The Oriole Welcomes Book Review Submissions

The Oriole, the scientific journal of GOS, invites authors to submit general notes or research articles about Georgia bird life. But we also publish book reviews, so this is a special invitation to all you avid readers out there to write up a review of a recent publication that would be of interest to our membership. You can see examples in previous issues of *The Oriole*, which are available at 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)*

helm and navigated the fog, the rest of us delighted in American White Pelicans roosting on the shore of the river, an occasional pair of Buffleheads bobbing in the choppy waters, and a nice flock of American Oystercatchers that were perched on a beach along with Double-crested Cormorants and an assortment of gulls and shorebirds.

Once the boat was docked and our gear was conveyed to an ATV, we consulted the map and headed for the north end of Cabretta Beach, where Ed and I were dropped off, and Todd and Alex made their way toward Nannygoat Beach. Ed and I waited for 9:00 AM and the start of the four-hour count window. The predicted six-foot high tide was not going to be optimal, because it was insufficient to flood the spits and sandbars and tidal creeks to drive shorebirds to the beach for their high-tide roosts. Still, the eroded north end of Cabretta harbored foraging Marbled Godwits, Black-bellied Plovers, Semipalmated Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, a few Sanderlings, and a lone Spotted Sandpiper. We could see many more shorebirds on sandbars to the east, but they were much too far away to identify with confidence.



Shorebirds roosting on a Sapelo Island sandbar, February 15, 2021. Photo by Ed Maioriello.

When the time was right, Ed and I started our 1.7-mile walk toward the southern end of Cabretta. There was zero action until we reached the southern end of the beach. The number of shorebirds was much reduced compared to previous counts due to the low level of the high tide, but it was rewarding to see a small group of shorebirds loafing on a small sandbar in the creek that separates Cabretta from Nannygoat. As we counted shorebird heads, the tide came up just enough to drive the birds off the sandbar and onto the southern tip of the beach, which afforded us a better look at the flock. As we walked back to the northern end of the beach, Ed and I observed a Marbled Godwit being chased and harassed by a Double-crested Cormorant as they flew north along the beach. Neither of us had ever seen such a thing before. The harasser and the harassed disappeared into the mist, and we were gratified that even though we had not seen as many shorebirds as we usually do on this count, we'd each seen bird behavior that we'd never seen before.

President's Message *(continued from page 3)*

I tell this story to illustrate how important it is to relish every opportunity we have to get outdoors during these troubling times. I knew that this year's count was not going to be very productive (numbers-wise) given the weather and the tide, but who could have predicted an unusual godwit/cormorant interaction on a foggy, balmy day on a beautiful Georgia barrier island?

Ed and I met again, virtually, on the following day, February 16, 2021, along with the rest of the GOS Executive Committee for our biannual meeting. The main topic of discussion centered on whether we would conduct a fall meeting over the upcoming Columbus Day weekend (October 9-11, 2021). The committee unanimously decided to forge ahead with a fall meeting, given that the number of COVID-19 cases is declining (at least at the time of this message), and that the number of vaccinated individuals is increasing. It is also important for us to have a fall meeting, if we can do so safely, so we can conduct a vote for Executive Committee elected officer positions. A Nominating Committee has been assembled and a slate of officers will be published in *GOShawk* before we meet on Jekyll Island. Please save the date and plan to attend so we can conduct the business of our society, listen to some great speakers, enjoy birding field trips, and enjoy each other's company.

In conservation,
Larry Carlile
President, GOS



Black-and-white Warbler and Eastern Redbud. Inspired by a photo the artist took in Pickens County. By Atlanta artist and former Youth Birding Competition participant Natalie Bailey.

In Memoriam: Walt Chambers (1974-2021)

By Mitchell and Mason Jarrett with assistance from Mark McShane, Richard Hall, Eran Tomer, and Ted Theus

Walter “Walt” Chambers passed away on Monday, February 8, 2021, from complications of COVID-19. He had no pre-existing conditions. He was simply an unlucky victim to a dangerous pandemic. This news was utterly shocking and devastating, especially as Walt was only 46 years old.

For those who didn’t know him well, Walt was an incredible birder, but beyond this he was a highly skilled photographer, a beloved pharmacist and a great friend to many, always sardonic and quick with a joke or a funny movie quote. As Mark McShane said, “Walt was a birder’s birder,” someone who got out and birded on a daily basis and was dedicated to covering his local “patch.” He didn’t rely on the excitement of chasing rare birds that other people found. He found them himself. To quote Walt, “I’ve never had any luck relocating.”

Walt was an all-round naturalist, possessing an incredible depth of knowledge not just about birds but of a multitude of other animals and plants, with a particular secondary passion for big cats. He also had a passion for traveling the world. His birding skills aided him in locating incredible birds wherever he went, and his quick wit and intelligent humor forged friendships every place he had the fortune to visit. He wasn’t the stamp collector, “lister,” type of birder. He liked to soak it all in, and he was always sure to add in time to simply experience the places he traveled. He truly enjoyed a balance between birding and culture.

As a resident of Columbus, Georgia, Walt primarily focused on West Central Georgia. Having birded this region for well over 20 years, he quite possibly contributed more data to the area than anyone else to date. He was one of the first people to regularly check the dam and surrounding areas at Lake Walter F. George, Dowdell’s Knob (Pine Mountain), West Point Lake, Standing Boy WMA, Cooper Creek, and Oxbow Meadows in South Columbus, a place he came to adopt as his own. Walt is in large part responsible for the Muscogee County checklist being at 269 species in eBird (one of the highest inland county lists in the state), and his dedication to Oxbow Meadows in particular helped build its eBird list to 243.

I’m not going to accuse Walt of being a Luddite, but he was certainly slow to come around to eBird. For that reason, you won’t find much record of Walt Chambers in a current eBird query. Fortunately, he did take meticulous handwritten notes of his sightings, so we can at least enter them into eBird for perpetuity.

Certainly, Walt’s most extraordinary contributions to Georgia birding are his findings of what is to this day the world’s southernmost Ivory Gull at West Point Dam on January 25, 2010 and the only record of Red-faced Warbler east of the Mississippi at Dowdell’s Knob (Pine Mountain) on



Walt Chambers. Photo provided by the authors.

In Memoriam: Walt Chambers *(continued from page 5)*

April 27, 2010. For scale, the second most easterly report of Red-faced Warbler is at the Texas-Louisiana border just below Lake Charles, Louisiana, almost 600 miles away. So, this bird was WAY out of its normal range.

Some might say Walt "lucked" into the incredible bird sightings he documented, but the truth is in order to be "lucky" you have to be out there, and Walt was someone who was out there looking for birds on a daily, religious basis. As he would say, "You have to play to win."

Like many great birders, Walt understood the movement patterns of birds. He would look for habitats that were good for a particular species and check those places obsessively when that species was most likely to be migrating through. Walt also understood that rare birds are around us all the time. He frequently made the statement, "They call them vagrants for a reason. A lost bird is just lost. That's why you have to check the large bodies of water all year, not just in winter." He taught me that the only way to be sure not to find birds is not to look. They are out there waiting to be discovered. I can hear him saying right now, "If you want to see a Hudsonian Godwit in Georgia, you just need to start checking shorebird habitat along the Chattahoochee corridor in the second and third week of May."



Beyond the rarities, Walt greatly expanded our knowledge of the breeding, wintering, and migratory ranges of birds in West Central Georgia. Perhaps the most notable of these was his discovery of an isolated breeding population of Black-throated Green Warblers at Pine Mountain (Harris Co.) in June 2009, the southernmost breeding population of this species in North America.

It's important to recognize that just because an area isn't a popular birding destination for humans, it might still be a good

Blue-headed Vireo. Photo by Walt Chambers.

place for birds. This is how new hotspots get discovered, and this is essentially how Walt came to find Oxbow Meadows.

I (Mitchell) am by no means a top-notch birder, and I know many of those reading this are in the same category as me. If you really want to improve your birding skills and try to be the kind of person finding great birds instead of chasing great birds other people find, take a few notes out of Walt's "Rite in the Rain" notepads. Get out there and look for good habitat. Check your local fields, forests, parks, lakes, and ponds on a regular basis. Keep your eyes to the sky at an outdoor sporting event. Check powerlines and fences when you're driving around. Check places when you just get a weird gut feeling to check them. For the best of birders, this is as normal as breathing, but to those just getting started, or hoping to improve, it's much more important than you think.

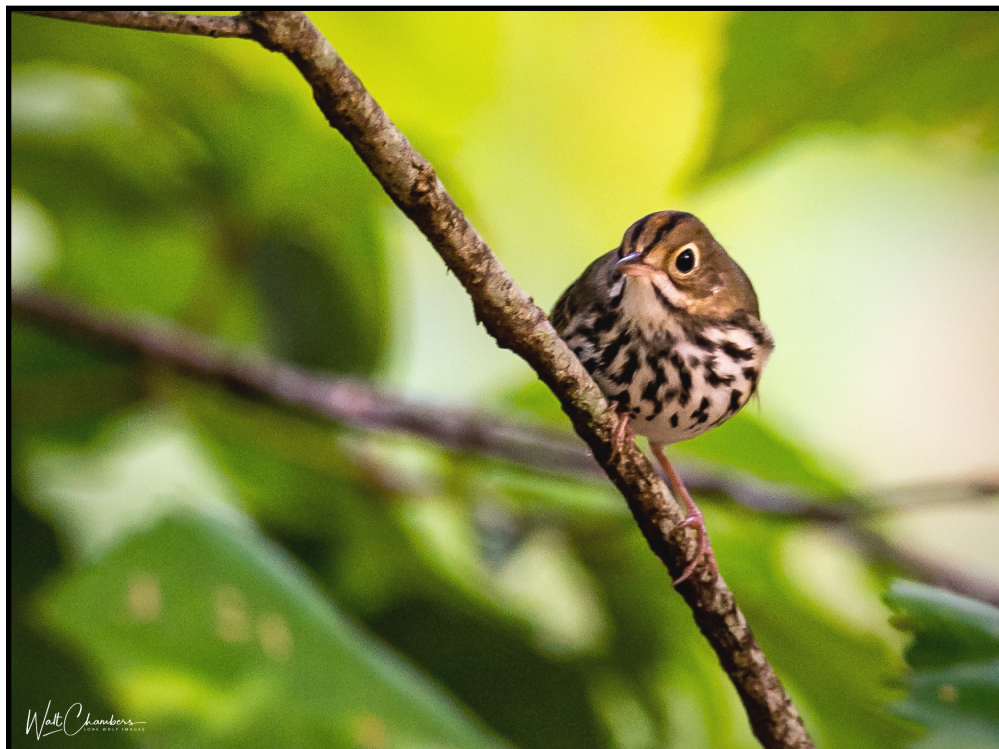
In Memoriam: Walt Chambers *(continued from page 6)*

The void of Walt's untimely passing will be felt in the birding community for years to come. To honor his legacy, a memorial fund is being established with the goal of improving habitat and birding accessibility at Oxbow Meadows. A celebration of life event is also being planned for a safer time for gathering, hopefully this June around his birthday, where we plan to exhibit some of Walt's stunning photography and hope to have prints available for purchase to help fund said memorial.

Lastly, if you are ever birding Oxbow Meadows in the third week of May, keep a lookout for a Hudsonian Godwit because one day, with the right conditions and a little bit of luck, you most definitely will find one.

Note: Below are some of Walt's most strikingly rare finds in Georgia, but he was responsible for countless local rarities to the West Central Georgia area as well.

Bell's Vireo / Oxbow Meadows / April 2000 (first state record)
White-faced Ibis / Bradley Unit Eufaula NWR / March 2002 (first state record)
Cackling Goose / Oxbow Meadows / 1/6/2007
Smith's Longspur / Marshallville Super Sod / 12/24/2007 (first state record)
Snowy Plover / Jekyll Island / Glynn Co. / 12/29/2007
Northern Goshawk / Eufaula NWR / 10/21/2008
Ivory Gull / West Point Dam / 1/25/2010 (first state record)
Red-faced Warbler / Dowdell's Knob / 4/27/2010 (first state record)
Sprague's Pipit / Marshallville Super Sod / 12/3/2010 and 11/29/2012
Black-legged Kittiwake / West Point Dam / 1/16/2011
Sabine's Gull / West Point Dam / 10/1/2012 and 9/1/2019
Neotropic Cormorant / Walter F. George Dam / 6/7/2020 (first state record)



Ovenbird. Photo by Walt Chambers.

WALKING to the SOUND of WINTER*BY DANIEL ROPER*

To what limits do seasons echo?

In Ridge Valley's piney forests and highlands
first frost chimes in cold-season symphonies
performed by vagrant virtuoso woods-winds.

Golden-crowned kinglets in treetops flash
pert head-stripes while sweetly mimicking
the drowsy chirr of autumnal crickets;
stub-tail upright in jaunty salute,
a winter wren unfolds her rolling
tuneful whistle from a log perch;
a yellow-bellied sapsucker presses
his breast to yonder hickory's darkly
furrowed bark, voicing nasal couplets –
“Nee-ya! Nee-ya!”

These merrymakers vanish before April,
taking their songs to new lands, winging
to distant places unvisited by the wanderer
till he began walking beneath a pack
striding north, each year picking up
where he'd left off before, treading
worn paths, farther and farther
from Springer Mountain.

One June morning eleven years
later, he shrugged away his burden
on Virginia's Pine Mountain, took
note of spring's birdsong
closed his eyes
understood.

Here was the sound
of December
back home.



Golden-crowned Kinglet. Photo by Dan Vickers.



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Photo by Dan Vickers.

159 Counties or 50 Shades of Dirt on My White Sedan

By Cathy McGraw

Who knew that Georgia had 159 counties – more than any state except Texas? Yes, many of my fellow birders knew, but I didn't until mid-year 2020. I can now say that I have visited them all — and have the eBird lists to prove it. What a terrific way to see all parts of our great state! Due to COVID-19, I found myself with a lot of free time and a need to get outside. After birding the counties around my home, I decided to take day trips farther away. And as birders know, once you start looking for birds, you just can't stop. Birding is a complete escape. You focus on listening for the familiar songs and the movement in the trees or on the ground. It gives your mind a much-needed break from whatever is bothering you. I was ready to explore further, and realized I hadn't even seen 25% of the counties in Georgia. There was so much more to see, and I was ready to try for all 159 counties. My goal was a simple count of 10 birds in every county. Easy peasy.

I bought a State Parks Annual Pass, a Lands Pass from the GA DNR, and a really good street map of the state. I planned my routes based on eBird's hotspots for each county (if available) and figured out which spots and counties were close to each other, and I hit the road. If it wasn't raining, I was birding. I found that the state parks are a real treasure. They have everything that a bird (and birder) needs to be happy. Each has some form of natural water – river, creek, lake; most have a mix of pine and deciduous trees, and some form of open area; plus, they all have restrooms! I've visited more than 30 state parks. Farm ponds are also really good locations, with a surprisingly diverse species population.

I've had some really memorable sightings. The Brown Booby on Lake Lanier was a really exciting bird to see, and it was fun to meet other bird-chasers. The angry Red-breasted Nuthatches in Dawson Forest were memorable, as were the Evening Grosbeaks in Murray County. It was fun finding the Burrowing Owl in Miller County and the Rough-legged Hawk and Vermillion Flycatcher in Thomas County. The Wood Stork in Berrien County was another rare find, along with, most recently, an Ash-throated Flycatcher in Chatham County. I've seen Bald Eagles in more than 20 counties and bluebirds in more than that. There are many places that I will visit again: Dyar Pasture in Greene County, Tugaloo State Park in Franklin County, Oconee River Greenway in Baldwin County (so many loud Red-headed Woodpeckers!), and Paradise Public Fishing Area (PFA) in Berrien County, just to name a few. The coastal counties are also a treasure.

After missing a few rare birds, such as going to Milton "Buddy" Hopkins Nature Preserve in Ben Hill County, but missing the Red Junglefowl in Fitzgerald a few miles away, I started subscribing to eBird's Rare Bird Alerts for the counties I was going to visit prior to my travel. (And then I'd turn off the alerts after I visited, because I didn't want to know what I had missed!)

I've learned a lot. I learned that, while 10 species doesn't sound like many, some counties seemed like a bird desert. In some counties I would see 25 to 30 species in a half hour; in other counties, I'd give up with only three species after an hour. I just had to move on. I learned that eBird hotspots are a great place to start, but sometimes, stopping along a road where there may be a little stream and brushy habitat is an ideal place to look for our feathered friends. I learned that there are spots where there isn't cell service, and reading a map and knowing which direction you're travelling are paramount. I learned that your local library has recorded books for free. And I learned that you get better at birding the more you do it.

159 Counties or 50 Shades of Dirt on My White Sedan (continued from page 9)

I completed my 159-county journey in 11 months. It started out slowly, but I visited 100 counties between November and January. When I scheduled my last oil change, they asked if I was sure since I had been there just a month earlier. Yeeup – 6,000 miles on the back roads of Georgia in a month. Thanks to the birders before me who added eBird hotspots in some of the less-birded counties. I'm ready for my next goal, and I can't wait for spring migration. Happy birding!

***Never Bird in the Road* – a Book for All Birders**

By Phillip Prichard

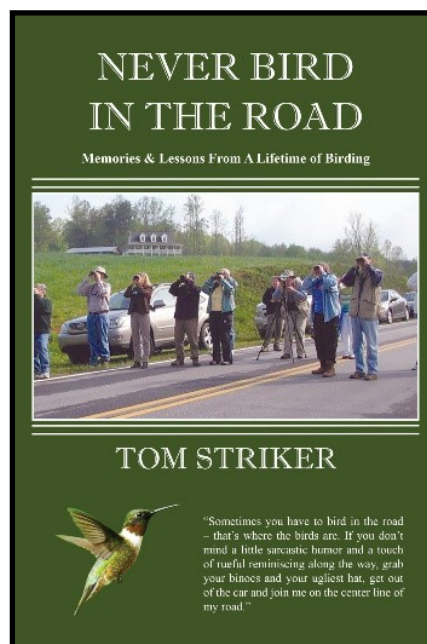
Never Bird in the Road is a book for birders – new birders, veteran birders, and those who may already be birders but just don't know it yet. Part memoir, part birding adventures, and part how-to, *Never Bird in the Road* is a fun read, packed with cool birds, cool places and great birding info.

Tom Striker is a resident of Blue Ridge, Georgia. The book covers his birding expertise for more than 50 years. In the foreword, it states, "Success is when you look back at your life and the memories make you smile." When you finish the book, you will be able to see how this sums up Tom Striker. The actual foreword is written by Tom's daughter, Lynda Striker Robinson, who wanted to title the book, *Learning to Bird in 7,362 Easy Steps*.

The birding bug bit Tom Striker when he was studying forestry as a grad school student. His outdoor final exam in ornithology ("See that bird? Write it down...") made him the birder that he is today. He's been behind binoculars ever since. Fifteen years with the U.S. Forest Service took him to Lake Tahoe, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Vermont. Never a "timber beast," his wildlife work included Kirtland's Warbler and the Mack Lake Fire, a 25,000-acre runaway prescribed burn that helped bring the "Bird of Fire" back from the edge of extinction. Black-backed Woodpeckers, Wisconsin Sharp-tailed Grouse, and restoration of the Peregrine Falcon to a historic Vermont cliff were some of his extraordinary career moments.

He took time out to earn an MBA. He changed careers to work for 15 years with BellSouth. He took an early retirement to own a bird store in Blue Ridge, a quaint mountain town. The bird store served as headquarters for birding adventures to Florida, the Georgia Coast, the sky islands of Arizona, and the below-sea-level Salton Sea. He led numerous Christmas Bird Counts plus other citizen science activities. Ten bird-filled days in Ecuador added hundreds of birds to his life list. He taught "birding classes for old people," led hundreds of bird walks and Saturday seminars packed with details about bird feeding, dealing with squirrels and black bears, and attracting hummers, bluebirds, and purple martins. If you want to know birds, *Never Bird in the Road* is a good place to start.

The book is written in such a way that it seems like Tom is just carrying on a conversation with the reader. As I read the book, it seemed to be leading you to Tom's next adventure. Tom is labeled as a superb teacher. *Never Bird in the Road* will make a great addition to any birder's library.



My Clarkston Birding Year

By Drew Whitelegg

One evening in late 2019, I was perusing eBird maps for DeKalb County, which comprises the eastern part of Atlanta. I was intrigued not by presence, but by absence: the lack of red and blue sighting markers in what seemed to be a quite substantial part of the county. Zooming in on one location, I was surprised to find relatively few records of even common resident species, especially in comparison to neighborhoods such as Decatur and Tucker.

The area in question was Clarkston, a city of about 13,000 straddling Interstate 285 in one direction and a major CSX railroad in the other. As a teacher, I had gotten to know the city well, as well as numerous refugee families living in its apartment complexes. Indeed, some of my students had helped me with Christmas Bird Counts. The city has been heralded as one of the most diverse in the nation. Not for nothing has it been christened the Ellis Island of the South.

However, if I knew a fair amount about the people of Clarkston, I knew next to nothing about its birdlife. And more importantly, neither did many other folks, at least according to eBird. It was with this in mind that I decided that rather than chasing rare species around the Atlanta area, I would confine myself in 2020 to much closer to home. I would bird all year only in Clarkston and its overlapping 30021 zip code. In doing so I hoped to fill in the gaps on the map.

I subsequently submitted 585 completed checklists from across the six-square-mile area from January to December. Friendship Forest (114 species), newly renovated with Audubon Society money, was the flagship site, for sure, and it was nice to share my enthusiasm with other birders drawn to the hotspot partly by my reports. I found 75 species at Forty Oaks and 70 at Milam Park, which doubled the number of recorded species at these two hotspots. In doing so I documented a whole year at these existing sites, as opposed to just a few selective visits. However, there were also new locations: Stoneview Park (70 species), an industrial estate near the 285 (66 species), and a kudzu-covered wasteland in an old builder's yard (66 species); even the schools (closed due to COVID-19) and library yielded more than 60 species each.

There were some obvious highlights: a Connecticut Warbler, Marsh Wren, breeding Broad-winged Hawks (Friendship Forest), a Wilson's Warbler in the woods behind Milam Park, a Swainson's Warbler, along with both waterthrushes in the swampy area at Stoneview Park. But what about more everyday birds? How were they faring? Using eBird data, I was able to compare the frequency of birds in Clarkston to the DeKalb County annual average for the species. Red-headed Woodpeckers clearly love the place, as do Swainson's Thrush, Brown Creepers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Green Herons and American Robins. Birds underrepresented, however, included chickadees, titmice, cardinals, towhees and Carolina Wrens, along with a number of the warblers (if anyone wants to look at all the data, I will willingly share it). Interestingly, Pileated Woodpeckers were also underrepresented, the only woodpecker to be so.

However, data and checklists don't reflect the whole birding experience, thank goodness. A major part of my birding year was just being on the streets and in the woods, especially during such

My Clarkston Birding Year *(continued from page 11)*

fraught times of lockdown. The minutiae of social interactions became precious droplets of hope: the teenagers on their bikes yelling “Mister, Mister, look at that bird!” (a Red-shouldered Hawk); the Rohingya man who emerged from his house thinking I was the county tree surgeon (I was watching some Pine Siskins), from which a conversation about the state of the world developed; the Ethiopian woman who stopped to admire (another) Red-shouldered Hawk and who then just started speaking to me in fluent Italian; the Red-headed Woodpecker lovers, stopping to stare and point and smile through their face masks.

And then, of course, as this was birding, there was also sadness. A Red-tailed Hawk (so dark we thought it might have been a Western bird) behaving so oddly that I called Audubon’s Melanie Furr, who expertly captured it and took it to rescue. But it was malnourished and full of parasites, and did not survive. The Mallard ducks that I actually stopped the traffic for to help them get to safety took up residence at Friendship Forest and then one by one disappeared, despite three reaching flying age. Perhaps they made it, but one local said he had seen piles of feathers, so most likely not. Last, but not least, the death of one of the habitats I had found – the woodland which gave me the Wilson’s Warbler, now razed to the ground as part of Clarkston’s gentrification. If nothing else, maybe knowing what is there helps us understand what we have lost.



Melanie Furr, the injured Red-tailed Hawk, and Drew Whitelegg. Photo provided by Drew.

Youth Birding Competition 2021

By Tim Keyes

Out of safety concerns regarding COVID-19, Georgia’s 15th annual Youth Birding Competition has been postponed from April 23-24 to September 24-25, 2021. The awards banquet on September 25th that caps the competition is also moving, from Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center near Mansfield to Indian Springs State Park in Flovilla, just north of Forsyth.

The popular 24-hour birdathon involves teams of youth from kindergarten to high school seniors counting bird species statewide, then enjoying an awards banquet. For the first time, the banquet will be held at Indian Springs’ Idlewild Event Center, a beautiful setting in a central location for competing birders as well as winners in the event’s T-shirt art contest. The registration deadline is July 31st and students who complete their senior year in high school this spring or summer will remain eligible to take part in the fall competition.

Visit georgiawildlife.com/YBC for competition updates and other details.

The Distracting Pleasure of Birding

By Daniel Roper

I began backpacking the Appalachian Trail with too many erroneous ideas about carrying a heavy pack long distances up steep mountains in Georgia humidity. I started with visions of open trails through parklike woodlands (with an occasional climb), allowing time to swim, read, throw a Frisbee, relax in hammocks, and fix tasty meals. Little of that proved true.

In reality, backpacking the AT in Georgia in summertime is an overwhelming sensory experience: heat, humidity, chafing, rain, lightning, wasps, poisonous vipers, exhaustion, dehydration, blisters, biting gnats, interminable climbs, knee-jarring descents, torn clothing, mouse-violated food stores, filtering water, unsatisfying snacks (that seemed to promise tastiness when added to the backpack), sore shoulders, cramping back muscles, longing thoughts for home and ice and a comfortable place to sit and clean sheets and hot showers and hamburgers. It wasn't all those things all the time, but usually, at any moment, there were two or three or six such things to irritate or vex. And there wasn't any tossing of Frisbees, stopping at lakes for swims, lying in hammocks, or otherwise taking part in an idyllic recreation. It was a constant effort that, in the aggregate, proved challenging, meaningful, satisfying.

Trudging along the trail, I was often too tired to notice the beautiful surroundings. I watched my feet lest I stumble on rocks or roots. I looked down so that the long rise ahead didn't provoke despair. I was enmeshed in thoughts of reaching the next stop or planning for dinner, so that I forgot to notice the views, which (in Georgia) are mostly not really views, just lots of green trees and bushes and gray rocks. When you're really exhausted, or beyond exhausted, all focus is on enduring. There's nothing left for observing.

My first trip on the AT in 2007 was meant to cover the Georgia section (about 75 miles) over a week with my then 12-year-old son. Midway through the first day, I was dragging, suffering from fifth-degree chafing. I wanted it to end quickly.



American Goldfinch. Photo by Dan Vickers.

It was then, walking a stretch of trail through Jarrard Gap near Blood Mountain, that I realized that birding was the one distracting pleasure possible when I was otherwise overwhelmed by weariness and low morale. Even when I wouldn't raise my eyes to admire a lovely wildflower, my ears were attentive to bird calls. At Jarrard Gap it was American Goldfinches and Cedar Waxwings voicing their cheerful tunes.

I didn't achieve my goal of finishing the Georgia section of the AT that year, stopping instead at Neels Gap. Each year since, I've continued north, winding up near Bland, Virginia, last summer. I recall hearing a Broad-winged Hawk on Tray Mountain, a Winter Wren on Indian Mountain, a Veery in the Great Smokies, and a symphony of June birdsong in Virginia that I'd only hear in Georgia in winter (Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, Golden-crowned Kinglet). It was early summer, but it sounded just like December, back home.

The Distracting Pleasure of Birding *(continued from page 13)*

I am an experienced, but not an expert, birder. I don't hike in order to birdwatch. Rather, I bird to enhance the hiking experience. It adds immeasurably to my enjoyment of our southern woods. Walking the AT without knowing birdsong would be like walking in Paris without knowing French. It can be done. It can be enjoyable. But knowing the language adds to the richness and immersion of the experience.

And knowing birdsong is one reason the woods seem like home rather than an alien, forbidding environment.

I've never been to Paris, but this spring I hope to continue up the AT in Virginia. Knowing what birds I can expect heightens the anticipation. Our woodlands are a refuge even more meaningful in these turbulent times, when we go to the woods to recharge and rejuvenate. Birdsong is an important part of the experience.

H. Branch Howe Graduate Student Grant Recipients for 2021

By Georgann Schmalz

Heather Gaya, Ph.D. candidate, Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of Georgia. "Investigating the Relative Roles of Abiotic and Biotic Factors on Songbird Range Limits." Advised by Dr. Richard Chandler. Awarded \$3,000.

Summary: Evaluate the relative roles of biotic and abiotic factors on limiting range distributions of warm-adapted and cool-adapted species. Assess the relationship between bird abundance, temperature, precipitation, and relative humidity across an elevational gradient. Track changes in temperature, precipitation, and relative humidity throughout time to evaluate impacts of climate change on the region.

Lily Martin, M.S. candidate, Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of Georgia. "Using acoustic spatial capture-recapture to estimate owl population density and the effects of anthropogenic noise in the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, Georgia." Advised by Dr. Jeffrey Hepinstall-Cymerman. Awarded \$2,739.

Summary: This study is designed to estimate the population density of Barred Owls (*Strix varia*) and Great Horned Owls (*Bubo virginianus*) in the Chattahoochee River NRA, GA, using acoustic SECR. We will also investigate the relationship between owl density and anthropogenic noise associated with extensive urban development in the study area that may threaten avian populations but whose effects are not yet well understood. The study could have important management implications for urban areas where owls persist if individuals must avoid areas of otherwise suitable habitat.

Matthew Tatz, M.S. candidate, Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of Georgia. "The Relationship Between Mercury, Urbanization and Salmonella in the American White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus*)." Advised by Dr. Sonia Hernandez. Awarded \$3,695.

Summary: Urban environments pose unique opportunities for pathogen transmission and exposure, specifically for *Salmonella*. The primary source of *Salmonella* for White Ibis is environmental uptake. In addition, vehicular gasoline is of particular concern to urban habitats. Emissions of Hg [mercury] from gasoline are not regulated and are transported via urban stormwater runoff, some of which may be settling in and around retention ponds utilized by ibis. As Hg acts as an immunosuppressant in birds, and *Salmonella* is prevalent in urban ibis populations, these factors may be positively correlated. We plan to investigate this correlation by analyzing Hg concentration and *Salmonella* prevalence of the White Ibis.

CAMP *TALON**

Teen **A**dventures **L**earning **O**rnithology and **N**ature

June 5-10, 2021 – St. Simons Island, Georgia

TALON is a one-of-a kind camp for teens with a strong interest in the outdoors, birding, and ecology. Each day the adventure begins as we travel by charter bus to barrier islands, state parks, wildlife management areas and refuges along Georgia's coast. Evening classes challenge our campers with presentations and quizzes about bird identification, songs, behavior, flight, migration, and other "birdy" topics. At camp's end we come home with new and improved birding skills, a better understanding of coastal ecology, and great memories!

Small Camp ~ Exceptional Experience

Length of camp: 6 days, 5 nights



Availability: Space for 20 campers.

Serious students: For beginner to experienced birders who don't mind long, hot, sometimes "buggy" days on beaches and marshes.

Ages: Boys and girls ages 14-19. Older birders who have attended before may be eligible for internships.

3:1 student/teacher ratio. Trips, classes led by biologists, ornithologists and environmental educators, each with 20+ years of experience.

Sponsors: Georgia Department of Natural Resources, TERN, Georgia Ornithological Society, and Georgia Audubon.

Birding Itineraries

Base camp: Jekyll Island 4-H Center..

Potential trips: Little St. Simons Island, Ft. Stewart, Altamaha WMA, St. Simons Island, Andrews Island, Sapelo Island, Cumberland Island, Harris Neck and Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuges.

Registration

Until April 16: \$400 (paid in full).

April 17 – May 7: \$450 (paid in full).

Cancellations after May 7, 2021 will not receive \$100 of the paid registration fee.

Register at <https://georgiawildlife.doubleknot.com/selection/73913>

Contacts Julie Duncan jdwildlife15@gmail.com, 770.313.5762

Bob Sargent bob.sargent@dnr.ga.gov 404.291.8124

*** Note:** This camp is currently tentative as the organizers review current and pending guidance pertaining to hosting events like this during the pandemic. A final decision to proceed with the camp or cancel it will be made on May 1st.

GOShaw



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

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society
PO Box 7642
Macon, GA 31209



Printed on Recycled Paper

Annual Rates for GOS Membership:

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

Please visit <http://www.gos.org/join-us>



Wood Duck. Photo by Walt Chambers.