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GOShawk

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President's Message

By Larry Carlile

Dear Birders,

October of 2021 will mark the end of my term as president of the GOS. I've been serving as an officer on the GOS Executive Committee (EXCOM) since October of 2013; serving as 1st vice president until 2017 and as president since then. I'll continue to sit on the EXCOM as past president until the fall of 2022, and I look forward to two more EXCOM meetings in that role. I'm exceedingly grateful to current and past iterations of the EXCOM for their dedication to the GOS and their skills of discernment. The opportunity to work with such thoughtful people for the past eight-plus years has been very gratifying for me. There is no doubt that the new slate of officers, listed elsewhere in this edition, will successfully continue the good work of the GOS (e.g., planning for future meetings, publication of *The Oriole* and *GOShawk*, and providing funding for student grants, conservation grants, and programs for the benefit of young birders), to the tune of more than \$100K per



Larry Carlile's first meeting as GOS president, spring 2017. Photo by Bob Sargent.

year.

While service on the EXCOM has been gratifying, my favorite part of being active in the GOS is attending meetings of the membership. Seeing old members and becoming acquainted with new ones is always a great joy for me, not to mention the jubilation of observing beautiful birds while in the company of very accomplished birders, both veterans and newbies. Meeting-wise, this past year has been disheartening because we couldn't

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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

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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)

Christopher Celis	St. Simons Island, GA
Joyce Hall	Greenville, SC
Codie and Carrie Mosher	Roswell, 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.



Orchard Oriole. Photo by Dan Vickers.

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

gather for meetings due to the pandemic. It was with much sadness that the EXCOM decided to cancel meetings in the spring and fall of 2020, and the winter of 2021, out of concern for the health of the membership. As of this writing, plans are to meet on Jekyll Island over the Columbus Day holiday. However, your EXCOM will continue to track the pandemic situation in Coastal Georgia as we get closer to the meeting date. Another cancellation is not out of the question, and we'll decide in plenty of time for registrants to get a refund on their hotel bookings. And of course, meeting registration, banquet, and field trip fees will be refunded if a cancellation is deemed necessary.

Finally, I'd like to say thank you to the membership for your continued support of the GOS via your annual membership dues and your service. If you are interested in more active involvement with GOS, check out our webpage (<https://www.gos.org/executive-committee>). Any one of the committee chairs listed there would appreciate your assistance in the execution of their programs. Contact me or any other EXCOM member if you'd like to talk about opportunities for service to the GOS.

Once again, thank you for your support of the GOS. I hope to see you on Jekyll Island, October 8-11, 2021, if all goes well. If not, I hope to see you in the Georgia mountains sometime in May if it is safe to do so. As always, good birding!

In conservation,
Larry Carlile
President, GOS

Nomination Committee Report

We are pleased to report the following slate of nominees for the 2021–2023 GOS officers term:

Ed Maioriello, currently the GOS 2nd president, has offered to serve as president.

Steve Wagner, currently the 1st vice president, has offered to serve another term.

Adam Betuel, conservation director for Georgia Audubon, has offered to serve as 2nd vice president.

Mike Weaver, currently the secretary, has offered to serve another term.

Jeannie Wright has offered to continue her long and invaluable tenure as our treasurer.

Bob Sargent, currently the acting business manager, has offered to replace long-time and now retired GOS business manager Ashley Harrington in that role.

I thank my committee members, Bill Lotz and Bob Sargent, for their help in compiling this slate, which will be voted on during banquet night at our meeting on Jekyll Island in October.

Respectfully submitted by Dan Vickers, committee chair.

Mark Your Calendars Now!
GOS FALL MEETING: October 8-11, 2021

Don't miss GOS's first meeting in almost two years, which will be held at our long-time roost on Jekyll Island. In addition to the usual four days of fabulous birding led by some of Georgia's very best, we will have two captivating and remarkably accomplished speakers on the agenda.

Meeting Hotel Details: Villas by the Sea Resort, 1175 N. Beachview Drive, Jekyll Island, GA. Call 912-635-2521, 800-841-6262, or visit www.villasbythesearesort.com. The cut-off date for the GOS room rate is September 8, 2021, and "GOS Conference" is the group code. For more information visit www.gos.org

On Friday night Adam Betuel will present "Conservation in the Built Environment." Adam has a B.S. in zoology from Ohio State University and studied the White-throated Sparrow while a graduate student at Indiana State University. He has conducted avian field research across the eastern U.S. and South America. In 2015, Adam became the first conservation director for Georgia Audubon. In this role, he manages multiple programs focused on making Georgia more bird-friendly. He primarily works on reducing threats to birds, such as collisions with buildings, habitat restoration, educating people on the value of native plants, growing community science programs, and leading birdwatching travel. He loves connecting people to nature through the lens of birds.



Adam Betuel. Photo provided by Adam.



Tom Stephenson. Photo provided by Tom.

On Saturday night Tom Stephenson will present "How to Study and Learn Bird Songs (and Memorize Anything!)." Tom has been birding since he was a young man under the tutelage of Dr. Arthur Allen of Cornell University. His articles and photographs are in museums and many publications, including *Birding*, *Birdwatcher's Digest*, *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, *Handbook of the Mammals of the World*, *Birds of Madagascar*, and *Guide to the Birds of SE Brazil*. Tom has donated numerous recordings of Eastern Himalayan rarities and other Asian species to Cornell's Macaulay Library of natural sounds. For several years he was on Zeiss's digiscoping team for the World Series of Birding, and in 2011 his and Scott Whittle's team won the World Series Cape Island Cup. In 2014 Tom and Scott set the U.S. record for a Photo Big Day, taking pictures of 208 species in one 24-hour period. His latest book, *The Warbler Guide*, is published by Princeton University Press and recently won the National Outdoor Book Award. The Warbler Guide App won the 2015 Design Award for the AAUP Book, Jacket and Journal Show. His app,

BirdGenie, helps bird enthusiasts identify more than 150 common vocalizations in the eastern and western U.S. by recording them on their smart phones. BirdGenie won the prestigious PROSE award from the American Association of Publishers.

Audubon's Hog Island Camp in Maine

By Amit Kamma

The first thing I noticed when I arrived at Audubon's Hog Island Camp in Maine was, ironically enough, nothing. As I stumbled onto the mist-shrouded island following a shorter-than-expected boat ride, I took a moment to remain quiet and simply listen. Even as I heard the ocean waves crashing onto the shore and a faint Black-capped Chickadee singing in the trees nearby, it still felt like I was hearing *nothing*. As someone who has spent my entire life living in the city, I have become used to the consistent hum of human noise that seems to fill the backgrounds of most of our lives. Here at Hog Island, there was no such background noise, only the sounds of nature, creating a version of relative "silence" that I would find so magnificent. It was against this tranquil backdrop that my camp cohort would spend the next few days birding. And, oh, how amazing the birding was! Set within Maine's Muscongus Bay, pressed right up against the coast of the mainland yet still surrounded by the ocean, Hog Island was primed to be an ideal locale for birding waterbirds and songbirds alike.

On our first day at camp, we took a boat ride to our most far-flung destination of the trip, Monhegan Island. I saw many incredible birds, most of which were new to me, both at Monhegan and on the way there. But perhaps no species was more memorable than the enchanting Wilson's Storm Petrels. They were quite abundant in the deeper parts of the bay, and their behavior was truly something to marvel at. Each bird was no bigger than my hand, and they had a great energy to them. The petrels darted all over the place, swooping and climbing above the water with great speed. Every few seconds, they would buzz across the water's surface, skimming for plankton. Their youthful energy was refreshing, thrilling, and comforting all at once. Seeing these birds perform their acrobatics out over the water, I was reminded of how unique of an experience this boat ride was. If not for the generous and rewarding scholarship provided by the Georgia Ornithological Society, I would not be off the coast of Hog Island, watching these storm petrels at play in their inaccessible habitat.

After spending an afternoon on Monhegan Island, we boated back to Hog Island, circling the esteemed Eastern Egg Rock along the way. Egg Rock was a bustling metropolis of seabirds, and among the thousands of Common Terns breeding on the island, we spotted Roseate Terns, a Razorbill, as well as a pair of the species I had most hoped to see on this trip: the unflagging Arctic Tern. But perhaps the most fabled bird to be seen on this trip was that magical alcid, the Atlantic Puffin! One could feel the excitement peaking on the port side of the boat as puffins floated into view along the coast of Egg Rock. These pudgy birds were a marvel to watch in flight, beating their wings with great urgency and flying in impossibly straight lines as their intricate and colorful beaks gleamed in the sunshine. The puffins of Egg Rock weren't just any normal ones, however. This colony was the product of Project Puffin, the first seabird restoration project in the world. Founded almost forty years ago, the project has aimed to restore puffins to the islands of southern and central Maine where their natural colonies were largely wiped out. Egg Rock was the first island where these extraordinary birds were successfully resettled.



A tranquil scene from Hog Island. Photo by Amit Kamma.

Audubon's Hog Island Camp in Maine *(continued from page 5)*

During a leisurely morning bird walk on the mainland a couple of days later, my group would happen to run into Steve Kress himself, the founder of Project Puffin. Kress had dreamt up the idea for the restoration project after reading a book from the Hog Island library, located in the very same building where we campers convened every night for the bird tally. Occurrences like this one truly display how much history and scientific importance surrounded us at Hog Island. It was both a secluded birding getaway and a place to be near the most cutting-edge research and many of the best birding minds in the world.



Long-tailed Ducks at Hog Island. Photo by Amit Kamma.

While birding during camp was certainly marvelous, I equally enjoyed many of the non-birding aspects. The food, always grown locally, was absolutely delicious and was served graciously by the selfless volunteers from Friends of Hog Island. They were part of the community on the island that consistently made everyone feel welcome, comfortable, and simply happy to be there. The instructors, guest speakers, and fellow campers all contributed to an incredibly friendly atmosphere, making Hog Island an experience to cherish and remember for birders of all types.

On our last full day on the island, we refrained from birding for the afternoon, instead spreading out across the island to write alone. One of our instructors was a talented nature artist, and all campers received sketchbooks in which we would sketch and write about the natural world around us. Throughout the week, I sketched more birds than I can count, wrote poems about the landscape of the island, and journaled about myself

whenever I could. On that final afternoon on the island, as I sat cross-legged, pressed up against a log at the spot where the dense forest met the rocky beach of Midden Cove, I began to write about what the instructors had told us earlier that day. They told us to remember that life operated in cycles, similar to the seasons. This cycle of my life — the Hog Island one — was coming to a close. Nevertheless, the experiences and knowledge I took from it would give birth to a new one, lasting for the rest of my life. As I wrote about my cycle, hearing nothing but the waves gently lapping up on the shore and the distant croaks of a Great Black-backed Gull, I felt fulfilled, knowing that I would return to Georgia a richer man. Hog Island didn't just show me dozens of spectacular new birds, it showed me how to coexist better with other humans, how to find peace wherever I looked, and, most importantly, how to better exist within and be a good servant of the natural world that surrounds us.

Hog Island Camp

By Luca Antinozzi

As a high schooler who watches birds in his free time, there are limited chances to hear someone describe your excursions as “cool,” but that is what I’ve heard again and again in the weeks after I returned from Hog Island. Something along the lines of: “Oh, you saw a puffin. Those are cool. They’re cute.” I didn’t start birding for peer validation, but I think the balance of the hardcore with the amiable, and the new with the old, is what makes Hog Island such a special place.

Hog Island Camp *(continued from page 6)*

Probably the most unique birding experience we had was with a Black-throated Green Warbler that had a very odd song that confused several birders and led to 15 people staring at a dense stand of shrubs looking for a bird no one could see. We were absolutely baffled by this flitting warbler that was singing a different song than usual, one which did not fit any bird species correctly. I did find this to be interesting, as I'm sure many of you do, but I could hardly blame my peers if they had trouble given the necessity of enduring mosquito bites, sweat, and miles of walking for that. But a puffin? Everyone can understand the appeal of those fluffy little devoted parents.

When I walked onto the dock below the Queen Mary Lab (built in 1850), I did not expect to learn that innovative conservation techniques were developed on that very island. Nor did I expect to take part in active conservation efforts. But in the following days, I was provided an amazing opportunity to learn so much from and about an amazing concentration of naturalists from many distinctive backgrounds. I was able to speak to seabird researchers, Big Year birders, and nature illustrators, to name a few. I was deeply affected by both the influence of this diverse and unique collection of conservationists and the unique wonder of Maine's coastal ecosystems. My visit to Hog Island was an incredible experience and has allowed me to gain a new appreciation for my place in the world's ecosystems as well as my place among its naturalists.



Some of the Hog Island residents were not thrilled about the presence of the campers. Photo by Luca Antinozzi.



Hog Island Camp's class of 2021. GOS scholarship recipient Luca Antinozzi is fifth from the left.

Making the Most of Migration

By Josiah Lavender

In the cool hour before dawn, I stood shivering beneath a pale gray sky. A light breeze rushed tattered clouds eastward, remnants of the previous day's storm system. I shivered partly from cold, partly from caffeine-fueled adrenaline, and partly from excitement. I was doing what birders call a Big Day — an attempt to detect as many bird species as possible in 24 hours — with three friends: John Mark Simmons, Mac McCall, and Patrick Maurice. It was 6 a.m. on a chilly morning in late April, and we had been awake for several hours. We had spent the last six of those listening for night birds and rails, with good success. We heard Eastern Whip-poor-Will, Eastern Screech-Owl, and three different species of rails at an inland location. We spent some of the night hours in quiet areas, listening for nocturnal migrants, the best of which was a Veery that called as it passed over us about 2 a.m. I particularly enjoyed this part of the night, as listening to nocturnal flight calls (NFCs, as they are often referred to) has always filled me with awe. They drift down to us as faint auditory reminders of the incredible phenomenon happening overhead while we sleep — millions of tiny birds, some (like the Veery) weighing just an ounce or less, passing on a journey that will take them thousands of miles, using mind-boggling navigation systems. Migration was precisely what we aimed to take advantage of on this day, and birds like the Veery were a good omen for the coming daylight hours.

Once sunlight struck the tops of the newly-leaved trees at the State Botanical Garden of Georgia, bird activity peaked and remained steady for the next two hours. We walked the garden's Orange Trail, picking up Blue-winged, Swainson's, Tennessee, and Black-throated Blue Warblers, as well as a continuing Lincoln's Sparrow, a rare migrant in Georgia. Near the beaver pond, among an abundance of warbler and vireo songs, we heard the buzzy, accelerating song of a Cerulean Warbler — one of our best birds during the Big Day. The new boardwalk over the beaver pond gave us a clear view of the east-facing edge of the forest, where we added a few more species to our total as they foraged in the sunlit patches of the trees. As we stood on the boardwalk, eyes fixed on the newly-leaved hardwoods in front of us, the rising sun filtered through the woods behind us and illuminated more of the trees across the pond. Water droplets dangling from fresh leaves sparkled in the light, reminders of the previous day's rain that probably grounded many of the birds we were seeing. Bright male Cape May Warblers chased each other through the oaks, flashing their brilliant chestnut cheek patches and speckled yellow undersides. A Rose-breasted Grosbeak joined the chorus from the treetops, and the buzzy "beer beer beerrr" of a Black-throated Blue Warbler emanated from the boxelders along the river. Ah, yes. This is why I love birding, I thought to myself. But there was no time to pause and enjoy our serene surroundings. We hurried on, making the most of the early-morning hours.



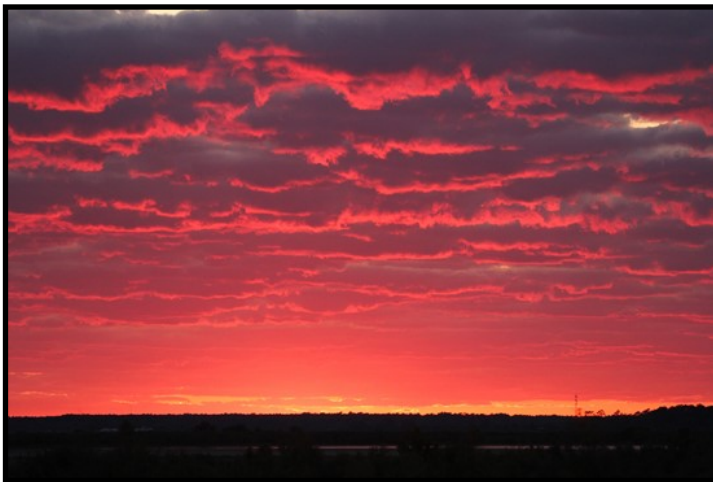
Black-crowned Night-Heron cruising over a wetland at Altamaha WMA. Photo by Josiah Lavender.

We left the botanical garden in high spirits, having tallied 21 warblers and several other species, both migratory and resident. We began making our way south, stopping for breeding birds such as Prairie and Prothonotary Warblers, and a Cooper's Hawk. A visit to the pine forests of Fort Stewart turned out to be hectic, as we had to navigate treacherous mud that blocked our entry

Making the Most of Migration *(continued from page 8)*

via the dirt roads on the site. We lost time trying to determine whether Patrick's sedan would make it through, but eventually we had to abandon the car and jog in. The stop yielded a few excellent target species, such as Bachman's Sparrow and Red-cockaded Woodpecker, as well as a surprise Sharp-shinned Hawk — a bird that would normally already be well on its way to the boreal forests of southern Canada. Next, we headed for the coast.

It was 3:30 p.m., and the expanse of marshy impoundments at Butler Island Plantation on Altamaha WMA stretched out on all sides. The sun beat down on our necks where they had been rubbed by our binocular straps. We had gone from shivering during the night to sweating in the humid air of the coastal spring. We had little time to dwell on discomfort, though. Butler Island, much like other parts of the Altamaha River delta, is rich in birdlife. The marshes were alive with Bobolinks singing and calling two hundred plus foraging in the tall rice. We climbed one of the observation towers and scoped our surroundings. The mudflats and shallow pools were alive with Least Sandpipers, Blue-winged Teal, American Coots, and Common Gallinules. Among these, we found a White-rumped Sandpiper, one of our best birds of the day. A little later, we saw a Purple Gallinule foraging in the reeds, its beautiful iridescent plumage shining in the afternoon sun. Mac spotted a Least Bittern as it flushed from the marsh, and I briefly saw it before it disappeared again — characteristic behavior of this secretive species. A Red-breasted Merganser in one of the more water-logged impoundments, probably a lingering winter bird, was one of our most unexpected finds at Altamaha. There is usually very little time to pause and enjoy any particular bird during a Big Day, but I did allow myself a few seconds to admire a brilliantly colored male Painted Bunting perched atop a reed. Moments such as these helped me momentarily relax from the adrenaline-fueled mania of bird listing that characterized the day.



Sunset over the East River as seen from Andrews Island.
Photo by Josiah Lavender.

One of the most productive locations we visited was Gould's Inlet, a famous shorebird spot on the southern part of St. Simons Island. As the tide comes in, hundreds of resting shorebirds, terns and gulls disperse from the numerous sandbars located a few hundred yards offshore as they disappear beneath the rising tide. As a result, we timed our visit to coincide with the incoming tide. We scanned the sandbars with our scopes, picking out less common species among hoards of pelicans, cormorants, skimmers, and Royal Terns. As the tide came in, many of the birds took off and flew past us where we stood on the beach. We found Marbled Godwits, Wilson's Plovers, and an American Oystercatcher. Five Whimbrels flew

over, another shorebird species that can be difficult to find. We decided to break from scoping the sandbars and walk to the tidal pools further down the beach, where we might find a Reddish Egret or Piping Plover. As we folded our tripods and began walking, I spotted a small falcon cruising high over the beach toward the row of houses behind the dunes. I called to the others, and they quickly got on it, all confirming that it was a Merlin — our final raptor of the day and leaving Peregrine Falcon as the only Georgia raptor we didn't see. I entered the Merlin into my eBird checklist, and checked the day's total, confirming my suspicion: the Merlin was species number 181. I announced this to the group, and I could see the elation in their faces. I was not

Making the Most of Migration *(continued from page 9)*

with them, but my teammates had previously done a big day in 2019, tallying 180 species. The fact that we had surpassed their previous total with more than two hours of daylight left meant we were on good track to beat the record. The strain that we had all felt to use every moment to our advantage while fighting increasing fatigue faded slightly and we felt a new, refreshing burst of motivation. This came in the nick of time, for the last push of the day was ahead of us.

The final location we visited during the daylight hours was Andrews Island, a dredge spoil site near the Brunswick Marina to which we had special access. Along the causeway we heard Clapper Rails and Marsh Wrens and saw a second Merlin, but the real show was on the spoil site itself. Upon reaching the top of the dike, we looked out over thousands of shorebirds foraging in the shallow water and on the mudflats below. We stopped at a suitable vantage point and set up our spotting scopes. Peering through them, we called out each new species as we found it: Long-billed Dowitcher, Semipalmated Sandpiper, American Avocet, Bonaparte's Gull, Stilt Sandpiper. As the designated list keeper, I watched our total climb to 192 and stay there. After a while, Patrick spotted a Lesser Scaup feeding among thirty-odd Ruddy Ducks. We had tied the record! Still, I didn't mention our total to the others. It hovered at 193, and I alone was anxious as I waited for us to find one more species. Hours seemed to pass as we searched for new birds, even though it was probably only 30 minutes. The sun was setting, and fatigue was at last beginning to take over. Our feet dragged as we searched for Common Ground-Dove in a scrubby area of the site with no luck. The sky over the Andrews Sound turned a brilliant gold as the sunbeams illuminated the patchy clouds in the fading light. Terns and gulls flew by heading to their roost, giving their melancholy calls as they passed. The sky turned from gold to a brilliant pink. Then we heard something — a familiar "peent" coming from somewhere high up. "Common Nighthawk!" exclaimed Mac. We all looked up, and sure enough, cruising overhead were not one, but three Common Nighthawks. They were followed by two more, all coming from the West. Here, silhouetted against the brilliant sky, gently gliding on buoyant wings, was the species that broke our record. For a moment, I forgot my fatigue. In fact, I forgot everything except that we had achieved our goal. After 17 years, we had set a new record for the Georgia Big Day.

A while later, after we took a brief selfie with the sunset in the background, I paused. Patrick, Mac and John Mark looked at me expectantly. All I said was, "One ninety-four." Every one of their faces lit up with a broad smile and we exchanged high fives. Had not most of us been awake for more than 36 hours, I think the celebration would have been more lively, but it was enough to convey the satisfaction and delight that we all felt. We tallied a few more species before the day was over, to reach 196, but this was the moment most of us will remember for years to come. At 12:45 a.m. we retired to our hotel beds. We were utterly exhausted, but we slept knowing we had set a record for Georgia, one that at least a couple of us, myself included, had dreamed about setting since we were little kids.



The whole team from left to right: John Mark, Mac, Patrick and Josiah. Taken shortly after breaking the record. Photo by John Mark Simmons.

A Morning Bird Walk

By Joseph Knapp

The day's plans called for a morning bird walk along the nearby Chattahoochee River, but before heading out I made one last-minute call to the GOS Rare Bird Alert. "A wintering Magnificent Hummingbird has been sighted in Georgia," declared the voice on the hotline. More winter hummer sightings have been turning up in the South recently, but this was incredible, a Magnificent just thirty minutes away. I scribbled directions furiously, hung up dazed, then wildly threw bird book, gloves, hat, coat, and maps into the car, hopped in and raced to the top of the driveway. "My binoculars! I forgot my binoculars!" I backed down the drive, ran into the house, grabbed the specs, rushed back out to the car, then paused before jumping into the driver's seat. "What else have I forgotten?" "Honk, honk," came the overhead reply. I smiled as six familiar sights, Canada Geese wintering on our subdivision lake, winged through the early morning mist. As they disappeared over the treetops, an early-rising Song Sparrow and a Carolina Wren tried to out-sing each other from opposite ends of our Red-tipped Photinia hedge.

Below the frosted hedge, I could hear a rustling. I stepped behind the car for a better look and found our resident pair of Eastern (formerly Rufous-sided) Towhees kicking up last season's deposit of dead leaves and straw in the pine island. Peering over the hedge, I spied another brown bird, this one in our Southern Magnolia. Through the binoculars, I easily confirmed this cautious visitor as our state bird, the Brown Thrasher. Above him in the Tulip Poplar sat an Eastern Phoebe nervously twitching his tail, and higher still, several Brown-headed Nuthatches searched the tops of the Loblolly pines for food, then flew off in a mass of bouncing twitters. The gentle tap, tap, tap rising behind me was the unmistakable sound of a Downy Woodpecker.

Descending the railroad tie steps into the backyard, I found instead a Northern Cardinal and three unusually silent Blue Jays perched on the bare branches, their silence disturbed only by the calls of a passing flock of American Robins and five distant American Crows. My birding blood warming, I wandered farther into the backyard. "I wonder if anyone is eating at my neighbor's feeder." A few steps into the backyard gave me a good view of a Red-bellied Woodpecker's heavy feeder landing that scattered some American Goldfinches into the trees and left the woodpecker precariously balanced on the edge of a wildly swinging feeder. Below him Mourning Doves, White-throated Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos and a Chipping Sparrow feasted on the abundant morsels cast overboard by the spendthrift woodpecker. A silent shape glided by from behind me and quickly out of view in front of the house. I raced across the backyard in time to see a Great Blue Heron, a life bird for my backyard list, emerge from the other side, glide over neighbor's rooftops and then disappear into the rising sun. My frantic backyard dash did not bother a Northern Flicker feeding in the lawn but frightened three House Finches, which flew from their regular drinking station at my wife's recently-created garden waterfall. Their excitement touched off an itinerant troop of Carolina Wrens, Tufted Titmice, Carolina Chickadees, and one each White-breasted Nuthatch and Ruby-crowned Kinglet that had arrived to declare their displeasure that "Fluffy," our resident Eastern Screech-Owl, still occupied the owl house outside my daughter's bedroom window. This morning he declined to acknowledge his tormentors and remained well hidden inside his box.

As I searched the mixed flock with my glasses, looking for a Golden-crowned Kinglet, Brown Creeper or rare Red-breasted Nuthatch, a large flash of black and white flew through my field of view and landed above Fluffy's box with a shriek. "Pileated," I silently screamed, another backyard first. Ecstatic over my luck, I continued my morning bird walk around our one-third-acre suburban lot. Around the front corner of our house, twenty-plus Eastern Bluebirds busily stripped the remaining red berries off an elderly dogwood. I circled wide around them, ducked back

A Morning Bird Walk *(continued from page 11)*

through the garage, and gently woke my wife. Without raising her head from the pillow, she watched the bluebird show through our front bedroom window, and when the last berry and bird disappeared, she turned and dreamily inquired, "I thought you were going birding this morning." "I've already been," I replied. "So how was it?" she asked. "Magnificent!"

What? A What Duck?

By Marlene Koslowsky

I got in the car with the intention of taking a quick walk through a nearby nature area, just to shake off another day of pandemic "when-will-it-ever-end?" feelings. Only minutes from home, the road in has a large private pond I at least glance at as I go by, in case there's something other than Canada Geese or Muscovy Ducks. As I slowed a bit, I saw a small group of birds on the opposite side of the pond that struck me as odd. Pulling over, bins to eyes, I said, "Hmm. Those don't look like geese." But, hey, it wouldn't be the first time I thought one thing and it's another. One quick photo at 500mm, brought in on back of camera, and, sure enough, not geese. Ducks? I took a phone pic of the back of the camera and sent it to Michelle [Hamner].

Her words? "SHUT UP! Where?!?"

In at most 12 minutes, Michelle was by my side. Pretty sure her keys were in hand within two seconds of her message to me. Also pretty sure it should have taken at least five more minutes to get from her house to where I was standing, but no matter...

There they were. Eight of them. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, in all their comical glory. Brown, orange, and black dots wandering along the shore, not knowing the stir they created for two delighted birders. A Green Heron zipped in and scared them into the air, but they landed back down quickly enough.



Oh, no, a cat! Stalking in toward them, step-by-step, then, too close — up and away all eight flew, out of sight to the other side of the pond, but safe, best we could tell.

This is not their territory, here in south Fayette County. Not even close. Why they wandered over here, we will never know. Where they went after that, we also don't know. But Michelle and I enjoyed seeing them even for a few fleeting moments. A nice treat to lift our birders' heart. Thanks, BBWD!

Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks at a private pond on Morgan Road, Fayetteville, Georgia, May 11, 2021. Photo by Marlene Koslowsky.

My Birding Mentors*By Sandy Pangle*

I actually had two birding mentors at the same time. Fifty years ago, in seventh grade, I took a nature study class as an elective. Our instructor was so smitten with birds that the entire class ended up being about bird identification. In those years, unbelievably, my most common winter bird was the beautiful Evening Grosbeak! Our class toured the neighborhoods around the school, and we viewed many great birds I never knew existed. From that class on, I was hopelessly hooked. My instructor told me of two “little old ladies” named Anne Hamilton and Harriet DiGioia, in the Dalton area, and I set out to find them. And find them I did!

I spent many hours as a teenage boy crawling through tick-infested bushes, thorns, and tall grass and skirting snaky lakeshores in the pursuit of some elusive bird that I needed to see to add to my life list. Both Harriet and Anne were always patient and unbelievably nurturing until they had transformed me into one of the best young birders in the state. They dragged me with them on GOS meetings all over the state. They always insisted that I identify the bird with their helpful hints. During our times together, they taught me such birding nuggets as: the White-eyed Vireo sings, “Kitty Maria Chick,” and the springtime White-throated Sparrow sings, “I sing plaintively, plaintively, plaintively.” Today, I can never hear those birds sing without a flood of precious memories of my years in the bushes with two “little old ladies” who freely gave of their time, knowledge, and friendship to ensure me a lifetime of pleasant birding memories.

Camp TALON 2021*By Teodelina Martelli*

This is really the story of two camps. In a sense, I was coming back to TALON, my last birding camp of high school, to find 2021 superimposed on 2019. I got the news of my internship in April, precisely when I needed a win — stuck at home, antsy, watching the pandemic continue to chew up my grandiose plans. Suddenly, Bob Sargent’s email said, here’s something real, something to look forward to! June shone with promise. It would be 2019 again. My fellow intern would be from my original cohort, more campers from our year were coming, and the nostalgia was extreme.

Things are a bit different when one is the intern, though. Sleep is at a premium at any birding camp and more so when you are making sure everyone sleeps, eats, and showers before you! But when I say interns enjoy a slightly later official sleep-time, I mean that word — “enjoy” — and I’ll tell you a few things I saw after hours. A Green Tree Frog, nestling in my hand as I listen to music. My sister on the phone screen, giving her graduation speech. A young girl, perhaps 12, handily swinging an unfortunate possum by its tail in the porch light as her campmates and chaperone scream in terror and delight. A raccoon, headed straight toward my feet as I sit in complete darkness, trotting silently back into the night at the last second when I chose to turn my phone light on. A small point of light glowing softly in the grass, which when I track it down, expecting to find either nothing or a firefly, appears to be a slug, mysteriously and charmingly mundane and offering no explanation at all for the light that I saw at its location. But these are just the things I saw alone.

Together with the campers and leaders, we shared sightings of manatees, Carnegie horses, a wheel bug, Christmas lichen, alligators, a nine-banded armadillo, and many birds, including specialties like the Wilson’s Plover and Red-cockaded Woodpecker. One of our best birds was arguably the White-rumped Sandpiper we found at Little St. Simons Island, over which we spent a happy five minutes narrowing down an ID to conclude that one camper’s snap judgment had been impressively correct. This same camper had met me at breakfast with a book to provide me information about the geology and ecology of Georgia after I had mentioned my ignorance

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on those topics, and had been plying me with questions about my rarest sightings. It was strange to realize, when I answered his questions, that the roles I was used to had been reversed; I had some sort of seniority, a critical mass of stories and sightings that directed the campers' questions and respect my way in a manner I had never before felt so clearly. It was humbling and rewarding, to say the least.

I will give you one hour, one hour at the dock of Sapelo Island. We all hop off the long benches on the back of the truck on the dusty dirt road, come walking back to the dock, hurrying against the oncoming thunder. Luca and I are doing our best to keep our charges off the steel ramp and railings, pointing to the approaching lightning. As someone particularly sensitive to the color and beauty of storms, it was hard to look away from the phenomenon that was forcing us off the island early. It was not an unusual or even strong storm, as storms go in the South, but it was a storm nevertheless, and it darkened the western sky in a deepening, smoky blue. Intermittent gusts of light wind brought smatterings of warm raindrops on those watching. Flashes of pale lightning struck the beach on the mainland, as if signaling its approach. Someone mentioned to me that in this moment there was more of that "lightning sea-glass" being made on the shore we were watching, and I was amazed. Of course the meeting of sand and lightning would result in a form of natural glass, and yet it had never occurred to me. I spoke with the birders around me, imagining blobs of newly-made glass cooling on the storm-darkened beach (what could that look like??), and wanted very much to go find some. (I found out later that lightning glass does not form blobs so much as tubes in the sand, the centers being vaporized.)

Soon we gathered safely in a packing room to listen to our respected naturalist guide for that day, Malcolm Hodges. Earlier, we had found Plain Chachalacas with him — the first record on Sapelo in years — and I'd been reminded of his amazing ability with identification and natural history. Walking with him is a masterclass in the nature outside of ourselves, but now, instead, he spoke with us in his kind, compelling voice about inclusion in birding and the outdoors.

Eventually, when the thrilling booms of thunder diminished and the storm seemed to grow lenient, some of us went down off the dock to investigate the beach. This was made entirely of oyster shells, and we crunched along on the gold-beige beach, singing and selecting flat shells to skip on the ripples of the water. A Ruddy Turnstone flew an arc from its unseen spot, showing its bright patterns and coming to rest again only slightly farther to watch us. A yelling from the dock! The boat is returning, and we pick our way back up to the dock, convinced we almost found some real pearls, and I herd campers out of the way into the rooms as newcomers stream off the boat. Another camper from my year is there, drawing peacefully in her field notebook like I would often do. There is an old telephone on the wall of the packing room, and on a nostalgic whim I put a quarter in and dial home. The thing is dusty and probably broken, unused since who knows when. I won't know if I don't try. Lifting the receiver, there is nothing on the line...

It's time to go. We load the coolers and food, and once our headcount is complete, we motor off again, back en route to the Jekyll 4-H.

I hope I will come back to see the islands we visited in Georgia in 2019 and 2021. Camp TALON has made these places special to me, not to mention the people with which I was privileged to lead and learn with. I believe that the campers of this and all the other years are lucky to have been out in the field with Bob Sargent, Julie Duncan, and all the hardworking and knowledgeable people enlisted in helping Camp TALON succeed. I thank them all, among them particularly Luca Antinozzi, my fellow intern.



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Inca Dove near Barnesville, GA, August 20, 2021. Photo by Bob Sargent.