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GOShaw

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society
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Recovering America's Wildlife Act

By Lauren Gingerella

Wildlife need help now more than ever. Since 1970, North America has lost nearly three billion birds, an overall decline of 29%¹. One in four birds have disappeared from the skies, and even common birds found at backyard feeders are experiencing dramatic population declines. This trend is not exclusive to birds, as one-third of U.S. wildlife faces an increased threat of extinction². Bats, fish, butterflies, bees, freshwater mussels, amphibians, and reptiles are all at risk of vanishing from their habitats. Reversing these declines is no easy task, but there is proposed legislation that prioritizes wildlife conservation.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (S. 1149), or RAWA, is a bipartisan bill that would provide \$1.4 billion in annual funding for the conservation and restoration of America's wildlife and plant species of greatest conservation need. RAWA would be the most significant contribution toward wildlife conservation since the designation of the Endangered Species Act in 1973. This bill would put funding in the hands of those conservationists working on the ground to control invasive species, restore native habitat, research and monitor species, fight emerging diseases, and protect and connect

wildlife habitat corridors.

The bill would provide \$1.3 billion in annual funding for state agencies and territories to implement their Wildlife Action Plans, which are federally approved plans that address species of greatest conservation need, and outline management and restoration actions that would benefit those species. Currently, only \$65 million a year of federal funding that is split between all states and territories is dedicated toward implementing these plans, which is a small fraction of the amount needed for full implementation. The remaining \$97.5 million would support wildlife conservation efforts led by Tribal Nations and would be the first-ever dedicated source of federal wildlife funding for Tribes. Tribal Nations own or are responsible for managing 140 million acres of land, and a dedicated source of conservation funding is long overdue.

Conserving biodiversity is not only important for wildlife but for people as well. Each year, nearly \$140 billion is spent on wildlife recreation. Birders, hunters, and fishers spend money on gear and travel expenses, such as lodging, gas, food, permits, and entrance fees. Many communities' neighboring wildlife refuges, parks, game lands, and birding hotspots depend on ecotourism for their economies. When wildlife vanish from these

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Least Bittern. Photo by Todd Schneider.

Welcome, New Members!

Fledgling (Students)

Timothy Teasley Valdosta, GA

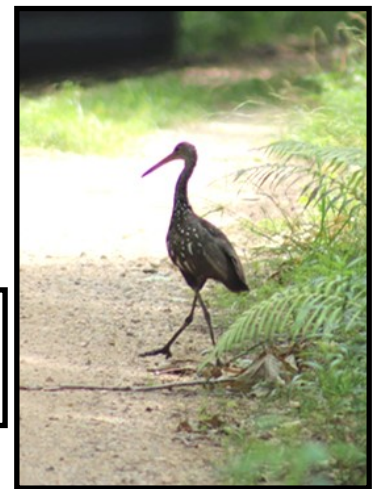
Brown Thrasher (Individual/Family)

Cooper Cancilla	Atlanta, GA
Barbara Geier	Berkeley Lake, GA
Celia Henson	Decatur, GA
Susan Jones	Decatur, GA
Karen Theodorou	Lawrenceville, GA
Anita Wallace	Atlanta, GA

Mark Your Calendars Now!

GOS FALL MEETING: October 6-9, 2023

Don't miss this year's Fall GOS meeting, which will be held at our long-time meeting location 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 6, 2023, and "GOS" is the group code. For more information, visit www.gos.org



Limpkin at Chickasawhatchee WMA, May 11, 2023. Photo by Jennifer Ward.

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RAWA (continued from page 1)

locations, the tourism disappears with it.

RAWA was close to becoming legislation last year, after being approved by the U.S. House of Representatives in June 2022, but failing to pass in the Senate before the end of the session deadline. Fortunately, hope is not lost for RAWA, as the bill was reintroduced in the Senate in March 2023. RAWA currently (as of mid-June 2023) has 11 bipartisan cosponsors, and you too can voice your support for its passage into law. If you feel strongly about preventing wildlife extinctions, call your U.S. senators to request they consider signing on as a cosponsor to the bill. It is crucial for both wildlife and people that this bill becomes law.

¹Rosenberg et al. 2019

Rosenberg, K. V., A. M. Dokter, P. J. Blancher, J. R. Sauer, A. C. Smith, P. A. Smith, J. C. Stanton, A. Panjabi, L. Helft, M. Parr, and P. P. Marra. 2019. Decline of the North American avifauna. *Science*, 366 (6461), 120-124.

<https://www.science.org/doi/full/10.1126/science.aaw1313>

²Stein et al. 2018

Stein, B. A., N. Edelson, L. Anderson, J. Kanter, and J. Stemler. 2018. Reversing America's Wildlife Crisis: Securing the Future of Our Fish and Wildlife. Washington, D.C.: National Wildlife Federation.

<https://www.nwf.org/Latest-News/Press-Releases/2018/03-29-18-Wildlife-Crisis-Report>



Baird's Sparrow photographed in Fulton County in early May 2023 by Dave Joyce.

The 2023 Youth Birding Competition

By Rick Lavender

From the excited hum in the Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center banquet hall to children flocking to a presentation on native turtles, the Georgia Youth Birding Competition (YBC) returned to full form on April 22, 2023. After three years of COVID-forced changes, the popular Department of Natural Resources (DNR) birdathon held its traditional contest-ending banquet and awards ceremony for all teams. More than 110 children and teens took part, with parents and team leaders joining them at the center near Mansfield.

The YBC, now in its 17th year, ran April 14 through the 22nd. During that nine-day span, kindergarteners through high-schoolers picked a 24-hour stretch and competed by age group to find the most bird species. Teams from Adairsville to Zebulon sported names such as Bird Dawgs, The Pike County Craniacs, and Birding with Baby Yoda.

The longer timeframe for birding – organizers changed from a single 24-hour period during the pandemic – has broadened participation. But this year some teams had also “upped their game,” according to YBC founder Tim Keyes.

Amazing Anhingas, a high school team from Glynn and DeKalb counties, won the championship for the second straight year, but with 144 species compared to 128 last year. Eleven teams had 70 or more. The middle school team Pi-billed Grebes raised \$1,200 for wildlife conservation, the most of any team. The total for the competition, in which fundraising is a voluntary part, topped \$2,200. Amy Alderman received the Mentor Award, spending 17 hours mentoring the St. Andrews Songbirds, a first-year team from Macon in the elementary school division.

The event also included a T-shirt art contest that drew 108 entries. Birding participants received T-shirts with a Golden Eagle drawn by Kevin Lin, a high school junior and student at SKA Academy of Art and Design in Duluth. As the art contest grand-prize winner, Lin received a \$100 Amazon gift card. Additionally, art contest coordinator Linda May announced the top entry from a youth who took part in the birding competition. For the third year in a row, the honor went to Abigail Moeller, this time for her Green Heron drawing. The 11th-grade homeschool student from Adairsville birded with the Moeller Myrtle Warblers.



High school student Kevin Lin's winning entry in the T-shirt art contest at the 2023 YBC..

The awards banquet featured a live turtles program led by Linda May, T-shirt art contest coordinator and outreach leader for DNR's Wildlife Conservation Section, and a video from competition alumnus (and Camp TALON alumnus) Angus Pritchard of DeKalb County.

The YBC is aimed at inspiring an awareness and appreciation of Georgia's birds and the outdoors. The birding event and T-shirt Art Contest are sponsored by DNR's Wildlife Conservation Section, The Environmental Resources Network Inc. or TERN – the friends group of the Wildlife Conservation Section – and others including Georgia Ornithological Society and Georgia Audubon.

Camp TALON 2023

By Bob Sargent

Linda May and Bob Sargent, along with volunteer interns Sophia Cox and John Deitsch, led the 13th edition of Camp TALON (Teen Adventures Learning about Ornithology and Nature) on the coast June 3-8, 2023. Seventeen teenagers from four states participated. Our base camp was Epworth by the Sea on St. Simons Island. Each day we traveled by bus and boat to many of the best birding destinations in southeastern Georgia, including Little St. Simons Island, Altamaha WMA, Jekyll Island State Park, St. Simons Island, Harris Neck NWR, Sapelo Island, and Ft. Stewart. Many other teachers met us at stops during the week to graciously give their time and talents on behalf of the campers. The teen birders learned about habitats and management practices, bird species identification, avian anatomy and physiology, how birds fly and how and why they sing, migration, island history and ecology, beach invertebrates, conservation issues, career opportunities, and journaling. They had the opportunity to meet and learn from biologists, graduate students, and naturalists involved with shorebird and painted bunting research, endangered species management, prescribed fire and timber harvest practices, and, on Little St. Simons Island, witnessed and participated in bird banding.

The campers recorded 115 bird species, took hundreds of photos, met and connected with like-minded teens from other places, and several made a point of collecting names, phone numbers, and addresses of potential career mentors. At several stops the campers listened as natural resource professionals explained their career paths and provided advice about how to acquire experience. At Harris Neck NWR many of the campers were interviewed by a journalist concerning their passion for birds and the outdoors. The campers participated in bird charades and a “Flying Wild” exercise designed to demonstrate the rigors and perils of bird migration, and they were challenged to show off their knowledge of bird trivia and bird song identification. All of the campers took prizes home, such as binoculars, natural history books, DVDs and CDs, caps, posters, and binocular harnesses, much of which was donated by Ilze Henderson.



Diane Klement teaches the campers how to band a Painted Bunting. Photo by Linda May.

There are so many people to thank: Gene Keferl for showing us the marshes, isolated ponds, beaches (with Wilson’s Plovers and nesting Least Terns) of Jekyll Island; Stacia Hendricks, Aurora Fowler, Diane Klement, Keegan, Jonathan, and Casey for transportation help and a day of hands-on banding and ecology lessons on Little St. Simons Island; thank you in particular to Wendy and Hank Paulson for supporting this visit to the island every year; Chuck Hayes for another guided tour of Harris Neck NWR and a “behind the scenes” visit to the rookery; Tim Keyes, Fred Hay, Adam Mackinnon, Justin

Alexander, and Blaine Tyler for another Sapelo island grand adventure, including a chachalaca encounter; and Larry Carlile for introducing the campers to the ecology and management of rare birds and amphibians. Camp TALON would not be possible without support from TERN, the Georgia Ornithological Society, and Georgia Audubon.

Biggest Week in American Birding

By Darryl Konter

The Biggest Week in American Birding does not disappoint. The self-proclaimed “Warbler Capital of the World” lives up to its title. I had been to the annual event in northwest Ohio once before. This year, I met up with a friend and fellow birder from St. Louis who had never been, and she was amazed by the sights and sounds along the Magee Marsh boardwalk.

The Magee Marsh, on the southern shore of Lake Erie, is a stopover point for thousands of warblers and other birds making their way north for the breeding season and summer. The marsh is unique not just for its huge numbers and great variety of warblers (up to 30 different species), but also because they so often perch at eye level. One friend asked me how I got such a good photo of a Northern Parula. “These guys usually hang out at tree top level.” Yes, I answered, but at the Biggest Week, they’re as easy to see as they are to hear.

Another unique feature of the festival is that the Magee Marsh boardwalk is free and open to the public. If you don’t want to attend lectures or workshops or go on guided excursions, you can simply show up and join thousands of other birders on the boardwalk. And the birds are still there after the festival is over.

We spent two days on the boardwalk. My friend immediately noticed the sweet cacophony of thousands of birds chirping and calling. The beautiful chorus made the shoulder-to-shoulder crowd near the boardwalk entrance tolerable. After a great morning, during which we saw and photographed dozens of different birds, we broke for lunch and then went back to our hotel. We returned to the boardwalk in the late afternoon, when the birds were still plentiful but the crowds were mercifully sparse.



Black-throated Blue Warbler. Photo by Darryl Konter.



Northern Parula. Photo by Darryl Konter.

There seemed to be far fewer birds in the marsh on our second day. A professional guide I spoke with told me he believed many birds had taken advantage of calm winds the night before and made their flight across the lake, and other migrants hadn’t yet arrived. We still had a nice day birding. And I’m already talking with another birding friend about attending the Biggest Week next year. As I said, it doesn’t disappoint.

The festival is held about 25 miles east of Toledo, Ohio. You can fly into Toledo, but you might have better luck flying to Detroit. It was a 45-minute drive from the Detroit airport to our hotel. You’ll need to rent a car either way. The festival HQ is the Maumee Bay Lodge and Convention Center, but it books up fast.

We stayed in a hotel in nearby Oregon, Ohio, about a 20-minute drive west of the Magee Marsh. There are also hotels in Port Clinton, about 20 minutes east of the marsh. For more information, visit <https://biggestweekinamericanbirding.com>.

Young Birder Optics Awards: Apply Now

GOS is a strong proponent of educating young people about birds and encouraging them to get involved in birding, ornithology, and conservation. Many serious young birders do not have opportunities to acquire quality optics to help them identify birds, grow their passion for feathered creatures, and contribute to bird study. Therefore, GOS, with generous support from the Zeiss Group, established in 2021 the annual Young Birder Optics Awards.

Details:

Two optics will be awarded each year, one to a birder aged 15-19 and one to a birder aged 20-25. If there are no applicants for one of these age ranges in a particular year and multiple applicants from the other, then GOS may choose to provide both awards to one age group. The award consists of a Zeiss Conquest HD binocular (valued at up to \$999). GOS will also award a spotting scope and tripod (valued at up to \$2,500). In some years GOS may choose to award two binoculars or two scopes and tripods, depending on the needs of the award-winning applicants. The award recipients will be announced at the society's meeting in October 2023. Winners do not have to be present at that meeting to receive the awards. The recipients must be Georgia residents and members of GOS.

How to be considered:

Potential awardees must be nominated via three letters (at least one from a GOS member; only one can be from a relative). The letters should describe:

- a) The seriousness of the birder: how long she/he has been birding, species seen, society/club memberships, evidence of teaching others about birds and birding, and birding/ornithological involvement (e.g., surveys done, CBC participation, field trips led, GOS meetings attended, clubs started, volunteer work at a banding station, etc.).
- b) Define the nominee's need: what model is she/he using now and financial circumstances that exclude getting high-quality optics.
- c) Career goals in relation to birds/biology/other natural resources field: will the nominee put good optics to use to contribute to bird conservation through study, teaching, or other means?

Nomination letters are due on September 1, 2023. Send the letters in PDF format (subject: Young Birder Optics Awards) to bob.sargent@dnr.ga.gov

Young birders at Camp TALON 2023, Little St. Simons Island, June 5th. Photo by John Deitsch.



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

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



Camp TALON's class of 2023 at Meridian Dock, June 7th. Photo by Linda May.