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GOShawk

Newsletter of the Georgia Ornithological Society
www.gos.org

President's Message

By Ed Maioriello

Another summer has almost run its course. I hope you all have had a fun and relaxing summer traveling or just spending quality time with loved ones at home. Here in Athens the students are returning to classes, fall sports are gearing up, and the migration is starting, as kites are amassing outside of town. There are a series of pastures outside of nearby Watkinsville that have attracted both Mississippi and Swallow-tailed Kites regularly over the last few years, and this year is no exception. I had been checking the area frequently over the last month, but last Wednesday paid off. More than 30 Mississippi Kites and at least six Swallow-tailed Kites were performing their aerial ballets over beautiful green pastures when I checked on my way to an appointment. I am often asked what is my favorite bird and I'm usually reluctant to give an answer, but kites in flight have to be close to the top of the list!

The return of fall also heralds the approaching GOS fall meeting on Jekyll Island. Whether it be Painted Buntings and migrating warblers in hand at the Jekyll Island Banding Station, migrating eagles or falcons in the air, or shorebirds galore on the beaches and marshes, the birds found on Georgia's coast



Swallow-tailed Kite. Photo by Ed Maioriello.

always excite and inspire me. As icing on the cake, the opportunity to catch up with friends from across the state and learn from our always interesting speakers makes the fall meeting a highlight of the season for me – and I hope it does for you too.

You can read more about the speakers in this edition of the *GOShawk*, but I hope that you will attend our meeting to hear them as well. Additionally, we will be having our biennial election of officers as well as a vote for a change to the bylaws, so come to Jekyll and be involved.

I hope to see you on the coast soon!

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Black-necked Stilt. Photo by Bob Sargent.

Welcome, New Members!

Fledgling (Students)

Eric Cormier	Sandy Springs, GA
Hannah Wright	Athens, GA

Brown Thrasher (Individual/Family)

Susan Breunig	Brookhaven, GA
Milton Hobbs	Hephzibah, GA
Warren Howe	Cumming, GA

Red-cockaded Woodpecker (Patron)

Ori Manes-Goode	Decatur, GA
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The Oriole Welcomes Submissions

The Oriole, the scientific journal of GOS, invites authors to submit general notes or research articles about Georgia bird life. We also publish book reviews. You can see examples in previous issues, which are available at the GOS website under Publications/Periodicals. Contact Jim Ferrari at jferrari@wesleyancollege.edu if you would like to discuss your ideas about a potential manuscript.



Orchard Oriole. Photo by Dan Vickers.

Go Paperless!

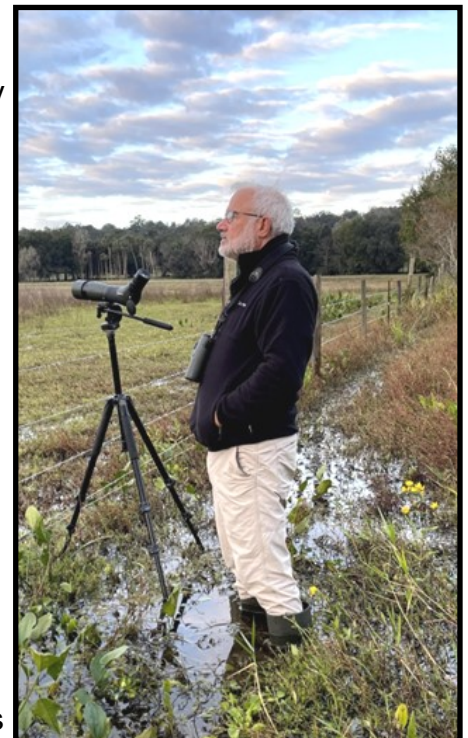
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Mark Your Calendars Now: GOS Fall Meeting, October 6-9, 2023

By Steve Wagner

Don't miss this year's fall GOS meeting, which will be held at our long-time meeting location on Jekyll Island on October 6-9. 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. For your planning purposes, here are the 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 7, 2023, and "GOS" is the group code. For more information, visit www.gos.org.

On Saturday night, Scott Robinson will present "Mixing birding and science: A personal journey." Scott is the Ordway Professor of Conservation Biology at the Florida Museum of Natural History in Gainesville, Florida, where he teaches ornithology at the University of Florida. Scott and his graduate students study birds around the world, but especially in the Andes and Amazon. Scott is also a fanatical lifelong birder whose father taught him a great deal about birds. Scott set the World Big Day record in 1982 with the legendary Ted Parker while working on a joint research project with his advisor, John Terborgh. The record lasted more than 30 years. Scott also took a gap year in college and did a North American Big Year, breaking Kenn Kaufmann's record. He continues to mix science and birding while studying bird ecology, conservation, and behavior.



Scott Robinson takes in the view. Photo provided by Scott.

On Friday night, Diane Klement will present "Painting the bunting: Linking birds to plant communities through fine-scale space use." Diane is an M.S. student in the Rushing Avian Ecology Lab at the University of Georgia's Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources in Athens. Her research seeks to use new tracking technologies and their corresponding space-use estimates to accurately quantify habitat quality for a declining neotropical migratory bird, the Painted Bunting, on Little Saint Simons Island, Georgia. Prior to starting graduate school, Diane worked as the bird technician on Little Saint Simons Island, monitoring breeding seabird, shorebird, and wading bird populations, and as a Marine Education Fellow with Georgia Sea Grant and UGA Marine Extension on Skidaway Island, Georgia. Through her research, she hopes to understand how ecological restoration efforts can utilize fine-scale space use data to restore specific plants associated with habitat quality for birds and connect communities to Georgia's coastal birds.



Diane Klement and friend. Photo provided by Diane.

Election of Officers and Approval of Bylaws Changes at the Fall Meeting

The GOS Bylaws require that the society hold elections for officer positions (president, 1st vice president, 2nd vice president, secretary, and treasurer) at the fall meeting in odd years. People elected to these positions serve two-year terms. We are pleased to inform the membership that all of the current officers have volunteered to serve another two-year term. On banquet night at the fall meeting on Jekyll Island, the members in attendance will be asked to vote on the following slate of nominees for the 2023-2025 term:

Ed Maioriello, president.

Steve Wagner, 1st vice president.

Adam Betuel, 2nd vice president.

Mike Weaver, secretary.

Jeannie Wright, treasurer.



Green Heron. Photo by Ron Goldfarb.

GOS President Ed Maioriello is proposing the following changes to the Bylaws' Article VI, Meetings:

Section 1. General meetings of the Society shall be held at least semiannually at locations and times selected by the Executive Committee. ~~In odd-numbered years, the Society shall hold a winter meeting and a fall meeting. In even-numbered years, the Society shall hold a spring meeting and a fall meeting.~~ Each year there will be a fall meeting and either a winter or spring meeting.

Per Ed, this change is recommended to give the society's leadership the flexibility to schedule meetings in a way that best serves GOS, as opposed to rigidly sticking to a schedule that sometimes does not attract enough participants to make economic and logistical sense. In particular, attendance at spring meetings in recent years has declined to the point where those meetings often lose money and struggle to recruit trip leaders. This does not mean that spring meetings will be completely eliminated; but it does mean that their frequency would be reduced. GOS leadership is evaluating other potential activities to offer to the membership in the spring such as sponsoring or co-sponsoring workshops or organizing unique field trips.

To see the society's Bylaws, go to www.gos.org/bylaws

My Tribute to Tom Johnson

By Patrick Maurice

Tom Johnson unexpectedly passed away on July 23, 2023. He was 35 years old.

When what you don't think is possible happens, it's hard to wrap your brain around it. When it seems like there's no logic, no rhyme, no reason, you will always be asking why. But "why?" won't change the past; it will just tear you up.

I'm currently at the airport about to head to Glacier National Park and, of course, I only have one person on my mind – Tom Johnson.

I first met Tom nine years ago when I attended the Hog Island young birder camp thanks to a scholarship I won from GOS. I really think he was the one who first made me realize that I could make a living as a bird guide and have an incredible life that is full of birds and travel, because that's what he did.

I was fortunate to bump into Tom at random spots over the years where you normally wouldn't see your non-birding friends: Sierra Vista, Arizona; Utqiagvik, Alaska; Cape May, New Jersey; and, most recently, a neighborhood in Boulder, Colorado, in April while we were searching for Bohemian Waxwings.

I now feel so fortunate to have spent so much time with Tom last fall in Cape May. From birding the Higbee dike at sunrise, to watching migration unfold in front of us during late nights at the hawkwatch, I always enjoyed our time together. Tom also helped me out after my relapse in October and was so kind and generous, because that's just who he was. More than an outstanding birder, he was an outstanding human.

It's going to be hard to think of the bittersweetness of Cape May and not think of Tom. But I'm sitting here at the airport with my Cape May shirt on and tears in my eyes, and I know that it wasn't a coincidence that I saw the sunrise today and it was redder because of Tom. Farewell, my friend. You will always be in my heart.



From left to right: Patrick Maurice, Ryan Zucker, and Tom Johnson. Photo taken by Patrick in Alaska in 2022.

Time Flies on Feathered Wings

By Madeleine Moon-Chun

Raucous calls of Black-billed Magpies pierce through our white rental car, bringing me out of a combination of entranced reverie, nerves, and excitement. Here at the YMCA of the Rockies, snow-threaded mountains undulate under the continuous blue sky in the distance. We are a mile closer to the sun than we are back home. After saying goodbye to my family, one of the counselors walks me and another young birder toward where we will be staying, Twin Sisters. The quarter-mile walk takes us 10 minutes, as we stop to observe the abundant Common Ground Squirrels, Broad-tailed Hummingbirds, and Black-billed Magpies. The magpies, especially, catch my eye. Their glossy, blue-black bodies, white flanks, and long, iridescent wings and tail catch the Saturday afternoon sun as they hop gracefully and unafraid along the path in front of us. With two lifers in the span of 10 minutes, I can tell this will be a good week.



Black-billed Magpie near picnic tables at the last breakfast. Photo by Madeleine Moon-Chun.

Introductions come after we transport food and luggage to the meeting room in the basement of Twin Sisters. At dinner, we bring trays and sit at picnic tables outside with Broad-tailed Hummingbirds, House Sparrows, Mountain Bluebirds, White-crowned Sparrows, American Crows, and, yes, more Black-billed Magpies, to name a few. Orientation back in the fireside meeting room is kept as brief as possible to ensure we have enough time to sleep before our busy day tomorrow.

With our eyes behind binoculars, we miss the days flying by on swift, sure wings. So before I know it, Wednesday comes. Our so-called “Big Day” is the longest – and my favorite – day. My roommates and I set our alarms for 4:15 A.M., and we are in the white vans by 4:45. We stop on a gravel road in Weld, Colorado, for Baird’s Sandpipers, Horned Larks, Lark Sparrows, Lark Buntings, Blue-Winged Teals, and the ever-so-elusive Sora. In Briggsdale, we are met with Mountain Plovers, Loggerhead Shrikes, Western Meadowlarks, and many Horned Larks. We spend most of our day driving in the seemingly endless grassland of the Pawnee, fulfilling one camper’s birthday wish to see a Burrowing Owl. On returning to the Twin Sisters’ meeting room in the fading sun, we tally 90 species! Several of our days continue in this fashion: long (yet feeling so short!) and bird-filled. Mealtimes and van rides to and from our birding locations prove to be a wonderful time for cultivating friendships among like-minded young birders. One of my favorite parts about camp is that, although it is advertised as a bird camp, campers and staff alike share a common appreciation for the beauty of all nature. I now know about the Woodhouse’s Toads that hop along rocky paths, Golden-mantled Ground Squirrels, and Red Admiral butterflies.



Western Kingbird at the Rabbit Mountain parking lot. Photo by Madeleine Moon-Chun.

Through meeting my wonderful fellow campers, I learn how much we may see but still miss until we really try and look. Here at Camp Colorado, I find that time is a rare and secretive bird. It passes us by, quietly, in tall grass or shadows right under our noses, and by the time we see it, precious flight feathers have already taken it high above our heads.

The Endangered Species Act Turns 50

By Lauren Gingerella

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is celebrating its golden birthday this year. For the last 50 years, the ESA has been one of the mightiest environmental laws in the world for saving imperiled animals and plants from extinction. Enacted on December 28, 1973, the ESA was signed into law by President Richard Nixon after passing Congress with bipartisan support.

The ESA was established to protect threatened and endangered fish, wildlife, and plants and the habitats they depend on, with the ultimate goal of recovering species so that they are self-sustaining and do not need legal protections for survival. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) administer the ESA. USFWS is responsible for terrestrial (land-based) species and freshwater fish, and NMFS handles marine species.

Once a species is listed on the ESA, recovery plans are developed and implemented, the species is monitored to assess its status and trends, and protective regulations are enacted. All federal agencies must use their authority to conserve threatened and endangered species and to not destroy critical habitat. Grant funding for states and tribes to support the conservation of listed, proposed, candidate, and recently delisted species is available through the ESA. The ESA not only protects species in the U.S., but globally as well. The law implements the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which is a multinational treaty to ensure international trade in plants and animals does not threaten their survival in the wild.



Bald Eagle. Photo by Ron Goldfarb.



Peregrine Falcon in Atlanta, January 2019.
Photo by John Baker.

Over the last five decades, the ESA has been highly successful: 99% of species listed on it have avoided extinction. The Bald Eagle, Brown Pelican, American Alligator, and Louisiana Black Bear are a few examples of fauna that have recovered and been delisted off the ESA. Wood Storks continue to recover and have been recently proposed for delisting after being downlisted from endangered to threatened in 2014. Due to its effectiveness, the ESA has been used as a framework for other countries to develop wildlife and conservation protections.

Recovery is a long-term process that requires much collaboration, time, and resources to save a species. Here's to the ESA for many more years of preventing extinctions, recovering populations, and prohibiting illegal wildlife trade.

My Camp Colorado Experience

By Alex Stach

Camp Colorado was an experience I'll never forget. The birds, the friends, the connections, and the experiences at Camp Colorado will stay with me long after the summer ends. However, if I had to pick a favorite day, it would definitely be the "Big Day." Now, this was not a serious big day by any stretch of the imagination – we weren't going to be staying up all night. We were already pretty tired from our previous birding adventures! Plus, it wasn't migration yet, so our species count wouldn't be as high as you would expect. Despite this, I think it was an amazing experience, and we got many great birds.

We started by getting up at 4:30 a.m. (no easy task!) and groggily eating breakfast at the YMCA. We hit the road by 5:00, and wasted no time getting to birding. In fact, I got my lifer Swainson's Hawk on the drive toward Pawnee. Then JB, one of the counselors and a fantastic birder, noticed a spot that might be good for birding – a little marshy area with some mudflats by the road. We stopped to see what we could find. It turns out JB was right! In addition to Soras, Blue-Winged Teals, Brewer's Blackbirds, and Lark Sparrows, we got my lifer Lark Buntings and Baird's Sandpipers as well! All before 7 in the morning. By 8:00, we had stopped at another spot, just outside of the Pawnee National Grassland. Here we found not one, not two, but 13 Mountain Plovers, with great views of them in the scopes. Another notable species there was a distant Loggerhead Shrike – the only one we found at the camp.

After these highly successful stops, we entered the Pawnee National Grassland, which is just under 200,000 acres of pristine grassland habitat. Our first stop in the grassland yielded



Juvenile Lark Bunting. Photo by Alex Stach.

Grasshopper Sparrows, Swainson's Hawks, my lifer Sage Thrashers, a ridiculous number of Lark Buntings (hundreds!), and a fan favorite: Burrowing Owls. So as not to disturb the owls, we got relatively distant but good views, especially in the scope, which we also used to view a herd of Pronghorn grazing in the distance. Pressing on, we stopped at a small water source, which was nothing more than a large puddle in the expansive grassland, with a herd of cattle by the side of the road. However small in size, this water source turned out to be big for birding. In addition to the hordes of Lark Buntings and Horned Larks flying in to have a drink or wash off, I got my lifer Thick-Billed *and* Chestnut-Collared Longspurs flying to the pond in rapid succession.

In addition to the several individuals of both Longspur species, we were able to get two Brewer's Sparrows, four Grasshopper Sparrows, two Bullock's Orioles, two distant Golden Eagles, five roosting Common Nighthawks, and one superbly camouflaged Short-Horned Lizard. It was while we were observing this Short-Horned Lizard that we noticed something. The cows were advancing... toward us. As we walked away, they began to quicken their pace. And they kept getting faster, to a somewhat alarming degree. And now they seemed to be...running. We figured that whatever it was the cows were trying to do by running toward us, we didn't want to find out. We ran all the way to the bus. Laughing and panting, cows in tow, we finally made it to safety. On the bus, we talked and laughed about the ordeal, realizing that only at Camp Colorado will you get experiences like this.

My Camp Colorado Experience *(continued from page 8)*

We then made our way out of the grassland, tired but content with the day so far. After a decent drive, we arrived at the Fossil Creek Reservoir, excited at the prospect of water-based lifers. The stop didn't disappoint, as we got 10 Wood Ducks, 20 Gadwalls, 50 Western Grebes, a Cinnamon Teal, a couple of distant Clark's Grebes picked out by JB, and a Bank Swallow on the other side of the lake found by Patrick Maurice, a fantastic birder from Georgia and holder of the state Big Day record. This was our last official stop of the day, but as we reluctantly headed back to the YMCA, our day of birding wasn't over yet. One short stop at a marsh on the way netted us our first Great-Tailed Grackle of the camp, and we also got a Belted Kingfisher on the drive, plus a bonus Bighorn Sheep by the road. Birding around the YMCA, we managed to pick out a Broad-tailed Hummingbird and some Violet-green Swallows. It was a slow end to the daylight hours, but we weren't quite done yet.



Common Nighthawk. Photo by Alex Stach.

After dinner, we hit the road again, this time for a much closer stop: we were going owling. We all knew the odds were stacked against us, as late July might be the worst time out of the entire year to find owls. We were determined to try, though. We stopped in forest clearings and edges, using a speaker to play Flammulated, Saw-whet, and Great Horned Owl calls at each stop (in that order, because we didn't want to scare away a Flam or Saw-whet with a scary Great Horned Owl call). Again and again we tried, keeping absolutely silent in the darkness. In the end, we weren't able to get any owls, but it was definitely a valuable experience. And we learned how to look for owls, so now we can do it on our own if we choose. Exhausted, we headed back to the YMCA and collapsed into bed after a long day.

In the end, we totaled 89 species. It was definitely on the low side for a Big Day, but that's not what it's all about. The experiences we shared, the memories we made, and, yes, the birds and wildlife we saw, though not necessarily the species count, combined to make it one of the best days of my life. And all of this was just one day out of seven at Camp Colorado! We also learned valuable information about career paths from people who work with birds for a living, made friends with young birders from around the country (whom I have and will keep in touch with), and learned from the best to improve our birding skills. I can't stress enough that Camp Colorado was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and I'll never forget it. Happy birding!



Greater Short-horned Lizard. Photo by Alex Stach.

My Camp TALON Memories

By Sarah Tharpe

(Editor's note: I contacted several past participants of Camp TALON, as well as recipients of GOS birding camp scholarships, asking them to write articles describing what they have done with their careers since their camp experience. There will be more stories like this one in the December 2023 issue.)

Hello, my name is Sarah Tharpe. I am 24 years old, am a Florida native, and I have had the pleasure of attending Camp TALON on three separate occasions: initially as a camper, and then spent two sessions as a camp counselor.

My first year at Camp TALON, I came in as a novice birder. I knew that I thought birds were “cool,” but I did not know much else. I remember being nervous when I first boarded the bus in Macon, and that I brought gummy worms to share in attempt to make friends as well as make what I thought was a subtle joke about birds and worms. Throughout that first week birding by way of barrier island hopping, I learned so much about bird ID and behavior, and that other people my age who were interested in the natural world existed. I obtained my first pair of real binoculars at the end of that week, and I still have them today, placed next to my kitchen window for ease of access for whenever I see a bird in my yard. I had never before traveled to the parts of Georgia that we birded in (Little St. Simons Island, Sapelo Island, St. Simons Island, Okefenokee Swamp, and the Altamaha Wildlife Management Area, to name a few), so not only was the birding a new experience, the landscape was as well.

After the first year, I was later invited back to camp, this time as a counselor for the girl campers. I enjoyed this role immensely, as I felt I was able to give back to the camp while also continuing to further my bird education. It is actually in the course of being a counselor that I realized I had an interest in teaching, a profession I am currently still working in.



Sarah is holding the “selfie cam” at the front of the Camp TALON class in this photo taken at Altama WMA in June 2017. Sarah was our selfie wizard.

While I am not currently traversing barrier islands and wooded areas to bird, I have found that I have turned into a literal backyard birder, as one of my favorite activities to do in the evenings is to sit on my porch and watch my bird feeders and bird bath that I have in my backyard. I keep a list stuck to my fridge of all of the species I have seen so far and celebrate each new species I see by adding it to the list with a smiley face. It brings me great joy to watch birds fly in and out of my yard, or take a bird bath, and it is this joy that was one of the emotions I remember feeling most at camp, even while getting sunburnt and being bitten by what seemed like every mosquito in Georgia.

Currently, I work as a high school science teacher at a private Christian school in North

Florida, while at the same time working toward a master’s degree through Florida State University. I also enjoy drawing and painting natural subjects, with birds being a reoccurring theme, of course.

I will forever be grateful for my time at Camp TALON, as I felt my experiences were extremely enriching not only in terms of increasing my birding knowledge, but also through allowing me the

My Camp TALON Memories *(continued from page 10)*

chance to enjoy the beauty of Georgia's wild places in the company of other like-minded teenagers. I would also like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to Mr. Bob Sargent and Mrs. Julie Duncan, whose unwavering kindness and support has had and continues to have a tremendous impact on me. If you are interested in seeing my art, I am on Instagram @sarahtharpe.art.

Sarah Tharpe (on the left) keeping tabs on the other campers as we birdwatched from the observation tower at Okefenokee Swamp NWR, June 2018. Photo by Julie Duncan.



My Birding Moment

By Darryl Konter

One of the great joys of travel for me is the chance to see birds that never show up in your yard or nearby park. Earlier this summer, my wife and I had a chance to spend a few days on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, with some long-time friends. Most of the birds I saw were as common as the ones that are at my feeders every day. But the one glorious exception was the Red-breasted Nuthatch (right). It's definitely one of the highlights of my summer!



My Birding Moment

By Marlene Koslowsky

This baby Mississippi Kite (right) nested in my front yard Sweetgum tree. I had no idea it was there until late into the nesting cycle. This photo was taken on its fledge day. I was so excited! Obviously, the bird is not in the Sweetgum, but is actually across from that tree in the pines on the other side of my house in Fayetteville. Also, I have just begun reading *What an Owl Knows* by Jennifer Ackerman. I am not one to read anything technical or full of science stuff. Not my "cuppa." Two chapters in, this is very readable and purely delightful. Just thought I'd mention it.



Yellow Rail in Nocvismig

By Patrick Maurice

(Editor's note: See Patrick's tribute to the memory of Tom Johnson on page 5 of this newsletter.)

I've been meaning to write this up for a while now but never got around to it. I think now is a great time to share, though, because this memory from birding with Tom Johnson and other friends always makes me smile.

When I was working last fall in Cape May, New Jersey, I got to join other birding friends on good migration nights for "nocvismig." This is an abbreviation for nocturnal visible migration, and Tom was our main leader for these efforts. Tom would send a text during the day saying that the sky and weather conditions for the evening looked good for migration, then we would gather at a set spot at sunset to see what birds we could spot as they migrated overhead.

This has only become a more recent birding phenomenon thanks to recent advances in technology. In order to be successful, you need a thermal scope, a powerful flashlight, binoculars, and a good camera to document what you are seeing. These are all expensive items, but they have become slightly cheaper and more accessible over recent years. Of course, Tom had all of these, and if you knew Tom, you'd know that he was a pioneer in birding and was always pushing to further our knowledge on birds and migration. Tom was also an incredible photographer, especially of birds in flight, even if they were being photographed at night in the beam of a flashlight as they flew quickly overhead. You can scroll through eBird for photos by Tom from other Nocvismig events from Cape May to see some incredible examples.



A Nocvismig event in Cape May, New Jersey. Photo by Patrick Maurice.

Now let's rewind to Tuesday night, October 18th, and there are a dozen birders gathered on a beach crossing near Congress Hall. There's a mix of younger birders, who were working for CMBO, a group from the American Birding Conservancy, and a few other birding friends, plus Tom, of course. It was an exceptionally good night for migration, and over the course of a couple of hours we had found 40+ species, highlighted by an American Bittern, two Barn Owls, a handful of American Woodcocks, and hundreds of songbirds.

At 11:31 p.m., a small rail was picked up by someone with a thermal scope flying right at us. We immediately knew it was a rail because during migration, rails fly with fast wingbeats and just make a beeline as

they head over. "Porcupine!" (Our code word for getting everyone's attention and all flashlights on a bird) was shouted to get everyone on the bird, and then probably a hundred photos were cumulatively taken in less than a minute by the photographers as the rail went over.

We then immediately gathered in a circle and started going over the photos, and our excitement grew as we noted the small triangular bill, buffy breast, and silvery wings that looked like they might even have some white in the secondaries, but it was grainy and dark, so it was hard to be sure. The ID of Yellow Rail was immediately suggested, but Tom was skeptical, and in his deep,

Yellow Rail in Nocvismig *(continued from page 12)*

baritone voice he said that he was not so sure that it wasn't a Virginia Rail (because the bill details were hard to make out) or a juvenile Sora.

I don't think Yellow Rail had ever been observed before at night in active migration, so Tom wanted to be 100 percent sure before confirming. We agreed to look at the photos later on the computer and then returned to searching for more migrants.

The next afternoon, I was volunteering at one of Cape May's raptor banding stations on the island when I got a text from Tom. I don't have the message anymore, but he said that after studying his and Sam Wilson's great photos and communicating with other top birders in the country, it was confirmed as a Yellow Rail!

This was a lifer for me, completely unexpected, and made even more fun by the circumstances and the group I was with. I knew I'd get a Yellow Rail eventually, but as a nocturnal migrant flying over Cape May? Absolutely bananas.

It's a story I love to share, so thank you for the trip down memory lane, and a huge thanks to Tom for always being so welcoming to us newcomers to Cape May and sharing this incredibly new way to bird. Maybe eventually I'll have my own thermal scope and powerful flashlight to light up Georgia's skies in search of the spectacular.

For those interested, here's the full eBird checklist from that night that Tom created and annotated. It's chock-full of his and Sam's Yellow Rail photos.

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S121016600>



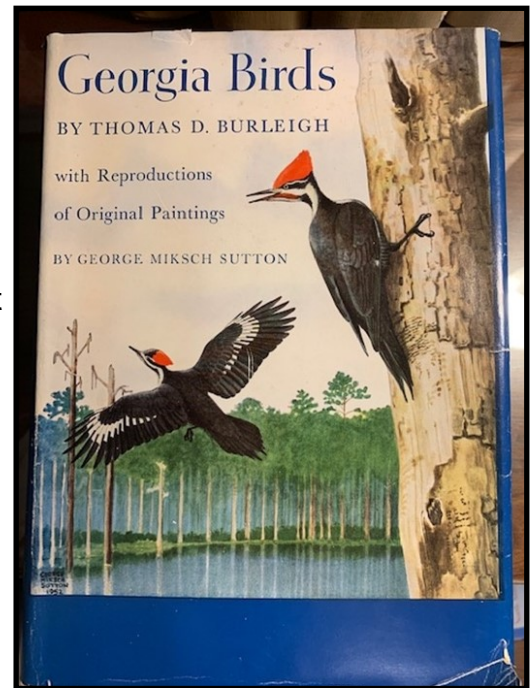
Patrick's lifer Yellow Rail photographed during the Nocvismig event in Cape May, New Jersey, October 18, 2022. Photo provided by Patrick.

GOS Grant Funding Available for Graduate Students and for Bird Habitat Management

GOS provides up to \$30,000 each year in support of graduate students who study birds. The society also provides \$50,000 or more each year to fund projects that directly benefit bird conservation via habitat management practices such as implementing prescribed fire, controlling invasive species, installing water control structures for marsh management, and inserting nest boxes for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. These funds are provided through the Bill Terrell Graduate Student Research Grants, the H. Branch Howe, Jr. Graduate Student Research Grants, and the Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grants. If you would like to learn more about these grants, how to apply for them, and about Branch Howe and Bill Terrell, visit www.gos.org and select the grants dropdown tab. You will also see the Lydia Thompson Grant (supports small-scale projects to benefit birds locally) and the Norene Boring Undergraduate Grant (provides funding to undergraduate students who conduct bird research). Note that the application deadline for the two Terrell grants and the Howe grant fall in December each year.

Interested in Adding Classic Books to Your Naturalist Library?

GOS will be offering attendees at the society's fall 2023 meeting an opportunity to win a copy of Thomas Burleigh's *Georgia Birds* and the 75th anniversary edition of the five-volume *The Complete Audubon*. All of these books are in exceptional condition (see photo at right for an example). These books were donated to GOS by Ilze Henderson from the collection of her late husband Rafe. Dr. Ralph "Rafe" Henderson, a world-renown epidemiologist and longtime member of GOS, passed away last year. It was his wish that his bird books and optics would be given to, or would benefit, young birders. Many of his books were donated as prizes to teenagers at this year's Youth Birding Competition and at Camp TALON. The Burleigh book and Audubon set will be separately raffled (\$10 per ticket) at the Jekyll Island meeting. The winners will be announced on Saturday night after the evening program. The proceeds from the raffle will be used to benefit Camp TALON 2024 via scholarship support. Ask about raffle tickets when you check in at the meeting's registration desk.



My Camp TALON Memories

By John Patten (JP) Moss

Ah, Camp TALON. If you were to discard my Camp TALON experiences, my birding journey would unravel like a beachgoer's kite string on Gould's Inlet. TALON has truly been the staple of my Georgia birding story, and those few action-packed days have led to lifelong friendships and interests. Falling in love with the Georgia coast is a nearly inescapable side effect of the six days spent zipping around and seeing the maritime highlights of the Golden Isles. I was not immune to these effects and continue to cherish our coastal landscapes and the wondrous bird life that they support. It was 2012 when I first timidly made my way onto the bus loaded with young bird connoisseurs. I knew I was outmatched as soon as I committed the fatal flaw of referring to Canada Geese as "Canadian Geese." But aside from the occasional correction in nomenclature, I encountered only positivity from my peers that June week. It was the catalyst that I needed to fully embrace birding moving forward. Being surrounded by so many peers and mentors who were well versed in birding and ecology, and in an unmatched setting such as the Georgia coast,

resulted in an undying dosage of inspiration that I carry with me to this day. Oh, and that was the week that I was exposed to eBird, a wild and mysterious concoction that spurs endless investigations into the world's avifauna.



Camp TALON's 2012 class birding the beach on Cumberland Island. JP Moss is on the far right.

My Camp TALON Memories *(continued from page 14)*

Although my first venture to TALON in 2012 was undoubtedly the most formative, my other two experiences were equally as memorable. By 2014, I had gained some birding competence, but I had failed to gain the growth spurts that some of my companions gained in two years. It was awesome to reconvene with my old acquaintances and to make some new friends, even if I was now dwarfed by their imposing statures. Whenever I go birding with my TALON buddies, a string of references to that week invariably follows. It was another five years before I found myself caught back in the TALON vortex, this time as an intern to help supervise campers. But I had kept in touch with my camp buddies very closely in the intervening years. Acting as an intern was an interesting spin on the camp experience, and the added responsibility peeled back the behind-the-scenes work that most campers remain naïve to. But this change brought a different brand of reward, especially in seeing campers overcome with the same wonder that gripped me a few years prior.

It seems likely that TALON experiences had a significant effect on my professional path in my adult life. Obviously, my interest in birding has not waned. But my passion for habitat and my desire to play a part in its restoration and conservation has taken center stage in my life. I think meeting so many inspiring folks with the same calling at TALON was the single greatest takeaway that TALON gave me. Like many of these mentors, I have chosen to eschew the life of glamor and wealth that are said to be found in corporate America in order to work in the woods. And since making this choice, I have scarcely looked back. After graduating from Berry College in 2019, I have worked at the botany lab at the Jones Center at Ichauway Plantation, on a GADNR prescribed fire crew in west Georgia, on a plant conservation project in the Piedmont of North Carolina, and finally now in my role as a contracted wildlife biologist at Fort Gordon (soon to be Fort Eisenhower) just outside of Augusta. Georgia has always beckoned to me, and our conservation community is truly unmatched. I believe that TALON makes the most of our wealth of conservation culture, and I am happy to know that the camp will continue to propagate this culture of caring and this call to protect. Camp TALON has been a real blessing in my life. Long live TALON!



Camp TALON's 2019 class at the ruins of the Dungeness Mansion on Cumberland Island. JP Moss is the third birder from the right.

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



Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and nest in a pear tree, Macon, Georgia. Photo by Bob Sargent.