

# THE MARSHLANDER

## OGEECHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

November - December, 2022, Volume LIII, Issue V



### Ogeechee Audubon Society Officers and Board

#### Administrative Responsibilities

President	Sue De Rosa
Vice President	Rose Talbert
Secretary	Patti Seanor
Treasurer	Pam Smith

#### Education Workgroup

Education Outreach	Diana Churchill, Sue De Rosa, and Rose Talbert
Field Trips	Diana Churchill, Brittany Dodge, and Katie Higgins
Programs	Melanie Sparrow, and Rose Talbert

#### Communications Workgroup

Social Media	Mary Lambricht
Webmaster	Mary Lou Dickson
Newsletter	Diana Churchill and Matt Tozer
Publicity	Matt Tozer and Erine-Fay McNaught

#### Historian

Leslie Weichsel

Ogeechee Audubon Mission: Ogeechee Audubon educates adults and children about birds, wildlife, and the environment. We provide opportunities to enjoy the world around us, and advocate for responsible public policy and legislation for the conservation of our natural resources.

**Please join us for the Public Meeting on Tuesday, December 13, at the First Presbyterian Church, 520 Washington Avenue, Savannah, GA!**

Our December meeting will be our annual holiday gathering featuring fellowship, refreshments, and games/activities. This meeting will be a great opportunity for everyone to start getting excited about the upcoming CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT season!

### Christmas Bird Counts 2022-2023

Christmas Bird Counts are one of the longest running citizen science projects in existence having started rather informally back in 1900. Nowadays protocols are standardized by the National Audubon society to maximize the scientific value of the data collected by the

thousands of participants, ranging from novice backyard birders to professional ornithologists. They are also of course a great way to engage with the local birding community and are just plain fun.

This year Ogeechee Audubon will be officially participating in three count circles:

- **Richmond Hill Count: Wednesday, December 14, 2022.** Coordinator and Compiler: Stan Gray [graysirsgarden@comcast.net](mailto:graysirsgarden@comcast.net)
- **Harris Neck Count: Friday, December 16, 2022.** Coordinator: Mary Lambricht [lambrichtm@gmail.com](mailto:lambrichtm@gmail.com) Compiler: Sue DeRosa [susanderosa55@gmail.com](mailto:susanderosa55@gmail.com)
- **Savannah Area Count: Monday, January 2, 2023.** Coordinator: Diana Churchill [dichurchbirds@gmail.com](mailto:dichurchbirds@gmail.com) Compiler: Larry Carlile [l.carlile258@comcast.net](mailto:l.carlile258@comcast.net)

If you would like to participate in any or all of this year's counts please contact the appropriate coordinators and we'll see you out there!



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## *Field Trips – Get out into Nature!*

Field trips are planned **leader-directed** birding opportunities. A knowledgeable and experienced leader will assist in spotting and identifying birds in a precise habitat selected for that particular field trip. The habitat and target birds for the particular area will be outlined in the field trip description. Field trips provide not only a birding opportunity but present learning opportunities for all, especially beginning birders. Field trips are open to the public and birders of all skill levels and ages. Length of time 2 to 3 hours.

**Saturday, Nov. 5, 2022. Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge 9:00am to 12:00pm.** Meet at the Folkston Entrance to the NWR at 9 am for a walk on the boardwalk, the old homestead, and possibly the upland trail. Trip rigor easy to moderate. Cost \$5 per person plus bring \$\$ for the concession stand for lunch. Limit 10 people with pre-registration required. **4155 Suwanee Canal Rd., Folkston, GA 31537** Contact leader Brittany Dodge ([brittmarie24@gmail.com](mailto:brittmarie24@gmail.com)) to register. 912-800-5361.

On your own option: After the OAS field trip, Brittany Dodge, a naturalist who formerly worked at Okefenokee NWR, is willing to guide a 1 1/2 to 2 hour paddle after lunch. This trip is not sponsored by Ogeechee Audubon. Limit 10 people with pre-registration required. Please contact Brittany Dodge ([brittmarie24@gmail.com](mailto:brittmarie24@gmail.com)) 912-800-5361 if interested.

**Saturday, Nov. 19, 2022. Lake Mayer Community Park 8:00am to 11:00am.** Meet at the eastern end of the large parking lot on Montgomery Crossroads entrance at 8:00 am. We will be looking for ducks, wintering songbirds, wading birds, gulls, terns and more. Trip rigor: Easy to moderate with 1-2 miles of walking. **1850 E Montgomery Cross Rd., Savannah, GA 31406** Leader Larry Carlile ([l.carlile259@comcast.net](mailto:l.carlile259@comcast.net)) 912-224-1796.

**Saturday, Nov. 26, 2022. Ft. Pulaski National Monument 8:45am to 11:00am.** Meet at the entrance at 8:45 for 9 am entry into the park. With an 8.4 ft high tide at 9:22 am we will be looking for marsh sparrows, as well as marsh and sedge wren, wintering songbirds, and more. Trip rigor: moderate; \$10 entrance fee or National Parks Pass required. **101 Fort Pulaski Rd, Savannah, GA** Leader Larry Carlile ([l.carlile259@comcast.net](mailto:l.carlile259@comcast.net))

**Saturday, Dec. 3, 2022. Skidaway Island State Park 8:00am to 11:00am.** Meet at the Skidaway Island Methodist Church at 8:00am. From there we will carpool (if you like) into the park (\$5 parking fee in the park will be in effect). Target species will include wading birds and wintering songbirds. Meeting site address: **54 Diamond Causeway, Savannah, GA 31411** Leader Katie Higgins ([Kt.Higgins@uga.edu](mailto:Kt.Higgins@uga.edu))

## Surveys!

Surveys are conducted to gather data regarding bird populations at a defined time, in a defined area for a defined purpose. Surveys are more rigorous than bird walks or field trips. Surveys are conducted with a specific purpose in mind and the data that is collected will be submitted by the survey leader only and shared with the participants. These surveys are led by a core survey team. Ogeechee Audubon members are invited to participate in survey activity as citizen scientists and expected to stay for the length of the survey. Surveys are only open to Ogeechee Audubon Members. Length of time will vary but typically as long as 4 hours.

### Sunday, Nov. 6, 2022. Rusty Blackbird Surveys at the Savannah Christian Preparatory School 3:00pm to 5:00pm.

Ogeechee Audubon will continue to monitor use of this site as a pre-roost staging area for Rusty Blackbirds. This restricted access site is most likely the most reliable location in the area for observing Rusty Blackbirds which have undergone massive population declines over the past half century. If you would like to join the survey team please meet a team member at the front gate of the school at 3:00pm sharp. **1599 Chatham Parkway, Savannah, GA 31408.** Leader Stan Gray ([grayirisdgarden@comcast.net](mailto:grayirisdgarden@comcast.net)). Surveys will be conducted every other Sunday on 11/6, 11/13, 11/20, 12/4, 12/18, and 1/2.

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## Field Notes

### **Tybee Island Shorebird Survey, September 11, 2022**

Judy Johnson

Our Sunday morning shorebird survey on North Beach lead by Diana Churchill was well worth the early rise and long drive. We were a small group so that made it even better for the bird identification help from our expert birders. Although I have been a birder for years, it is so helpful to have these knowledgeable eagle eyes.

We were amply rewarded with lots of Laughing Gulls in various states of plumage (easy to identify when they have their summertime black heads but a bit more difficult with juveniles and winter plumage molt). Other notable gulls were quite a few Lesser Black-backed Gulls, 1 Great Black-backed Gull (the largest gull distinguished by their pinkish legs), Herring Gulls and a couple of Ring-billed Gulls.

And then there were terns! Lots of Royal Terns and Sandwich Terns – they provided a great cacophony of sound against the gentle surf. It was so cute to still see the begging behavior of the young adults. We also saw a few Caspian Terns & Common Terns, but the most exciting were Black Terns (a life bird for this birder) thanks to the great spotting of Diana and Pam Smith.

Interspersed with the terns were several Black Skimmers. Unfortunately, none were flying so we didn't get to observe their unique fishing technique skimming above the water using their longer lower mandible to scoop up unsuspecting fishes!



*Piping Plover*

*Photo Credit: Diana Churchill*

There were lots of Sanderlings including one large “army” of them moving in formation along the beach. Also present were quite a few Ruddy Turnstones with several still in nice summer plumage.

But the excitement of the day was 4 Piping Plovers, one of which was banded. Diana got some great shots so hopefully we will find out the history of this sweet little bird.

Walking back to our cars we made a detour to a beautiful pond where we enjoyed some shade (we were hot & sweaty at this point). Here we saw quite a few Snowy Egrets (including juveniles with yellowish streaking up their legs) and Little Blue Herons (some juvenile with their still white bodies and greenish legs). A beautiful pair of Green Herons joined the crew and an Anhinga doing its snake imitation. We also saw a scruffy male Painted Bunting and a brief glimpse of a secretive Common Yellowthroat confirmed by hearing his “cheep”. We enjoyed seeing butterflies – several gulf fritillaries and cloudless sulphurs – they are in migration too!

The final treat of the day was watching an Osprey grab a fish! What a splendid day of birding on the coast!

## **Kingfisher Pond Recreation Area, September 17, 2022**

Rachel Green

On September 17, 2022, Pam Vercellone-Smith led a group of six participants on a field trip around Kingfisher Pond Recreation Area. This beautiful morning was one of the first breaks from the humidity of the summer and hinted of the coming of cool, autumn days. As we arrived in the parking area, we heard the distinctive calls of numerous Black-Bellied Whistling Ducks flying overhead. We were able to see clearly their white wing patches as they flew to and from the pond. A part of the Savannah Wildlife Refuge, the Kingfisher Recreation Area consists of a loop trail and a pond which we later learned started as an old borrow pit dug to build the overpass of US 17. Now, the pond has a dock for observation and is filled with vegetation both in and around its banks. As we began our walk around the pond, we saw several more Black-Bellied Whistling Ducks standing on their bright pink legs in the branches of the bare trees located in the center of the pond while several common gallinules foraged below. We heard a Hooded Warbler but it was deeper in the forest and we were unable to get a view. However, we were soon entertained by an American Redstart hopping in the tree branches, flashing its yellow tail to scare up insects.

As we walked away from the pond the trail dipped into a wetter area and we were reminded by the number of mosquitos that it was still summer. Pam sighted a Northern Waterthrush among a pile of downed trees, but it was only a brief view.



*Northern Waterthrush*  
Photo Credit: Pam Vercellone-Smith

As we came around the edge of the far end of the pond, we saw a Pileated Woodpecker as it landed in a tree. Pam told us that a woodpecker’s long tongue recedes into its skull and wraps around it. We also learned that a woodpecker’s skull is made of a spongy bone that acts to cushion its brain, allowing the bird to hammer a tree repeatedly with great force.

As we continued our walk, we saw many additional species including a juvenile White-eyed Vireo, a Yellow-Throated Warbler, a Common Yellowthroat and several Northern Parulas. Later, we got a long look at an adult White-eyed Vireo with its distinctive yellow spectacles. As we continued around the pond there was a shallow boggy area of shrubs and small trees just off the trail. There, we observed movement low in the shrubs and soon spotted a Northern Waterthrush, patterned in brown streaks with a



narrow, pale eyebrow. As we observed it, we spotted two more individuals and enjoyed watching them bobbing their tails up and down while foraging for insects along the water's edge and among the trees.

As the trip ended, we once again spotted a small group of Black-Bellied Whistling Ducks and a Common Gallinule. This time, we watched them somewhat nervously as they walked around a large alligator hidden among the vegetation. Fortunately, the day ended peacefully and with much success in numbers and field experiences, with the group recording twenty-seven species and one-hundred and eight individuals in the E-Bird list.

## **Fort McCallister State Park, October 22, 2022**

Steve Fox

The Fort McCallister SP field trip took place during beautiful sunny weather on Saturday, October 22, 2022. The trip was a reschedule due to concerns of inclement weather from Hurricane Ian. The Redbird Creek Trail has been closed for years due to extensive damage incurred from Hurricanes Matthew (2016) and Irma (2017), but was recently reopened in its entirety.

The morning trip consisted of a walk through the main parking area, as well as through the entire stretch of redbird creek trail (~3.5 mi). The trail winds through maritime forest, hardwood hammock and crosses tidal wetlands and tidal marsh (spartina/black needle rush) through a series of board walks. Trip attendance was small, but did allow us to take our time to explore this trail thoroughly and better familiarize the group with local bird species ID, vocalizations and expectations on what we may see throughout the different habitats as we walk along the trail. This weekend was slightly past peak for the GA coast for most post-breeding warblers but it was also the start of the fall migration for wintering birds. The park and trail yielded a decent mix of both.

As we started our way towards the trail, we were greeted by three bald eagles (2 yr.) fighting and flying over the tree canopy overlooking the Ogeechee river. Several Palm Warblers and of course, Yellow-rumped Warblers were present throughout the entrance area, as well as Eastern Phoebes. Once on the trail, we had excellent views of Black and white Warblers, Pine Warblers, Yellow-throated Warbler, a Hooded Warbler and a Northern Parula to name a few. I had a very fast glimpse of a Black-throated Blue Warbler but was unable to show it to the group despite my best efforts to relocate it (argh!!). Ruby-crowned Kinglets were back in decent number and Golden-crowned-kinglets had a nice showing as well. House Wrens and Carolina Wrens were in good number and my FOS Sedge Wren was observed in a tidal swale adjacent to the marsh. As we walked along the long boardwalks over the marsh, we heard several Clapper Rails sounding off in the distance and observed several wading species roosting and foraging. Swamp and Song sparrows were also present and vocalizing. Five Woodpecker species were observed including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Northern Flicker. One of the trip highlights was observing a Coopers Hawk charging and hunting several Blue Jays for approximately 10 minutes, not caring in the least of our close presence below. As we ended our trip, I observed a couple of American Redstarts and two more Bald Eagles (adult).

In total, 61 species were observed. The trail and park largely met my expectations for this time of year. The trail appears to have healed well post hurricane damage from Matthew and Irma. However, I was a little saddened that prime Red-headed Woodpecker habitat that was once in abundance on this trail has significantly declined, presumably from hurricane damage. Winter Wren were historically in very good number as well but none were observed as of yet. It appears that they're still moving through north and central GA so it might be something to keep an eye on for this winter. I'm looking forward to coming back to this State Park soon!

## Webb Wildlife Management Area, October 23, 2022

Diana Churchill

Six members of Ogeechee Audubon joined leader Steve Wagner for this fall trip to one of our favorite spring locations. When I got there, Steve, Mary Lou Dickson and Pam Smith were staring up into a tall pine tree buzzing with bird activity. At least 2 Red-cockaded Woodpeckers were vocalizing and actively feeding. They had counted close to 30 Pine Warblers. We heard both Brown-headed and White-breasted Nuthatches, and spied a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker as well.

One difference in the fall was that the Bachman's Sparrows were not perched up singing.

Neotropical migrants were few and far between. It was a far cry from the spring when we always see and hear Summer Tanagers, Indigo Buntings, Blue Grosbeaks, Prothonotary Warblers, and Mississippi and Swallow-tailed Kites. Pam found one female Black-throated Blue Warbler feeding in a small live oak, and we did see and hear a single Eastern Wood-pewee. In a weedy field near what during the spring is a wading bird rookery, we found several female Painted Buntings and one female Indigo Bunting.

The pond did have Black-bellied Whistling ducks and Wood ducks, as well as Common Gallinules.



*Red-cockaded Woodpecker*  
Photo Credit: Diana Churchill



*Yellow-billed Cuckoo*  
Photo Credit: Diana Churchill

Down at the swamp, that had been flooded during the spring, Steve spied a pair of Yellow-billed Cuckoos. We also found a small feeding flock of songbirds, including Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, a Northern Parula, a Black-and-white Warbler, several Yellow-rumped Warblers, an Orange-crowned Warbler, and a Blue-headed Vireo.

We heard and saw Red-cockaded Woodpeckers at several locations on the property, both perched and in flight.

Another highlight was watching an aerial battle between American Kestrel and a Sharp-shinned Hawk over the dove field near the Rookery.

All told, it was a gorgeous fall day and a very satisfactory 5 hours of birding.

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## *Weeds are for the Birds*

*Carol McCray Davies*

Weeds are often unwanted, uninvited native plants in the garden. They've gotten their bossy reputation by being invasive, and well, bossy. They often outperform, or outwit, more desirable plants.

I have learned that weeds are important denizens and should be allowed to grow in any well-tended garden. Not that my garden is well-tended, but I have learned to leave at least part of my garden untamed. A little wilderness in an urban garden is a good thing.

A tall patch of weeds had taken over an area in my garden I had hoped to grow caladiums and impatiens, but ever opportunistic weeds had pushed them all out and grown almost two feet tall, scraggly looking things, that I threatened to pull up for days, when I glimpsed a male Painted Bunting in the midst of them!

He was pulling, pushing, and plucking the seed heads near the tops of these unsolicited beings! He stayed about an hour in my garden sampling the most unsavory looking plants, ignoring the bird feeder altogether and clinging to the sturdy stalks of these unsightly weeds I had planned to remove.

I was thrilled that I hadn't cleaned out this particular weedy patch as it seemed to be just what the Bunting desired most!

So, lesson learned. Delay weeding as long as possible, let weeds stay until they form nutritious seeds. My bird feeder hadn't attracted the Bunting with his coat of many colors, my weeds had! When I've seen Painted Buntings in my garden they are always foraging in the neglected areas.

Leave some weeds for the birds. They will notice and grace your garden with unexpected pleasure.

## **Membership Reminder!**

Hi! I am Mary Lambright and I am the person who keeps track of membership. Fall is in the air and it is time to think about renewing your membership in Ogeechee Audubon for 2023. Did you know? Your membership in the Ogeechee Audubon Society membership is for the calendar year (January 1 through December 31). Some of you have already renewed for 2023 (yay for you!). If you aren't sure what your current membership status is, you can send an email to [ogeecheeaudubon.help@gmail.com](mailto:ogeecheeaudubon.help@gmail.com) and I will be happy to let you know. If you received this newsletter via MailChimp, your membership is current (you paid for 2022). At the end of this newsletter you will find a membership form so you can choose which membership level is best for you and then fill out the form and send it in with your dues. Our treasurer, Pam Smith, will take care of your money and I will make sure that you continue to receive our newsletter, The Marshlander, and other important info via MailChimp.

Disclaimer: Membership to Ogeechee Audubon Society does NOT include membership to National Audubon Society with its subscription to the magazine, Audubon but you are encouraged to join both organizations. For more information about National Audubon Society, visit [audubon.org](http://audubon.org)

Thank You!

### **Ogeechee Audubon Chapter Membership Form – 2023**

New membership \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

Membership – please check level of membership

\_\_\_\_\_ Individual Adult older than 18 years - \$20

\_\_\_\_\_ Household/Family - \$20

\_\_\_\_\_ Senior – individual (62 and older) - \$15

\_\_\_\_\_ Student – individual (13 years old to 18 years old) - \$15

\_\_\_\_\_ Fledgling Birder – individual (12 years old and younger) - \$5

Additional contribution: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

If household or family, additional names: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: (home) \_\_\_\_\_ (mobile) \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Ogeechee Audubon membership is for a calendar year – January to December. OAS Chapter renewals are accepted until March 31<sup>st</sup>.

All meeting information, events and important conservation issues will be communicated by email.

Ogeechee Audubon Newsletter – The *Marshlander* is sent by email to individual or household/family.

Please mail this form with your check to:

**Ogeechee Audubon, Attn Membership**

**PO Box 13424,**

**Savannah, GA 31416**

*Contributions are tax deductible.*

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in leading Field Trips

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in volunteering to help with OAS booth at events

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in serving on the Board

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in helping wherever needed