

THE MARSHLANDER

OGEECHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

January - February, 2022, Volume LIV, Issue I



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.

Christmas Bird Count Round-Up

Harris Neck, December, 16, 2022 **Sue De Rosa**

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count for Harris Neck was held on December 16th which was a sunny, pleasant day compared with the following week. Harris Neck CBC became part of the CBC in 1971. Unfortunately the birders didn't gather for lunch to share their experiences of being out in the field. Twenty-seven people participated this year, slightly down from last year's twenty-eight. Nine "new" birders joined us: Tim Miller, Mark Woodruff, Steve and Sandra Calver (who stood in for Larry Carlile), Rose Talbert (now retired from her day job), Suzy Tarnower, Matt Perry and Betsey Finn, and Steve Miller. Only one area wasn't covered this year, mainly thanks to their efforts. All of the birders' hard work yielded 121 species, down from last year's 128 and 135 species in 2020. Many thanks to the early birders catching some owls and not just worms plus the groups that ventured out on the waters counting the shorebirds, ducks, tree swallows, and more. Being out in the marsh, river, and woods is a great way to "welcome" winter, but seeing the birds and birders is delightful.

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 Lambright
Webmaster	Mary Lou Dickson
Newsletter	Diana Churchill and Matt Tozer
Publicity	Matt Tozer and Erine-Fay McNaught

Historian

Leslie Weichsel

Savannah Area Christmas Bird Count, January 2, 2023 **Diana Churchill**

For a change, we had very pleasant weather for the count. Temperatures began in the low 50s and got up to the mid-60s. It was sunny and not windy. We had 27 teams with some 68 people involved, as well as several feeder watchers.

A few notes:

Diana's team at Delta Plantation (Mark Hyner, Stephen Dickson, Tony & Rose Johnson) were thrilled to hear an



Hooded Mergansers

Photo Credit: Rachel Green

unusual call that turned out to be a Fox Sparrow. Tony and Rose got brief looks at the bird that refused to pose for photos. Everyone heard it very clearly, and Merlin sound ID also provided us with audio evidence. Other notables were a single Roseate Spoonbill, a Merlin, and a pair of Sedge Wrens.

Steve Wagner and Andy Jones counted at Fife Plantation. They recorded a total of 91 species, with highlights being an American Woodcock, Purple Finch, and American White Pelican.

Pam Fandrich & Alan Bailey, doing their first count, were assigned the task of checking the feeders at Diana's mother's house in Magnolia Park. The wintering Painted Buntings were cooperative, as were the Baltimore Orioles.

Rachel Green, Diane Flickinger & David Haubrich counted area 13 in midtown Savannah. Rachel was thrilled to find 2 Killdeer in Daffin Park, as well as an Orange-crowned Warbler on the Police Memorial Trail. They also had 3 Hermit Thrushes, 3 Red-tailed Hawks, and many Ruby-crowned Kinglets. The Hooded Mergansers in the Casey Canal were abundant and showy.

The Downtown Team – Karen & Philip Graine, Bob Birkett, and Shannon Matzke – spent their time in Forsyth Park, Bowles C. Ford Park, and Laurel Grove Cemetery. A highlight was two different pairs of Red-shouldered Hawks – one near the pond of Bowles C. Ford, and another in the forested wetland south of the drainage canal one south end of the cemetery.

Kathy Schaefer & Larry Carlile covered Area25 A, B & C. Says Kathy "The first bird that Larry Carlile and I encountered was a Screech Owl, followed by a pair (or triumvirate) of Barred Owls. We saw/heard an abundance of Pileated Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, White-breasted Nuthatches, Little Blue Herons, and Snowy Egrets. The last bird of the day was a Great Horned Owl." Larry was particularly happy to find American Woodcock and Virginia Rail, as well as two hummingbirds at the home of Mary Richards – one a male Ruby-throated and the other a Selaphorus species. At Honey Creek Park he was surprised to find 9 Bonaparte's gulls and 2 Purple Finches.



Mark Woodruff, Steven Miller and John Cassell counted on Hutchinson Island. Once again, they found a Western Kingbird, as well as a Grasshopper Sparrow.

The Wilmington-Whitmarsh Team boasted our youngest participant. Wanda Swanson, not quite 5 months old, accompanied father Eric and mother Jess. She was out from 6:45 am until 4:00 pm. Eric said he was a bit disappointed in not finding some of their regular birds but did see a white pelican late in the afternoon near the Rails to Trails site.

Look for notes on the Richmond Hill Count, species highlights, and an overview from Savannah Count Compiler Larry Carlile in the March edition of the Marshlander.

 <p>Wild Birds Unlimited Nature Shop</p>	<p>Fresh Seed NO Fillers!</p>	<p>Bird Feeders Birdbaths Pole Systems And The Freshest Seed in Town!</p>	<p>8108 Abercorn Street Mon-Sat 10-6 Sunday 12-5 Next to Home Goods (912) 961-3455</p>	
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Public Meeting!

Please join us for the Public Meeting on Tuesday, February 21, 7:00pm, at the First Presbyterian Church, 520 Washington Avenue, Savannah, GA!

Our speakers will be Adam Betuel and Lauren Bowman Clontz from Georgia Audubon.

They will be speaking in person about Project Safe Flight – an ongoing project to understand the issue of birds colliding with buildings.

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.

Jan. 13 – 16, 2023. GOS Winter Meeting on Tybee Island. Visit www.gos.org for details.

Sunday, Jan. 22, 2023. Tybee Island North Beach 8:30am to 11:00am. We'll be surveying gulls, terns, shorebirds and more. Meet by the parking meters on Polk Street at 8:30 am for a high tide beach walk. Trip rigor-moderate with 1-2 miles walking in soft sand. **77 Polk Street, Tybee Island, GA 31328** Leader Diana Churchill dichurchbirds@gmail.com. 912-604-7539

Saturday, February 11, 2023. Lake Mayer Community Park 8:00am to 11:00am. Targeting ducks and wintering songbirds. Meet in the east end of the parking lot on Montgomery Crossroads at 8 am. Trip rigor – easy with 1-2 miles walking on paved path. **1850 E Montgomery Cross Rd., Savannah, GA 31406** Leader Larry Carlile. l.carlile259@comcast.net 912-224-1796.

February 17- 20, 2023. The Great Backyard Bird Count. Count the birds in your yard, neighborhood or favorite venue and submit your data on eBird. For details, visit www.birdcount.org.

Saturday, Feb. 25, 2023. Oatland Island Wildlife Center 8:30am to 11:00am Target species will include wintering songbirds, raptors, wading birds and more. Meet at the gate to Oatland Island Wildlife Center at 8:30 am. Trip rigor easy. Entrance fee will be waived for participants. **711 Sandtown Rd., Savannah, GA 31410** Leader Eric Swanson ericgreggswanson@gmail.com 309-721-4357.

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.

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 (grayirisgarden@comcast.net).

Surveys will be conducted every other Sunday on

- January 22
- February 5
- February 19 (coincides with Great Backyard Bird Count weekend)

Field Notes

Fort Pulaski, November 26, 2022

Steve & Sandra Calver

We met at the entrance waiting for everyone to arrive and the park to open. After we spotted some Savannah Sparrows, someone yelled ducks and we saw 7 Red-breasted Mergansers fly over. We figured that was a good omen. We started out the morning parking just past the bridge and heading to the marsh edge. We then began looking for marsh sparrows and wrens and were not disappointed. We found several Marsh Wrens that all appeared to be the red migrant race. The sparrows were more difficult. We did have one Nelson's pose for us near the top of a bush. We saw a few Seaside Sparrows in flight but better looks were hard to come by. The Saltmarsh Sparrows were a little better as we got brief glimpses of several.

We next headed out into the open field and ended up at the edge of the marsh that surrounds the fort. Larry and his sharp ears led us to some Sedge Wrens that eventually perched where we could see them. A little Blue Heron posed for us and some were also treated to glimpses of a Northern Harrier.

After that, we walked toward the old pier and were first treated to flocks of Willets and Least Sandpipers. We then found 3 rather cooperative Lesser Yellowlegs. At the tip of the pier we found Black-bellied Plovers, Dunlin, Sanderling, Semipalmated Plovers and a few Short-billed Dowitchers. On the walk back to the parking lot those that were near Larry again reaped the benefits of his hearing where Gnatcatchers and Golden-crowned Kinglets were detected, among others. We ended the official trip at the parking lot where we were greeted with a large flock of Brown-headed Cowbirds. A few of us headed back to the causeway and were treated to looks at a Wilson's Plover, American Oystercatchers and both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs.

Skidaway Island, December 3, 2022

Alan Bailey

Seven birders including trip leader Katie Higgins assembled on a weather-perfect day for birding on the Sandpiper Trail at Skidaway State Park. The day started out cool, warming rapidly, with a light breeze and good sun for our birding.

An early stop was at the bird feeders behind the park's nature center. Here we saw a small flock of Chipping Sparrows, and several common feeder birds, the Painted Buntings that frequent this feeder in summer having left for warmer climes.

Our group moved on to cross the boardwalk over the high saltmarsh. Talk about slow-birding! There was so much avian activity, especially in the trees just beyond the boardwalk's far end, that it took us at least thirty minutes to make the 100 yards or so of walkway and take it all in.

It was a bluebird-of-happiness day- not just the weather, but good heavens the Eastern Bluebirds were out in force. They were actively flying about and perching in the pines, live oaks, and cedars here, giving us great zaps of that blue-morpho color in the low-angle winter sun. The more experienced birders among us estimated we saw a total of about 30 for the day! The abundance of bluebirds gifted our group with smiles all around.



Photo Credit: Tommy Taylor

Among other birds we observed from the boardwalk was a small flock of that most impeccably-groomed of our winter birds, the berry-loving Cedar Waxwing. Birders may argue Swarovski versus Zeiss, but they all agree that the Cedar Waxwing is among the handsomest of birds, with its deep black mask outlined in white, the raked crest, the way the its body colors work together, and all accented by that bright chrome-yellow tail stripe. Lynn Hodgson had been kind enough to lug along her spotting scope and she let all in our party admire their movie-star looks.

Skidaway State Park is covered mostly in maritime forest, with a goodly number of pines in the mix of trees. Katie explained that the dead pines along the trail, and the many we saw from the boardwalk, resulted from the flooding of recent hurricanes such as Irma, worsened by rising sea levels. That the pines are among the first trees to succumb to the salt water incursions is at least a silver lining for woodpeckers, giving them great forage on the insects inhabiting the dead pines. And so we were able to see Pileated, Red-headed, Red-bellied, and Downy Woodpeckers in addition to getting good looks at a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, at least in my limited experience, is a bird that is heard more than seen so we were grateful for that nice look at one. We were fortunate to have Steve Miller along taking photos and, as we admired the sapsucker's precision-pecked and nicely aligned sap wells, Steve was able to get some good photos. Katie explained that the sapsuckers chisel their holes in the bark of trees in part so that the weeping sap will bait insects that the birds then return to feed on. Katie also told us that hummingbirds will often trail behind the sapsuckers to lap up the sap weeping from the wounds.

Further down the trail, we were able to get a distant but clear look at a full adult Bald Eagle, commandingly perched on the edge of a marsh hammock across a broad stretch of the saltmarsh.

We eventually emerged on the beach of Skidaway Narrows, which the Intracoastal Waterway follows here. Looking across the water to Long Island, part of Wormsloe, we heard and saw Laughing Gulls, and higher above them an Osprey. Looking toward the bridge to Skidaway Island, we observed a flock of 15 Double-crested Cormorants and a couple of Brown Pelicans loafing on the wood structures below the bridge, undeterred in their apparent relaxation by the car traffic above them and the boat traffic in the Narrows.

Yellow-rumped Warblers -butterbutts in birder slang- were plentiful as expected this time of year and reassuring in their faithful winter return to our area. Katie tried to teach the unschooled among us to recognize their call note, but I'm afraid I will need more practice.

Heading back, and not far from returning to the long boardwalk, our group watched the experts among us puzzle over the identity of a young raptor in a dead snag- whether it was a juvenile Red-tailed or Red-shouldered Hawk. For help with this conundrum, Katie brought out her wonderful book The Crossley ID Guide: Eastern Birds that she had lugged along, a book which made its way to my Christmas list! Eventually, it was decided to call the raptor *Buteo* sp., and Katie reminded us that it is better to let it a bird go incompletely or unidentified if one is not certain of its identity.

We ended up with a tally of 45 species for the day, a superb day of birding with a great group. Thanks were extended to Katie for leading our trip, Lynn for bringing her scope, and Steve for sharing his great photos. The complete list of birds we saw can be found on the Cornell's eBird website along with Steve's photos that he selected to post.



Figure 1 Photo Credit: Tommy Taylor

Two Fledgling “Birders”

Don McInnis

Vidal and I have been involved in the “birdwatching world” for several years. Our journey has been at a somewhat slow pace, yet we often have the feeling of what must be similar to that of fledgling birds as they leave their temporary homes. Like the fledglings, we had no real sense of the environment we were entering - new sounds, sights, experiences, and adventures.

We credit Diana Churchill, a fellow birder and personal friend, with introducing us to this new world. She connected us with OAS, a truly fine and welcoming group. They are to be admired for their passion and knowledge. We don’t approach their level of knowledge - not sure we ever will. However, we have risen in the ranks of “interest level” in birding as evidenced by the eight bird feeders now in our yard. Who would ever have thought? Certainly not us!! In addition, we have a designated viewing window in an extra room. Thus, we are able to do birding even in bad weather while having coffee. Nice!

So what have we learned/discovered thus far?

PPP...patience, patience and patience! This is the survival tool of birding in my opinion. I remember Diana casually saying it takes lots of patience...lots! Little did I know the truth of those words. Now I do. With each bird outing/field trip it becomes more obvious. Might I add, it spills over into my personal life as well. Patience is not my strong suit. I think it has improved via birding.

In reflection, I am happy to have the daily pleasure of a “maturing fledgling,” and look forward to more experiences and adventures.

“Here a bird, there a bird, everywhere a bird.”

Master Birders Course

Congratulations to Ogeechee Audubon’s new Master Birders: Rachel Green and Steven Miller. Ogeechee Audubon partnered with Hilton Head Island Audubon members to participate in the course offered by Georgia Audubon. Rachel and Steve attended two weekly Zoom classes for four weeks which were lead by experts from around Georgia. Additionally, they participated in four field classes on four consecutive Saturdays. Two of the four field trips were lead by OAS’s own bird specialists, Diana Churchill, Mary Lou Dickson, and Pam Vercellone-Smith. After completing a final examination, they earned their Master Birder Certification. The graduation was celebrated on November 19th at the education center of the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. We look forward to gleaning much bird information from them, especially on OAS’s bird walks.



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 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

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 31st.

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