

THE MARSHLANDER

OGEECHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

March - April, 2023, Volume LIV, Issue II



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.

Public Meeting!

Please join us for the Public Meeting on Tuesday, April 18, 7:00pm, at the First Presbyterian Church, 520 Washington Avenue, Savannah, GA!

Savannah National Wildlife Refuge Hurricane Irma Rehabilitation Project

Speaker Kimberly Hayes; Wildlife Refuge Manager for the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex

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

In September 2017 Hurricane Irma brought wide-spread damage to the Georgia and South Carolina coasts including the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. The objective of the refuge is to provide high-quality habitat for wintering waterfowl and other wetland-dependent migratory birds. The 3,000-acre impoundment system managed by the Savannah NWR is the primary means of providing this high-quality habitat and was severely damaged. The storm surge brought by Irma breached several levees and damaged the integrity of many miles of levees critical to the management of the impoundment system. The Savannah NWR received funding to not only repair the breached levees but also create more resilience to the existing system through rehabilitation of the levees, which includes rebuilding berms, slopes, and the tops. Additionally, rice trunks located on the perimeter levee were replaced to provide better water control. The refuge contracted with Ducks Unlimited to provide engineering and oversight of the rehabilitation project, which started in 2021. This presentation will highlight the work that is being accomplished and upcoming opening of the Wildlife Drive.



And coming up at the June public meeting...

Unsure of how to use eBird? Want to learn more about how the eBird review process works? Want to find out all the incredible data available in eBird that can inform your birding experience? Come to OAS's June meeting where Yve Morrell, an eBird reviewer and who did a big year in 2017, will fill us in on those questions and much more.

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.

Sunday, March 12, 2023: Lake Mayer Community Park 8:00am to 11:00am. We'll be searching for ducks, wintering songbirds, and more. Meet at the east end of the main parking lot on Montgomery Crossroads at 8 am. Trip rigor: Easy walking on a paved path. **1850 E Montgomery Cross Rd., Savannah, GA 31406.** Leader Larry Carlile l.carlile259@comcast.net 912-224-1796.

Sunday, March 26: Ford Field & River Club, Richmond Hill 8:30am to 11:30am. We'll be exploring this spectacular property for wintering birds and early spring migrants. Ogeechee Audubon is happy to continue our partnership with the Ford Field & River Club by offering this trip for Ford Residents and OAS members. Meet at the Main Entrance **48 Ford Way, Richmond Hill, GA 31324** at 8:30 am. Advance Reservations required. Email Diana. Trip rigor: Moderate with a good bit of walking. Leaders Shannon Matzke & Diana Churchill. dichurchbirds@gmail.com 912-604-7539.

Saturday, April 8: Wormsloe Plantation 8:30am to 11:30am. Target species will include winter birds and early spring migrants. Meet at the Wormsloe Entrance at 8:30 am. Reservations required. Ogeechee Audubon will make a donation to Wormsloe to cover entrance fees. **7601 Skidaway Rd., Savannah, GA 31406.** Trip rigor: Moderate with some walking. Leaders: Katie Higgins kt.higgins@uga.edu 912-677-2067, Pam Smith & and Gretchen Gremlinger. Register: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60B0944AEA62EA2FA7-oasfield>

Spring Migration Walks in Forsyth Park. Thursday mornings April 6, 13, 20, 27 & May 4th 7:45am to 9:15am. Meet at the Forsyth Park Fountain at 7:45 am. We will wander the North End of Forsyth Park for 1 1/2 hours looking for migrating songbirds, nesting hawks and owls and resident songbirds as well. Trip rigor: Easy. **1 W Gaston Street, Savannah, GA, 31401.** Leader Diana Churchill dichurchbirds@gmail.com 912-604-7539

Sunday, April 23: Webb Wildlife Management Area 8:00am to 12:00pm. We'll look for site specialties such as Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Bachman's Sparrows, spring migrants, and more. Meet at the entrance to Webb at 8 am. Trip rigor: Moderate. Bring snacks and or lunch. **2680 Augusta Stage Coach Rd. Garnett, SC 29922.** Leader Steve Wagner sjwgnr@hotmail.com 912-655-0797.



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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 Savannah Christian Preparatory School

Ogeechee Audubon continues to conduct every other week surveys at this location to monitor the population of Rusty Blackbirds.

Sunday, March 5 from 3-5 pm. Sundays, March 19 & April 2 from 4-6 pm. Contact Stan Gray at graysirsgarden@comcast.net or 912-659-5020

International Shorebird Surveys on Tybee Island

These surveys take place on Tybee North Beach during spring migration. Meet at the end of Polk Street. Bring quarters for meters or use the Park Tybee App. Note: Parking on Tybee is going up to \$4 an hour beginning March 1st. Be prepared to walk 2 miles on sand. Leader Diana Churchill dichurchbirds@gmail.com or 912-604-7539.

Monday, March 20, 2023 - 6 pm

Monday, April 17, 2023 - 6 pm

Monday, May 15, 2023 - 5 pm

Field Notes

Richmond Hill Christmas Bird Count, December 14, 2022

Stan Gray, Count Compiler

The Richmond Hill Christmas Bird Count was conducted on Wednesday, December 14, 2022. Only in its 3rd year since inception, it is still in its formative stage, with new areas being explored each year, and internal boundaries being modified. As such, drawing too many conclusions about emerging trends in bird populations is subject to speculation at best. However, for the 31 participating birders this year (a slight increase from 26 in 2021), divided into 13 parties, it was a fun day in the field, yielding some interesting results, and a chance to become more familiar with the ecological characteristics of the count circle.

The circle is anchored by 13 eBird hotspots plus a large swath of the easternmost training/recreational areas at Ft. Stewart. The weather was relatively mild, cloudy all day, but with a light rain beginning to fall in the mid-afternoon. Many birders enjoyed lunch together at the Coastal Georgia Botanical Gardens, count circle HQ's, for a delicious catered lunch generously sponsored by the Friends of the Coastal Gardens. The count day ended with a team conducting a roost count at the Ford Field & River Club. This was the first year of this roost count, and it had a decidedly positive impact on numbers of wading birds (egrets, herons, and ibis) reported for the day.

Rare Bird forms were submitted for the following species: Hairy Woodpecker, Henslow's Sparrow, Red-cockaded Woodpecker (all from Ft. Stewart); as well as Northern Waterthrush (Superior Landfill) and Rusty Blackbird (multiple locations). In addition, several sightings were made of Winter Wren and Brown Creeper, species that are highly problematic many years.

In all, 108 species (not counting feral or domestic birds) were observed, the same # as last year. More than 10,000 more birds were counted this year than last, owing primarily to huge gull #'s at Superior Landfill: 16,000 Laughing Gull and 10,000 Ring-billed Gull.

Other than those mentioned above, the following species showed robust significant increases from last year: Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Flicker, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Golden-crowned Kinglet, White-breasted Nuthatch, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, American Goldfinch, Swamp Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow-rumped Warbler. The most dramatic increase was of Bald Eagles. At the Superior Landfill site, 53 eagles were individually counted, by far the highest # ever recorded by OAS at that site, covering many periodic surveys there since 2013.

Conversely, and quite likely due to the impact of the Avian flu, dramatic decreases were seen with Black Vulture (while Turkey Vulture #'s rose) and Fish Crow.

The Richmond Hill CBC count circle encompasses much land that is in a dynamic state of development. Most notably Richmond Hill, Grove Point/Georgetown, and the Little Neck/Quacco Road corridor are seeing or are on the verge of tremendous residential and commercial or industrial growth. It is important that we determine which areas within the count circle will remain as stable "green" space, so as to achieve consistency in future CBC reporting. I invite you to join us for the next Richmond Hill CBC on **Wednesday, December 20**.



*One of the Blue-gray Gnatcatchers counted on this year's Richmond Hill CBC
Photo Credit: Matt Tozer*

Experience on the Savannah Christmas Bird Count, January 2, 2023

Connor Stille

My name is Connor Stille. I am 12 years old and I live on Tybee island. This was my second year doing the Christmas Bird Count, and I am lucky enough to have been given the opportunity to do this through a friend who does it regularly. At first, I was unsure about this, but then I realized that doing the bird count is like a Christmas gift, and seeing new species is so much fun. My very first bird count I saw a Ruddy Duck which was a new species for me, and so exciting because no one else saw that species during the bird count in our area, except for our group.

Both years that I have done the bird count I have done it in the same area, which is 11A. The first year we got 47 different species which was really exciting, but then this year in 2023 we saw 65 different species. That's about a 30 percent increase in species, which over one year in a certain area is a great increase. While looking for birds we realized there was one bird that was super common in this area that we had not seen yet – Rock Pigeons. Yes, we had to go looking for pigeons to add them to our list.

My favorite bird that we saw was the American Kestrel. It is a really pretty bird, and it appeared right before we were about to leave the area both times. I would like to thank OAS for letting me do the bird count, and I would like to encourage more young people to try new things because you might enjoy them.

Master Birder Program, Fall 2022

Rachel Green and Steven Miller

In Fall 2022, Ogeechee Audubon members Rachel Green and Steven Miller were fortunate to have the opportunity to complete the popular Georgia Audubon Master Birder program when the Ogeechee Audubon Society partnered with the Hilton Head Audubon Society to create a coastal cohort. The program lasted from October 11 to November 11 and consisted of eight required Zoom webinars and four in-person field trips. It was an intensive but fun way to increase our birding knowledge and skills while providing great birding experiences and the opportunity to meet fellow birders in the area.

While the course title included "Master," the focus was on improving birding knowledge and skills. The program was suitable for participants of all skill and experience levels. The only requirement was to have a strong interest in birds. Advanced birders provided mentorship to those of us who felt more like beginners and were willing to help with identification and share their knowledge and experience. The webinars were participatory, with many opportunities to ask questions and discuss the information. They included lessons on bird identification and classification, birding apps and equipment, bird anatomy and physiology, bird ecology, behavior, flight and migration, and bird conservation. In addition, we studied bird songs and calls for two sessions to improve our birding-by-ear skills significantly. The webinars were attended by Georgia Audubon members from Atlanta and the Savannah/Hilton Head area, allowing the opportunity to meet fellow birders and learn about conservation efforts throughout the region. After the program, participants could connect through a Master Birder listserv and an invitation to a Master Birder Facebook page that provides information about volunteer opportunities and special programs.

We were able to apply our new knowledge during the four field trips that allowed us to explore nearby but unfamiliar areas. The first field trip was to Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge, located between Hilton Head Island and Bluffton, SC. Carlos Chacon, Manager of Natural History at Coastal Discovery Museum, Hilton Head Island, lead this trip. This refuge has a variety of habitats, including salt marsh, tidal creeks, freshwater ponds, and pine forests. This refuge consists of several islands in an estuary. It is integral to a chain of wildlife refuges along the Atlantic flyway that attracts

thousands of migratory birds. The freshwater ponds also provide nesting habitat for wading birds like ibis, egrets, and herons.

After our arrival and introductions, we quickly spotted a small mixed group of egrets and Roseate Spoonbills feeding in a shallow pond. Distracted by their food, the birds gave ample opportunity to observe and discuss their feeding behaviors. Later, at one of the larger ponds, we were surprised to get good views of the usually secretive Sora as the bird crept along the edge of a large pond. The trip's highlight was when we spotted a flash of yellow among a large flock of Red-winged Blackbirds. Upon a closer look, we were delighted to identify a Yellow-headed Blackbird with a golden head and a white patch on its wings. It was a great day, and we identified nearly 60 species. The next trip was to Kingfisher Pond, part of the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge. Led by Ogeechee Audubon board members Mary Lou Dickson and Pam Vercellone-Smith, we identified 40 species, including a flock of 150 Black-bellied Whistling Ducks that seemed to arrive endlessly to the pond. We also got great looks at a Pectoral Sandpiper, a lifer for many in the group.

Our third trip was to Sterling Creek Park in Richmond Hill, co-led by Ogeechee Audubon board members Diana Churchill and Pam Vercellone-Smith. It has forests, wetlands, ponds, and grassland habitats. Our group observed 47 species, including Northern Harrier, Ruby and Golden Crown Kinglets, Marsh Wrens, and Sedge Wrens.

The final trip was to Fish Haul Beach Park on Hilton Head Island, once again led by Carlos Chacon. Fish Haul overlooks Port Royal Sound and is a great location to explore shorebirds. At low tide, visitors can observe a wide variety of shorebirds and seabirds, including Black Skimmers, Western Sandpipers, Black-bellied Plovers, and Marble Godwits. In addition, on this trip, participants could photograph and view a continuing Reddish Egret actively feeding along the shoreline. The class identified 33 species in total.

On November 19, we concluded our course with a luncheon for the coastal cohort at the Savannah National Wildlife Refuge visitor center. Before lunch, several members of our group met early to explore Kingfisher Pond again. There, we identified 32 species with many ducks, including the reliable but never dull Black-bellied Whistling ducks (surprisingly accompanied by two ducklings). We also observed Gadwall, Blue-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Wood Ducks, and Ring Neck Ducks. We had outstanding views of four Wilson Snipe as they bobbed up and down, probing the mud with their long bills among the marsh vegetation.

At our luncheon, Georgia Audubon presented us with certificates. We then enjoyed a warm lunch, warmer conversation, and, as with typical birder behavior, many of the group went birding together afterward.



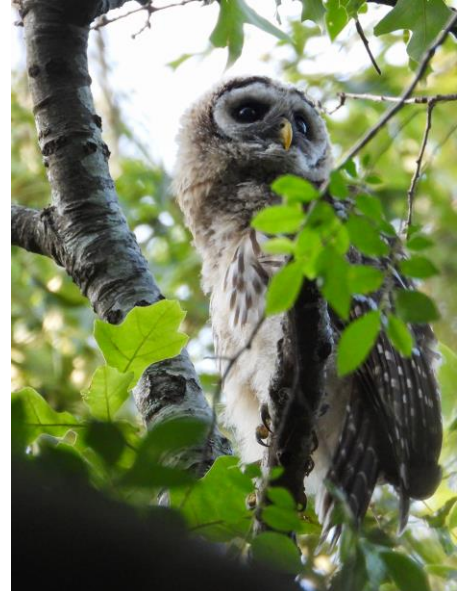
A Year with Ogeechee Audubon

Steven Miller

March marks the first anniversary of my membership with Ogeechee Audubon. It's hard to believe it's only been a year since I began my journey down the rabbit hole of serious birding. During that time, I birded across seven states, added 222 birds to my life list, submitted 184 eBird checklists, and was part of counting over 3,175 individual birds. But what do those numbers *actually* mean?

As it turns out, while that's certainly a large quantity of data, the *quality* of my birding experiences is what I'll remember:

- My first field trip to Skidaway Island State Park, filled with stories and tips by Katie Higgins
- Walking the north beach of Tybee Island with Diana Churchill and deciphering shore birds (I still need a lot of practice)
- Learning to be excited about sparrows thanks to Pam Vercellone-Smith's expertise at Ft. Pulaski and Sterling Creek Park
- Learning the finer points of Rusty Blackbirds with Stan Grey
- Narrowly avoiding flooding my boots while hunting down a particularly shy Henslow's Sparrow with Larry Carlile
- Mark Woodruff allowing me to visit his resident Great Horned Owl pair (thanks again!)
- Earning the title of Master Birder with fellow member Rachel Green and connecting birders from Hilton Head and Atlanta



Barred Owl (Juvenile)
Photo Credit: Steven Miller

And the list goes on. Upon reflecting on this year, I've realized that while the birds are essential, the *people* are even more vital. From other Ogeechee Audubon members, I've learned identification, of course. But I've also discovered other skills that have filtered their way into other aspects of my life.



Henslow's Sparrow at Fort Stewart
Photo Credit: Steven Miller

I've learned *patience* while waiting for a bird to surface from the tall grass, how to *manage disappointment* when that bird doesn't appear after a long morning's search, and how to *step back and appreciate the details* of those common backyard birds that can be easily overlooked. And especially important, I've learned to reconnect with nature and my interest in the landscape around us.

Ogeechee Audubon is a group with vast knowledge, passion, and commitment to citizen science. It's also been a welcoming, generous, and friendly space for an inquisitive novice like me. And for that, I'll always be grateful.

March marks the start of spring, a time of change, growth, and new beginnings. And as wintering birds start their migration north, I'll be doing the same. In a bittersweet turn of events, my time in Georgia is ending, as my partner and I will soon be relocating to western Massachusetts. So as I prepare for this next big adventure in life (and birding), I'll carry the knowledge and fellowship I've gained as a member of this organization.

Thank you to all the new friends I've had the pleasure to meet this year. I'm sure this won't be the last you see me. And if you're coming my way, let's go birding together.

Donation in memory of Lydia Thompson

Lydia Thompson grew up in Mississippi, and moved to the Georgia coast in 1985 to apprentice with artist and printmaker Judith Hall. Lydia combined her artistic skills with her love of birds and conservation to produce beautiful artwork, as well as inspiring others to enjoy and take care of the world around them. She was a long-time member of Coastal Georgia Audubon and also served as director of the Colonial Coast Birding and Nature Festival, which took place on Jekyll Island from 2003 until 2009.

Lydia also helped establish the Project Plover Patrol to monitor the nesting efforts of Wilson’s Plovers on Jekyll, and wrote and illustrated a children’s book – “Willa Gets Her Friendship Bands” – about a young Wilson’s Plover. She received the Earle R. Greene Award from Georgia

Ornithological Society in 2016 for her contributions to birds and science. She died on November 7, 2022 after a struggle with cancer.



Former GOS President Steve Holzman presents the 2016 Earle Greene Award to Lydia Thompson on January 14, 2017, at the winter meeting, Tybee Island, Georgia. Photo by Ed Maioriello.

In the most recent edition of *The Goshawk*, GOS included a tribute to Lydia. The Jekyll Island Foundation is going to purchase and install a viewer/scope on the observation tower at the Jekyll Island Welcome Center, plus put up a plaque in her memory. The cost will be between \$3600-\$7200 for the viewers/scopes, depending on the ones purchased. OAS has made a \$250 donation to the Foundation.

If you would also like to make your own contribution visit jekyllislandfoundation.org and click DONATE. Please add, “Lydia Thompson” under **Donation is in memory of:** section of the giving page.

Lydia’s obituary can be found at <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/thebrunswicknews/name/lydia-thompson-obituary?id=37066942>

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,
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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