

# THE MARSHLANDER

## OGEECHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

July - August, 2023, Volume LIV, Issue IV



### 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

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, September 19, 7:00pm, at the First Presbyterian Church, 520 Washington Avenue, Savannah, GA!**

#### **Creating Bird-Friendly Backyards**

**Richard Hall**

Watching birds in our backyards brings us cheer and a sense of connection to nature, and as the human footprint on the landscape increases, our backyards may become vital habitats for declining species. This talk will provide lessons learned from a decade of converting a small heavily-invaded, in-town yard into a pocket nature reserve, highlight native plants and other landscape features that attract wildlife, and showcase the surprising diversity of birds that have shown up since. Born in England, Hall developed a lifelong fascination with birds from a young age. His enthusiasm for the natural world led him to pursue a career in Ecology. He has been on the faculty of the Odum School of Ecology and the Dept. of Infectious Diseases at UGA since 2009, where his research focuses on changing patterns of animal movement and wildlife diseases. He also serves on the board of Oconee Rivers Audubon Society.



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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, July 15: Savannah National Wildlife Refuge Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive, 8:00am to 11:30am.**

Ogeechee Audubon will return to this famed local site after an extended period of closure to repair and protect against storm damage and rising sea levels. Highlights at this time of year should include Common and Purple Gallinules, Black-necked Stilts, and wading birds. Meet in the parking lot just inside the gateway (**Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive, Hardeeville, South Carolina**). We will be limiting the trip to 20 people and 5 vehicles so as not to overwhelm the pull-offs on the Drive. Registration is required – email Matt Tozer ([mctozer@yahoo.com](mailto:mctozer@yahoo.com)). Please be willing to carpool during the trip. Leader Matt Tozer.

**Sunday, August 6: Summer Kite Extravaganza, 9:30am to 1pm.** We will be monitoring Mississippi & Swallow-tailed Kite feeding locations to choose an appropriate location. 9:30 am to 1 pm. Exact location TBD. Please email Diana Churchill [dichurchbirds@gmail.com](mailto:dichurchbirds@gmail.com) to register. Limit 12. Leaders Diana Churchill and Mark Woodruff.

**Monday, August 28: Tybee North Beach, 6pm to 8pm.** Searching for gulls, terns and returning shorebirds. Meet at Polk Street at 6 pm. Rigor - Moderate with 2 miles walking on sandy beach. Leader Diana Churchill [dichurchbirds@gmail.com](mailto:dichurchbirds@gmail.com). 912-604-7539.

## **Field Notes**

### **Forsyth Park, Thursdays April 6 – May 4, 2023**

Diana Churchill



*Barred Owls*

Photo Credit Diana Churchill  
other's feathers.

We began our series of five early-morning Forsyth Park migratory bird walks on Thursday, April 6th. Almost immediately, the attention of the birders was drawn to a Barred Owl roosting in an oak tree near the fountain. Upon further inspection, we also found two fluffy juveniles resting on nearby branches. The 15 birders present got good looks and listens to a winter-resident Blue-headed Vireo. The only spring migrants we saw or heard were 15 Chimney Swifts, 1 Great Crested Flycatcher, and 1 Northern Parula.

Over the next few weeks, migratory bird activity continued to be slow, but the Barred Owl show was ongoing. One week we observed two adult owls sitting on nearby trees. Then one owl flew over to the branch next to the other and they began “noodling” each other - touching beaks and preening each

That same morning we also managed to get distance looks at a single Worm-eating Warbler.

April 27th highlights included a flyover of 6 Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks, 1 adult and 2 juvenile Barred Owls, and a White-breasted Nuthatch.

By far the best day migration-wise was Thursday, May 4th. That day, in addition to seeing 3 Barred Owls, we had 1 Veery, 2 Swainson's Thrushes, 2 Ovenbirds, 2 Black-and-white Warblers, 2 Common Yellowthroats, 1 Northern Parula and 1 Black-throated Blue Warbler.

Our human participants included many locals as well as visitors from Virginia, Tennessee, and several SCAD students. Some of our Audubon members were thrilled to see correctly identify the call of a Black-and-white Warbler with the help of the Merlin App Song ID feature.



*Barred Owls*  
Photo Credit Diana Churchill

## **Oatland Island Wildlife Center, June 4, 2023**

Kathryn Byrd

On June 4, 2023 Ogeechee Audubon members joined Eric Swanson, the naturalist with Oatland Island Wildlife Center, for a walk around the grounds of the center. The property consists of 100 acres of Maritime forest just outside of Savannah, Georgia and is home to more than 95 animals from 39 different species who have been rehabilitated from a variety of situations from which they were unable to be returned to the wild. In the early to mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Oatland Island was part of a cotton plantation and the entire island was cleared and used for farmland. The land was privately held until 1927 when it was purchased for a railroad conductor's retirement home at which time the main structure was built. After that the campus was used for a variety of public health and research projects. In 2004, the property was officially transferred to the Savannah-Chatham County Public School System as an education and visitors center.



*Wood Ducks*  
Photo Credit Kathryn Byrd

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We were privileged to walk the grounds with Eric along the nature trails and boardwalks through the forest and marsh. We began at the main building feeders with a nice start of House Finches, a female Painted Bunting, Northern Cardinals, a Carolina Chickadee and White-breasted Nuthatches. The remainder of the walk did not disappoint with highlights of a male Summer Tanager, several Black-crowned Night Herons, 3 Wood Ducks and a Royal Tern. The crowning jewel was the Wood Stork rookery with 23 active nests! In addition we were treated to interactions with the resident Bison, Cougars, Bobcats and Wolves. What fun! With a total of 35 species of birds, various rescue animals, some impressive Bullfrogs and the requisite alligators this field trip was a delight!



*Wood Storks*  
Photo Credit Kathryn Byrd

## **Sterling Creek Park, June 10, 2023**

Rachel Green

On Saturday, June 10, Brittany Dodge, Coastal Training Program Coordinator with Sapelo Island National Estuarine Research Reserve, led a birding trip at Sterling Creek Park in Richmond Hill, Georgia. Sterling Creek Park is located near Sterling Creek Plantation and next to the City's wastewater treatment plant. It is a 187-acre area that includes a running trail and a lake for fishing, but for this trip, we focused mainly on walking along the dikes through freshwater marshes to view buntings, kites, herons, and gallinules. A small but committed group of four arrived promptly at 8:30 am to be greeted by a flock of 14 Northern Rough-winged Swallows that were uncharacteristically perched on a fence. As we walked along the forest edge, we heard several Summer Tanagers, White-eyed Vireos, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. When we reached the chain-link fence that surrounds a section of tall grasses, we were delighted to find a colorful male



*Blue Grosbeak*  
Photo Credit Kathryn Byrd

Painted Bunting. Not soon after, the bright blue of an Indigo Bunting was spotted as several foraged among the grasses. Having seen the Indigo Buntings, the group really wanted to spot a Blue Grosbeak. We patiently waited and watched for one to appear. We were not disappointed when a few minutes later a Blue Grosbeak with its large beak and rufous wing-bars flew out and landed on the fence. He then flew to a nearby tree to entertain us with his song.

As we started to walk along the impoundments, Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks began to fly over while two Mississippi Kites soared above. Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks flew over consistently throughout the trip and we later got good views of several of the ducks standing in the water. As we walked, we were accompanied by the song of Red-winged Blackbirds and Common Yellow

throats hidden in the grasses. Later, a Common Yellowthroat would pop up to give us a good view.

We continued on to the furthest impoundment to search for Purple Gallinules. We first spotted several Common Gallinules and three Green Herons but it wasn't long before we observed two, beautiful Purple Gallinules walking on the large leaves of the water lilies. On our way back, Brittany gave us many insights into other nearby birding spots that we could explore and told us about her experiences working with owls. Just as we finished our morning, we spotted a Swallow-tailed Kite soaring above, making a perfect ending to an excellent day of birding. Overall, the group observed 42 species.



*Purple Gallinule*  
Photo Credit Kathryn Byrd

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## *A Message from the President*

Sue De Rosa

The Board of Ogeechee Audubon Society understands the National Audubon Society's recent decision to keep the Audubon name is controversial for many people and may be a deterrent to our twin goals of bird conservation and inclusiveness. Ogeechee Audubon has a history of collaboration across our communities, so the Board is beginning discussions about our chapter name. The Board will reach out to members and partners in the fall as we thoughtfully consider our chapter name.

**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.*