

THE MARSHLANDER

OGEECHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

November – December, 2023, Volume LIV, Issue VI



Ogeechee Audubon Society Officers and Board	
<u>Administrative Responsibilities</u>	
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Field Trips	Diana Churchill, Brittany Dodge, and Katie Higgins
Programs	Melanie Sparrow, and Rose Talbert
<u>Communications Workgroup</u>	
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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, December 12, 6:30PM 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!

The 124th Christmas Bird Count

Harris Neck - Friday, December 15 - Organizer Mary Lambright/Compiler Sue DeRosa; lambrightm@gmail.com

Richmond Hill - Wednesday, December 20 - Organizer & Compiler - Stan Gray; grayirisgarden@comcast.net

Savannah - Saturday, December 30 (The count window ends Friday, Jan. 5th so in order to avoid New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, we have to hold this count earlier than our custom) Organizer Diana Churchill/ Compiler Larry Carlile dichurchbirds@gmail.com

If you haven't previously participated in one of the above Christmas Bird Counts but would like to, please contact the appropriate organizer.



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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.

If you plan to attend a field trip, please email the leader, though for all of these trips, walk-ins are welcome as well.

Wednesday, November 15: Onslow Island section of Savannah NWR (open Wednesdays only); 8:30am to 12:00pm.

We'll be targeting shorebirds, sparrows, ducks, raptors and more. Meet in the small parking lot near the Houlihan Bridge at 8:30 am. Sturdy shoes, hat, water and bug spray recommended. Trip rigor moderate with a lot of walking. Scopes are very helpful. Leader Lynn Hodgson hodgson.lynn@aol.com 808-282-5218

Saturday, November 25: Lake Mayer Community Park; 8:00am to 11:30am for ducks, winter songbirds, and more. Trip rigor easy with moderate walking. Leader Larry Carlile l.carlile259@comcast.net 912-224-1796

Saturday, December. 2: Skidaway Island State Park & Priest's Landing; 8:00am to 11:30am for songbirds, wading birds, raptors, and more. Meet in the Parking Lot of Skidaway Island Methodist Church at 8 am to Carpool into the State Park. Parking fee \$5 per car. Trip rigor moderate with some walking on uneven paths. Leader Rachel Green delgreen@comcast.net 912-660-8217

Rusty Blackbird Surveys at the Savannah Christian Preparatory School; 3:00pm to 5:00pm on specified Sundays (see below)

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. Leaders Stan Gray (grayirsgarden@comcast.net) & Pam Smith (pavercel@comcast.net)

Surveys will be conducted on Sunday Nov. 12, Nov. 19, Dec. 3, Dec. 17 and Dec. 31st.

Field Notes

Oatland Island Wildlife Center, September 24, 2023

Kim Turner & Kathy Varadi

I have always been a backyard birder although I didn't know many birds by name besides the usual visitors- Northern Cardinals, Northern Mockingbirds, Mourning Doves and an occasional Tufted Titmouse or hummer. I am also an avid photographer and recently attended a birding workshop in South Texas where I was introduced to the Green Jay, Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, Great Kiskadee and Pyrrhuloxia, to name a few. In June of this year, my partner, Kathy, and I attended a week-long puffin workshop on Audubon's Hog Island in Maine. My life was changed! Once back in Savannah, it was natural that we join Ogeechee Audubon.

Now I had never attended a bird walk with any group but was encouraged by a friend to attend the Oatland Island field trip on September 24th. Kathy and I were a little nervous, not wanting to stand out as beginners. Led by the legendary Diana Churchill, our fellow birders were so welcoming and generous with their vast knowledge. Although I've been observing bird behavior for some time, I really didn't know how much activity really went on up in those trees!

At Oatland, we saw numerous species, but my favorite find was the Cape May Warbler in the photo attached. He was patient with me and waited for me to raise and focus my camera before twittering away. We wandered around the island for the next couple of hours, visiting with the wolves, cougar and other resident wild (sort of) animals. The day was topped off with a cacophony of crows over a tree. Everyone ran over to find a huge owl in the top of the tree. I had no idea the crow activity might indicate a possible owl entanglement. After a little internet research, I found that a murder of crows is more than a match for a solitary owl, and they have been fighting for generations. I never saw the face of the owl and couldn't get a good picture, but it was a huge learning experience for us!



Cape May Warbler
Photo Credit Kim Turner

We were blessed with perfect weather, minimal bugs and a great birding experience! We are looking forward to attending more walks, meetings and volunteer opportunities with Ogeechee Audubon.

Tybee Island Shorebird Survey, October 1, 2023

Natlie Boydston

Having newly arrived to Savannah in August, I've been eager to spend time with the various species not commonly seen in my last five years in the Puget Sound. I was involved with multiple avian conservation organizations in the Seattle area, so upon arriving to Savannah I looked up the happenings of the local Audubon and put some bird trip dates on my calendar. My move has been a transition in a lot of ways! Deciding to attend graduate school in my mid-thirties was a daunting idea, but also – why not, right? My master's degree research at Georgia Southern University is centered on an experimental coastal restoration project using artificial oyster reefs, with the goal of sinking atmospheric carbon via

sediment and vegetation accumulation on the shoreline. I'm excited to study this topic for many reasons, and one of those being its ties to protecting habitat for birds!

My first jaunt with Ogeechee Audubon was perfectly suited for my reasons for arrival to the area – joining a stellar group for the International Shorebird Survey. I had gone out to Tybee to scope shorebirds on my own once before and honestly felt a bit lost. I went home to try and wisen myself on plumages and possible species, but home study and Larkwire quizzes in no way hold a candle to learning via discussion of species field marks with the bird in front of you. And discussions we had! I was stoked to learn about not only the wondrous bird species we were seeing, but also the shared knowledge on insect pollinators and native plants. A really great group of naturalists was gathered that day, and our efforts of the early morning arrival was well rewarded. We saw what was said to be a record number of Piping Plover – a species first for me and truly heartwarming to witness their complete cuteness. The most numerous species observed were the court and jester contingent of Laughing Gulls and Royal Terns, with Sanderlings milling about and a Willet to boot! Our shore survey started and ended with the awesome sight of breeding horseshoe crabs – a great way to round out an awesome day.



Piping Plovers
Photo Credit Judy Johnson

Red-headed Woodpeckers Caching their Nuts

Diana Churchill



Red-headed Woodpecker
Photo Credit Diana Churchill

On Monday, October 3, I happened to have an errand to do in Garden City so took advantage of the opportunity to do some westside Savannah birding at Tom Triplett Park on Highway 80. While waiting for Pam Smith to join me, I was strolling near the tennis courts when I noticed a Red-headed Woodpecker fly into a small oak next to the court. Since Red-headed Woodpeckers are not all that common, I was intrigued when I saw a 2nd, 3rd, and then a 4th RHWO fly into the oak. At the same time, a parade of woodpeckers was exiting the oak, each seeming to be carrying something in its beak.

Pam arrived and I called the behavior to her attention. We studied the tree and noticed that it was full of still green acorns. We watched in fascination as at least a dozen Red-headed Woodpeckers flew in and out of the tree, each exiting with an acorn it had wrested from its cup. The birds were flying across the pond to an open wetland studded with dead tree snags. When we walked around to that side of the pond, we watched several birds flying over to the

snags to deposit their loot.

My observations began at noon, and at 4:30 pm when I left the park, they were still at it. Another birding friend, Diane Gannon, returned to the park on Wednesday and observed and photographed the same behavior.

According to Birds of the World, this hoarding behavior by Red-headed Woodpeckers is common and usually begins as early as September and can continue through November and even into January, until the oak trees are completely stripped of acorns. The birds will sometimes bring the nuts to an "anvil" site where they break them into smaller pieces for storage. They are adept at wedging these pieces so tightly into crevices that squirrels, and blue jays have trouble "stealing" them.

Birds of the World reported that first year birds also perform this storing behavior. We saw at least one juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker imitating his elders and plucking and storing its own acorns.

One of the things I love about birdwatching is that there is always something new to see and learn. Good birding!



Red-headed Woodpecker
Photo Credit Diane Gannon

Earth-Conscious Expo!

Last Saturday at Skidaway State Park, Ogeechee Audubon members Katie Higgins and Sue De Rosa shared their enthusiasm for all things related to birds. Kids could use binoculars to zoom in on stationary birds located on a backboard and then take replicas made from cardboard tubes with them. Also they could create a band for themselves just as a migrating bird might have. For the adults, information was available regarding plants that attracted specific birds which complemented several other Expo participants that had the actual plants. Additionally, people signed up to receive information about our organization. Hope to see them at future OAS events!



Hi! I am Mary Lambright and I am the person who keeps track of OAS membership. Fall is in the air and it is time to think about renewing your membership in Ogeechee Audubon for 2024. Did you know? Your membership in the Ogeechee Audubon Society is for the calendar year (January 1 through December 31). Some of you have already renewed for 2024 (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 2023). 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, Judy Johnson, 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 but you are encouraged to join both organizations. For more information about National Audubon Society, visit audubon.org

Ogeechee Audubon Chapter Membership Form – 2024

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.