

THE MARSHLANDER

OGEECHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

January – February, 2024, Volume LIIV, Issue I



Ogeechee Audubon Society Officers and Board Administrative Responsibilities

President	Sue De Rosa
Vice President	Rose Talbert
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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	Brittany Dodge

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,
February 20, 7PM at the First Presbyterian
Church, 520 Washington Avenue, Savannah, GA!**

Speaker Blair Holloway of the National Weather Service

Blair's expertise in weather and climate, coupled with a focus on bird migration, promises an engaging and informative session for attendees. Bird migration is often influenced by weather patterns, so Holloway's insights could offer valuable connections between meteorology and ornithology. Attendees can likely anticipate an enlightening discussion on the intricate interplay between atmospheric conditions and the fascinating journeys of our feathered friends.

And coming up in April:

The OAS April 16 meeting will be an exciting opportunity for bird enthusiasts and nature lovers. Bruce Beeler who has extensive experience, including his work at the National Museum of Natural History and his travels to diverse locations like New Guinea, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, promises a captivating presentation. With 17 books to his name, his expertise adds a valuable perspective to the discussion. The topic, *North on the Wing: Traveling with the Songbirds of Spring* covered in his Pulitzer Prize winning book, sounds intriguing and educational. Please consider spreading the word to those outside the organization who might share an interest in ornithology and the wonders of bird migration.

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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 unless otherwise noted.

Saturday, Jan 13: Fort Pulaski National Monument 8:45am to 12:00pm. With a nice high tide, we will be looking for marsh sparrows, checking on the nesting bald eagles, visiting the Old Pier to scope for shore birds and more. Meet at the entrance to Fort Pulaski at 8:45 am. Entrance fee \$10 per person or National Park Pass. Pass will allow entrance for car of 4 people. Trip rigor Moderate. Leader Diana Churchill dichurchbirds@gmail.com 912-604-7539

Saturday, Jan. 27: Ford Field & River Club afternoon birding and roost count 3:15pm to 6:30pm. Enter the Ford at the main entrance 12511 Ford Avenue Richmond Hill, GA 31324 at 3:15. Judy will lead the group to the Clubhouse. Trip rigor moderate. Limit 10 people. Everyone must have a flashlight/headlamp as we will be walking back to the cars in the dark. It is not a tough walk, but you need to be steady on your feet as there may be tripping hazards. It is less than a mile walk out to the roost and back.

Advance Registration required by email to Judy Johnson judybirdgirl@comcast.net. Co-leaders Shannon Matzke Naturalist@fordfieldandriverclub.com & Judy Johnson. judybirdgirl@comcast.net. **For issues only - Judy Johnson - (678) 773-9924**

Sunday, February 11- Bear Island WMA, Green Pond, S.C. 8:30am to 12:00pm. Bear Island is always one of the highlights of the Lowcountry year. We gather at the entrance, on Titi Road, which faces Mary's House Pond, where we will set up spotting scopes. Depending on water levels, this pond may have lots of waders and/or ducks, and possibly White Pelicans or Tundra Swans. Then we will drive into the WMA, stopping frequently to look and listen. Bear Island consists of 12,021 acres of brackish water marshes, maritime forests, bottomland hardwoods, upland fields, and water-controlled impoundments, lagoons, etc.

From the Bear Island WMA website: "Bear Island Wildlife Management Area, owned by the SC Department of Natural Resources, is managed to provide quality habitat for wintering waterfowl and other wetland wildlife including threatened and endangered species such as wood storks and bald eagles; to provide habitat for upland game and nongame species; and to provide recreational opportunities for the hunting and nonhunting public. Public hunting on the WMA includes waterfowl (by special drawing only), white-tailed deer, mourning dove and small game. The diverse area provides excellent bird watching, attracting waterfowl, bald eagles, wading birds, shorebirds and song birds."

Directions: From Savannah or Bluffton, take either 170 or I-95 to Hwy 17 heading east toward Charleston. Turn right onto Bennett's Point Rd (if familiar with Donnelly, this turn-off is a few miles beyond it). Continue on Bennett's Point Rd 13 miles. Entrance is on the left, on Titi Rd, about a mile after crossing the Ashepoo River. No facilities once you turn onto Bennett's Road. The last chance for gas, snacks, bathrooms is a small gas station/store on Rte 17, shortly after the Donnelly entrance. And once at Bear, we often lose cell service, so warn folks who might worry about you!

Optional Extension: Lynn Hodgson will lead this trip, and afterwards expects to continue for an unofficial afternoon of birding in Donnelly WMA. Participants are welcome to follow along. If interested, bring a lunch! And plan to keep busy until 3 or later.

Trip Rigor Moderate. Leader Lynn Hodgson hodgson.lynn@aol.com 808-282-5218. For detailed information and directions see below.

Friday, Feb. 16 - Monday, Feb. 19: Georgia Ornithological Society Winter Meeting. Visit gos.org for details and to register. There will be an assortment of field trips as well as speakers.

Friday, Feb. 16- Monday, Feb. 19: The Great Backyard Bird Count. Count the birds around you and contribute to this Global Bird Count. Visit www.birdcount.org for details.

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 (graysirsgarden@comcast.net) & Pam Smith (pavercel@comcast.net)

Surveys will be conducted on Sunday Jan. 14, Jan. 28, Feb. 11, and Feb. 25.

Field Notes

Onslow Island, November 15, 2023

Lynn Hodgson

On Wednesday, Nov 15, 4 hardy Ogeechee birders met with Lynn Hodgson at Onslow Island, which is a part of the Savannah NWR, only open on Wednesdays. Water is scarce, so we walked all the way to the back, where there are a couple of ponds with just enough water for a few waders. There was a large flock of maybe a hundred peeps, which were probably Least Sandpipers, but we couldn't get close enough to be sure. We saw and heard a couple of Greater Yellowlegs, and one Dunlin among the Least.

It was sprinkling and windy, so smaller birds were hard to find in the bushes. We got peeks at Song and Savannah Sparrows, and heard a couple Swamp Sparrows. Even the Yellow-rumped Warblers were scarce. We had a good look at a Red-shouldered Hawk near the parking lot, plus some skulking Gray Catbirds and Northern Cardinals. One observer found a female Painted Bunting, which was exciting, although the bunting didn't cooperate for the rest of the group.

Since birding was marginal at Onslow, the group decided to leave after about an hour, and head for the Laurel Hill Drive -- long story short, we had the "usuals" there, but near the end of the drive we found hundreds of ducks: mostly Ring-necked, with interspersed Wood Ducks, Blue-winged Teal, Gadwall, American Wigeon, and a lone Canvasback! We totaled 34 species, which is low for that drive but excellent for that weather.

If you go, bring a spotting scope for the ducks!

Lake Mayer Community Park, November 25, 2023

Douglas Morrison

I have a unique entrance to the world of birding as many have. Before this trip I would often go on solo adventures just snapping pictures or catching up with my dear friend Diana Churchill whom I met on one of my many fishing outings around Savannah. Diana could tell I was eager to learn more and encouraged me to attend the Lake Mayer bird walk, and man was I glad I did! With my rambunctious 11-year-old son in tote, we arrived bright and early and had the pleasure of meeting members of the Ogeechee Audubon.

From the first step we were greeted by a gracious group of people. I had no idea of what to expect, but I was truly blown away. Mr. Larry Carlile lead a group of passionate birdwatchers who made this experience so enjoyable not only for myself, but for my son. Larry has a truly vast amount of knowledge on some questions that arose. He and another member even brought some very nice spotting scopes that they were kind enough to let the group look with. This really enhanced the enjoyment for my son. I will say "man do these things make the birds come of life ." The experience is one we will not soon forget – from the Osprey that spooked up as we rounded the first corner, to counting Ruddy Ducks (that I now know are a stiff tail duck), sneaking up on Wood Ducks in the canal, and even the Bald Eagle soaring over the Lake for a large part of our trip. If I recall, I believe he counted right at 60 species of birds. I even got a real fun fact about the Egret's name from Ms. Diana. It was a true privilege to be able to attend this group's walk, and I look forward to the next!

I would like to thank first Ms. Diana Churchill for inviting me and really igniting my curiosity that has rapidly turned in to a hunger for knowledge and enjoyment of the birdwatcher ways, and of course, Mr. Larry Carlile for leading the trip. It was a pleasure to not only learn more things then I could ever remember on the trip, but to see my son enjoying it. Thank you Ogeechee Audubon. I look forward to doing it again!

The Fourth Annual Richmond Hill Christmas Bird Count

John Harty

Christmas Bird Counts have been bringing people from different backgrounds and age groups together to celebrate the joy of birding for many generations. I find myself looking forward to CBC season throughout the year, excited to connect with new friends, catch up with old friends, and spend time together doing what we love. The benefits to science and the crucial data provided by the annual Christmas Bird Counts truly pale in comparison to the sense of community fostered from the act of simply counting birds. It's no wonder the tradition of CBCs has carried on for 124 years and shows no signs of stopping.

The Richmond Hill CBC holds a special place in my bird-loving heart. In 2021, the Richmond Hill count was

my first Christmas Bird Count. To be completely honest, I have no idea how I ended up at the Richmond Hill count for my first CBC – I live three hours away and pass several great counts on the drive down – but one Google search led to the Audubon website and Richmond Hill caught my eye. At the time, I considered myself to be a beginner birder and didn't really know what to expect. However, there's something special about a group of people who have one similar passion,



Photo Credit Brittany Dodge

and I felt immediately at home with this group of new friends. After one day of counting with the Richmond Hill crew, I was hooked on Christmas Bird Counts and knew I would be making it a yearly tradition.

After not being able to make it to the 2022 count, I was ecstatic to be back in town this year. I began my day by meeting Dawn French at The Ford to do some owling just before sun-up. Before I had transferred my gear from my car to the golf cart, we had already heard two Great-Horned Owls. We were off to a great (if chilly) start. We walked around a bit, hoping for a Barred Owl or even an Eastern Screech-Owl with no luck. Once the sun was up, we transitioned to the golf cart and began birding along the dike just east of the Oyster House. It was cold – and that, my friends, is an understatement of colossal proportions. We spent an hour and a half on the dike, counting large numbers of Yellow-Rumped Warblers and several majestic Bald Eagles. By the time we finished the dike trail, Mrs. Dawn had mercy on my freezing hands and offered to go to her house for a few minutes and meet up with our other teammate, Ryan Hampton. I was extremely thankful for the heat.

We spent the rest of our morning birding the Sterling Creek trail where we found a Sandhill Crane circling above the marsh. We then proceeded birding the very last portion of the dike we had skipped earlier due to the cold. We heard a Sora calling in the marsh and got some quick glances at an Orange-Crowned Warbler. As we walked back to our vehicles to go to lunch, Ryan found two River Otters in the water. We enjoyed watching them swim playfully while staying out of view.

After lunch, Dawn, Ryan and I joined Leslie Weischel for a river boat tour. Despite the icy wind on the boat, we enjoyed our time on the river. Shortly after we got on the water, we saw three Hooded Mergansers in the distance with their snowy-white crests raised, flashing us with their brilliance every time the sun hit their heads just right. Toward the end of our tour, we stumbled upon a large group of gulls on the water. As we motored a bit closer to the gulls, we found most of them to be Ring-Billed but pulled out three Bonaparte's Gulls – our first for the day.

Once we arrived back at the marina, Ryan, Dawn, and Leslie headed home for the day, while I joined another group headed to do a roost count on the golf course. Shannon Matzke, The Ford Field and River Club's naturalist, led our group in golf carts up to the roost. If you've never done a roost count before, I highly recommend taking advantage of the next opportunity. As the sun sank lower in the sky, we counted 124 Double-Crested Cormorants, 144 Tricolored Herons, 79 Little Blue Herons, 564 Snowy Egrets, and 401 White Ibis among many other species in the mix. Just before dark however, a group of Tree Swallows gave us the show-stopper moment of the count. In the distance, I thought I saw a cloud of smoke, but as I watched it, the cloud changed shape rapidly, constantly moving. I centered my binoculars on the cloud and realized we were looking at a murmuration of Tree Swallows, gathered together as a cloud of birds making odd shapes in the sky and even descending at one point into a funnel shape, making it look like a "Swallow-nado". We stood amazed, stunned by the sheer beauty of the moment – all while trying to continue to count the constant stream of birds coming to roost. It was a truly amazing day.

As I drove home after the count, I spent time reflecting on the experiences of the day. In a little over two years, I have gone from considering myself a beginner birder, to someone completely obsessed with birds. I have now taken part in many Christmas Bird Counts around the state, and I can safely say that while the other counts were truly amazing, I believe the Richmond Hill count is the one where I feel most at home. The friends I have met have been an inspiration, and the memories I have made will last a lifetime.

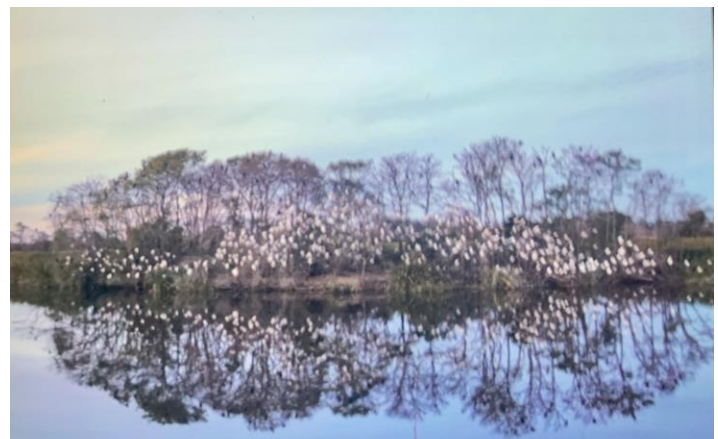


Photo Credit Diana Churchill

So, here's to many years of Christmas Bird Counts to come in Richmond Hill. May we all continue to grow in community and our love of birds.

2023 Master Bird Class

Judy Johnson

Ogeechee Audubon members Gretchen Greminger, Judy Johnson and Rose Talbert completed the master birder class put on by the newly named "Birds Georgia" (previously Georgia Audubon). The course involved 2 hour zoom sessions twice a week for 5 weeks covering birding techniques, songs and calls, anatomy, migration, behavior, ecology and conservation along with 4 field trips. One of the helpful things we learned was to really study the bird in your binoculars before trying to look it up in a book – observe its characteristics (size, shape, colors, behavior), head (bill shape/length and field marks such as eye line, eye rings, etc.), wings (bars/patches, length), tail (shape, length, field marks) and any sounds it was making.

Our group's field trips were to SNWR Kingfisher Pond (thanks leader Eric Swanson), SNWR Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive (thanks leader Katie Higgins), Fort Stewart (thanks leader Larry Carlisle) and Pinckney Island NWR (thanks leader Carlos Chacon). Some interesting birds we saw were an Ovenbird at Kingfisher, an American Bittern along with 2 sweet juvenile Purple Gallinules on the Wildlife Drive, Red Cockaded Woodpeckers and a Henslow's Sparrow at Fort Stewart and a hundred+ Double-crested Cormorants at Pinckney.

One of the highlights was getting to meet new birders from the Hilton Head and Bluffton areas as well as getting to know some of the very knowledgeable folks who were instructors: Adam Betuel, Melanie Furr, Theresa Hartz, Charlie Muise and Georgann Schmalz. We had a lovely graduation lunch in the education building at the SNWR Visitor's Center.



Ogeechee Audubon Winter Holiday Party

Susan De Rosa

The festive gathering on December 12 was a diverse and engaging event. Featured were the enchanting piano holiday melodies of Todd Smiley, creating a delightful atmosphere for all attendees. As plates were filled with delicious snacks, Sarah Lucas and Brenda Ecken shared insights about the David Scott Blue Bird Trail at the Landings, highlighting the importance of conservation efforts. OAS donated \$100 in memory of Matt Ryan, who dedicated himself to the trail and was the husband of past president Dot Bombach, added a poignant and meaningful touch to the evening, honoring his significant contributions to the community.

Pat Wolters' presentation on Orphaned Bird Care added a compassionate dimension to the evening, shedding light on the importance of caring for our feathered friends in need. After her talk, the raffle, skillfully led by Judy Johnson, featured bird paraphernalia and books authored by Sarah Lucas and Diana Churchill, offering attendees the chance to take home both knowledge and avian-inspired treasures. The festivities concluded on an interactive note with a game led by Diana Churchill, challenging participants to identify the top 10 birds commonly found during the Christmas bird count. What a well-rounded and enjoyable gathering for bird enthusiasts and conservationists alike before heading off for OAS's three Christmas Bird Counts.



Photo Credit John Cassell

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.