

THE MARSHLANDER

OGEECHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

July, 2020, Volume L, Issue V

50th Anniversary Edition of the Marshlander



Ogeechee Audubon Society Officers and Board	
Administrative Responsibilities	
President	Leslie Weichsel
Vice President	Mary Lambright
Secretary	Marty Foxx
Treasurer	Pam Smith
Education Workgroup	
Education Outreach	Diana Churchill,
Sue DeRosa, Rose Talbert	
Field Trips	John Williamson
Programs	Lynn Wrenn
Communications Workgroup	
Social Media	Mary Lambright
Webmaster	Mary Lou Dickson
Newsletter	Leslie Weichsel
Publicity	Matt Tozar
Historian	
Sandy Beasley	
Conservation Workgroup	
Entire Board	

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.

Ogeechee Audubon Society continues in Flockdown!

Ogeechee Audubon is continuing in Flockdown mode at least through the summer months. Typically, we do not conduct too many field trips in the summer, so this coupled with the uptick in COVID-19 cases in Georgia, we feel it is prudent to not risk anyone's health and welfare. As you are aware, we did not have our public meeting in June and at this time, we will keep a close eye on the pandemic and make a decision regarding the September public meeting later this summer. We miss you all and we can take comfort in the fact that we will bird together again!

Our April meeting was the time designated in the By Laws for our Annual Meeting and the election of officers. We postponed the Annual Meeting until the next meeting of the membership which will be determined based on the timeline dictated by the virus. Our By Laws do not specifically address a pandemic situation so we believe since our activities are suspended, at the first opportunity when we can safely reconvene and resume our activities, we will have the Annual meeting and hold the elections. In the meantime, the present officers have agreed to continue to serve.

-OAS Board of Directors

RHYMES WITH ORANGE HILARY PRICE

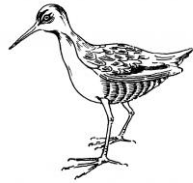


<p>Wild Birds Unlimited Nature Shop</p>	<p><i>Fresh Seed NO Fillers!</i></p>	<p>Bird Feeders Birdbaths Pole Systems And The Freshest Seed in Town!</p>	<p>8108 Abercorn Street Mon-Sat 10-6 Sunday 12-5 Next to Home Goods (912) 961-3455</p>	
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This publication of the Marshlander will be a bit different. It is the fourth “Flockdown” edition! We will be presenting stories and photographs to keep you connected with birds and with Ogeechee Audubon Society. I hope you enjoy it!

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Ogeechee Audubon’s Annual Meeting will be scheduled for the next public meeting. At this meeting we will elect Officers for the Board. If you have any nominations for President, Vice President, Secretary or Treasurer please contact the Nominating Committee (Diana Churchill, Mary Lou Dickson, Marty Foxx) at ogeecheeaudubon.help@gmail.com. Thank You.



Membership

A gentle reminder to all who have yet to renew your 2020 dues to please do so at your earliest convenience. We will be back and you do not want to miss out on what we have in store once activities resume! Please use the renewal form on the last page of this newsletter. If you are unsure of your membership status, please email us at OgeecheeAudubon.help@gmail.com to check.

Thank You!

50 Years of Ogeechee Audubon - Our History continues and is being written today

2020 marks the 50th anniversary of the Ogeechee Audubon Society! The members of the Board of Ogeechee Audubon will be planning celebratory events to mark fifty years of fulfilling our mission to educate adults and children about birds, wildlife, and the environment.

We are bound together by a love of birds, nature and each other...

On June 6, 2020 Ogeechee Audubon Society took a stand and published the following:

The Board of Directors of Ogeechee Audubon Society expresses sadness and indignation regarding the recent violence and mistreatment of Black Americans.

We condemn and grieve the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Nina Pop, Sean Reed, Ahmaud Arbery and countless others.

We are equally concerned and angered by the incident in Central Park involving a fellow birder, Christian Cooper. The weaponization of color of skin is one sign of the depth of systemic racism in our country. This behavior has no place in Ogeechee Audubon Society nor in our world. We are all called to examine our own hearts and we are called to do and be better for our fellow birders and fellow humans.

Ogeechee Audubon Society celebrates our differences, much like we celebrate the wonderful and rich variety of birds, each having a unique shape, size and color.

All are welcome at Ogeechee Audubon Society regardless of race, religion or sexual orientation.

Ogeechee Audubon Society commits to fostering and building a culture of welcome and inclusion, where all are bound together by a mutual love of birds, nature and each other.

Much has been written lately about the topic “Birding While Black”. National Audubon had hosted two sessions titled “Birding While Black: A Candid Conversation”. These sessions are posted on National Audubon’s Facebook page. I highly recommend that everyone view these conversations. It helped me begin to understand the issues, prejudices and pain. My eyes as well as my heart are opening to something I can never fully comprehend.

<https://www.facebook.com/NationalAudubonSociety/videos/599256750697358/>

The following is an Essay by our fellow Ogeechee Audubon Member, birder, friend and an exceptional young man, Isaiah Scott. In his essay, Isaiah portrays his experiences as a young black birder. We are certainly blessed to have Isaiah as a member of Ogeechee Audubon.

...by Isaiah Scott

Rare little Blackbird fly away. Fly towards the sky where the heavens stay. Let your true vibrant colors rain down from your wing, as you soar through the clouds and harmoniously sing. But as you sing, you do not feel heard. You feel like a lonely little blackbird. Migrants fly by, attracted to your features, prismatic aura, and noir plumage like an undiscovered creature. They flock behind your colorful light, following wherever you went, but as you continue to fly you still feel different. “How did you get your colors”, “why do you fly so high” they asked. As if you were never meant to be on this path. As if you were meant to be trapped in a cage or lost in the midst of a new age. Ascending through the thick clouds, heaven bound, in hope of stygian angels to be found. Tending to wonder if you are all alone, a great mistake, a broken bone. Now ascending through the air, faced by a golden light. Piercing through the clouds, making your dark feathers shine bright. At last arriving at heaven’s gates, where you no longer are alone, where hope awaits.



Isaiah with his artwork

Since I was born, I always had a fascination for animals and the natural world. I spent most of my days outdoors in my backyard reading dinosaur books and pretending to find rare mystical creatures after school. I grew up in a predominantly white school called South Effingham Elementary. I was usually the black dot out of the crowd in the classroom. Growing up in this environment, I was mentally trained to talk a certain way, act a certain way, and look a certain way. Even though I talked and acted “white”, I still felt and definitely looked different than everyone else, as if I had some kind of drawback or disadvantage than my peers. As if I am out of place, a lost boy. As I continued to grow, I learned about black stereotypes, mainly about teenage black boys. I remember in middle school when I was having a conversation with my classmates and this boy asked me, “Why do you act so white?” Confused and slightly offended by this, I simply replied, “How am I supposed to act?” Am I supposed to talk unproper? Am I supposed to sag my pants? Am I supposed to play sports? Am I not supposed to like nature? Am I not supposed to behave? Am I not supposed to be who I am? I could not believe that people think that I am supposed to follow some kind of rule or guidelines, like we are not supposed to express ourselves and be who we are. I can be unique and who I want to be, not following some ignorant rulebook that white people wrote. I soon realized that a young black boy not following stereotypes surprises and confuses people, so I continued to do what I do.

I competed in wildlife competitions through FFA (Future Farmers of America) and 4-H. I have done many hours of community service. I joined school clubs and became an officer in student council. Once I found my passion for birds, I taught myself how to identify species and organized Ike’s Birding Hikes. After hosting my first hike, I was interviewed on WSAV and gained the attention of the Ogeechee Audubon Society. I was very exhilarated to finally get to meet other birders who I can relate and go birdwatching with. I remember my first time walking into the meeting noticing that everyone was much older than I

was, but the setting was prominently white. I was extremely nervous at that moment, being the fact that I do not know how people would react to a young black boy going to a meeting for birdwatchers. Since I grew up in a predominantly white setting, I adapted to the situation. It reminded me of elementary school when I was the only black kid in the classroom. It was like I had Déjà vu, especially when other members glance at me with a surprised look on their face, like I was a lost migratory bird that wended up out of its range. I knew that this would be the reaction of other birders when they first saw me. I would frequently get asked, "So how did you get into birding?" I would gladly answer their question and share my story, but the more I get this question, the more I get the feeling that they only ask just because they're surprised a young black boy would go birding. Like I should be at basketball practice or playing video games or walking through the streets in a gang or anything else besides birdwatching. I enjoyed attending the meetings, going on extravagant birding trips, and encountering new birders, but deep down inside, I felt awkward and different. Not only because of the huge age cap but because I was the only black birder in the group. I always made sure not to misidentify species because I did not want to be labeled as stupid or uneducated. I usually kept quiet because I did not want to be labeled as loud or noisy. And even when I am birding by myself in public areas, I sometimes pretend to look at a bird with my binoculars if someone notices me, so I will not look suspicious. I was very self-conscious whenever I am in the field with other people and strangers. Sometimes I would ask myself, where are the black birders? Where are the birders of color? Where are the birders that look like me? Where are the birders who I can relate to on a deeper level? Not that I was treated unfairly or not accepted by others, but I felt misunderstood and alone. Doing some research, I stumbled upon a black birder named Joseph Drew Lanham. I remember first watching his video about birdwatching while Black, which I watched several times. I soon realized that he was not the only other black birder out there. Jason and Jeffery Ward, Corina Newsome, Alex Troutman, and many more are all amazing black birders who I look up to. And they all went through the same feeling I had when I first started. Through social media, I found myself in a community full of black birders and nature lovers. I even got to meet and go birding with black birders which I never imagined would happen. For once in my life I truly felt like I fit in. I found my flock. And when situations like the racist encounter that Christian Cooper had in central park, we come together to address discrimination and racism while birding. But not only black birders but all birders as a community stand up to say that birdwatching is for everyone. It's not just for the adults and senior citizens, or just for white people. It's for any human being that has an enjoyable passion for birds.

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Mary Lambright, our Ogeechee Audubon Vice President has been blessed with the gift of watching a young Barred Owl grow up before her very eyes in her own backyard! Here are some photographs and a couple websites to look up information about owl pellets.



See the tiny bones in this owl pellet!

How much fun is this?!

If you want to learn more about owl pellets follow these links!

<https://www.carolina.com/knowledge/life-science/all-about-owl-pellets>

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/what-are-owl-pellets/>



Transcending Time and Space with Swallow-tailed Kites

...by Matt Tozar

There are few things that I am aware of that are as spectacular as catching sight of a Swallow-tailed Kite sweeping across the sky on a summer day. There is something about a creature with such boldly contrasting plumage and elegant proportions effortlessly negotiating air currents against a background of towering cumulus clouds that is almost too good to be true. A brief description of their basic biology, a raptorial bird that feeds almost entirely on the wing, snatching large insects from the air and small arboreal vertebrates from the tree tops, seems like the stuff of science fiction. Somehow, the bird seems to belong in a different era, perhaps more at home soaring over mastodons in a somewhat dubious artist's rendering based off of an overly ambitious paleontologist's interpretation of a few bits and pieces of fossilized bone. Alternatively, swallow-tails would seem to be equally likely in some distant, dystopian future created in the mind of an overly imaginative novelist where climate change or atomic war have pushed animal physiologies and survival strategies to extremes.

One day recently, I was particularly struck by this seeming anachronistic quality while watching a kite calmly and serenely take several passes over my exceedingly contemporary condominium complex. It occurred to me that it might be interesting to do a little digging and see what the latest research has to say about from where our modern-day swallow-tails came from in an evolutionary sense. Were there, for instance, Giant (and possibly saber-toothed) Swallow-tailed Kites snatching enormous cicadas from around the heads of giant ground sloths?

After a decent amount of googling, an unreasonable number of cups of coffee, and knocking the dust off of some long-buried knowledge of evolutionary biology, I determined that the answer is somewhat complicated, not entirely settled, but certainly pretty fascinating. Scientists have made tremendous progress in elucidating the relationships between different bird species. Traditionally, this was done comparing the presence or absence of different physical characters. Over the last 40 years or so this type of work has been greatly aided by new technologies allowing for the manipulation and eventually the sequencing of DNA. One thing that became clear with the advent of these genetic methods of investigation is how powerful of a force is "convergent evolution," whereby different lineages wind up appearing very similar by way of finding similar solutions to the same set of problems. Falcons (Falconiformes) were long thought to be adjacent to hawks, kites, eagles and old world vultures (Accipitriformes) on the evolutionary tree due to such similarities as their predatory habits, hooked bills, and sharp talons. In fact, DNA analysis shows that the falcons are more closely related to parrots and the large order of perching birds (passerines) than to hawks and it would seem that natural selection produced talons as a convenient means of dispatching prey more than once.



In any case, the widely agreed upon placement for Swallow-tailed Kites is as the sole member of their genus *Elanoides* which is nested within the subfamily *Perninae* (e.g. Mindell et al. 2018). Members of the *Perninae* share a mostly tropical distribution, a general preference for eating invertebrates, a few features of the skull, and apparently a fairly spongy stomach lining that is well suited for handling the pointier parts of insects. Somehow, none of the other *Pernid* species are particularly Swallow-tail-like. They tend to have rounded wings and a much more stationary method of feeding. For example, the only other member of the group to make it into North America north of Mexico, is the Hook-billed Kite, which although striking in its own

way, prefers to spend its days clambering around tree branches searching for snails. Intriguingly, the Bazas, Cuckoo-hawks, and Honey Buzzards that fill out the *Perninae* sub-family all share a more recent common ancestor with Swallow-tails than the similar looking *Elanus* Kites (think White-tailed Kite). Even the Mississippi Kite which shares the southern summer skies and a very similar lifestyle with the Swallow-tail is a comparatively more distant relative.

Now, knowing the closest living relatives of Swallow-tailed Kites is all well and good, but what I was really curious about was what their direct ancestors looked like, how they lived, and what led to the development of the species we have today. Ideally, for that kind of inquiry, we would have a nice chain of well-preserved fossils showing the gradual transition of one form to the next. My brief, Google-based literature survey did not turn up any papers describing Kite fossils of any kind. Access to academic search engines and obscure archaeology journals may have yielded some more information, but possibly not. Fossil records are often incomplete and bird bones tend not to preserve well. However, may be able to make few educated guesses about what the birds at the base of the Perninae subfamily-tree were like.

There are really three options. They could have been relatively sedentary, round winged, wasp larvae and snail specialists like most members of the group; sleek, pointy-winged, aerial predators, similar to modern day swallow-tails; or something in between. Species utilizing the round-winged body plan split off the main stem of the Perninae tree both before and after the split with the birds that would eventually give rise to the Swallow-tails. Therefore, it would require the fewest "evolutionary steps" if the birds at the base of the tree were also round-winged and tended to grab and eat their prey on the ground or on tree limbs. Traditionally, this simplest or most parsimonious explanation is considered to be the most likely by evolutionary biologists. Our story would then be that at some point, near the trunk of the family tree, the round-winged, land-lubbing "proto-swallowtails" started to take advantage of available flying prey, thus making adaptations for long periods of flight and maneuverability like pointy wings and an awesome-looking forked tail advantageous. I think this is *probably* the way it happened, but I'm not sure we can be absolutely certain until other evidence is uncovered. If this is in fact the path that Swallow-tailed Kite evolution took, any similarity in appearance and behavior that they share with Mississippi Kites would be a case of convergent evolution.



Although we can only speculate about where Swallow-tails came from in the distant past, we can be pretty certain where they are going on a much shorter timescale. It has long been known that the Swallow-tails that nest in the Southeast US depart for South America to spend the winter months. Now, thanks to developments in transmitter technology and a tracking project run by the Avian Research and Conservation Institute we can tell exactly where they are going. It seems most of "our" Swallow-tails hop over the resident population of northern South America and wind up largely in the savannahs and wetlands of southwestern Brazil, roughly 4000 miles from here in a straight line. In the fall, Swallow-tails favor a route down Florida, across to Cuba, turn west until they hit the Yucatan and then head through Central America and the Amazon Basin until they hit their destination. In the spring, with breeding looming, the birds reverse course, but tend to skip Cuba and instead launch directly over the Gulf of Mexico. It's a mind-boggling journey which can be followed by reading the blog found at swallow-tailedkites.org.

Swallow-tailed Kites will be with us through July and into August when they'll begin their journey to the plains of South America.

Mindell DP, Fuchs J, Johnson JA. " Phylogeny, Taxonomy, and Geographic Diversity of Diurnal Raptors: Falconiformes, Accipitriformes, and Cathartiformes." Sarasola JH, Grande JM, Negro JJ (Eds.) (2018) Birds of prey: biology and conservation in the XXI century. Springer. 3-32.

The Tale of the Jaeger and its Tail

...by Diana Churchill

Tuesday, June 2nd was the final day of the third window for the spring 2020 International Shorebird Surveys. John Williamson, Pam Smith and I met at Polk Street on Tybee to conduct one final survey on the north end of Tybee Island. I warned them that I had visited the beach the evening before and seen nary a shorebird, but they were eager to get out to the beach for some birding regardless.

We tallied a mockingbird, a Carolina Wren, and were serenaded by a Brown Thrasher as we began our walk to the beach. We also noted an Osprey near a nest on the water tower.

Once on the beach, we began counting Laughing Gulls, Herring Gulls and Brown Pelicans. Almost at the same time, we noted a large bird flying just off the coast, and John wondered if it were the same Osprey. As we all looked at the bird, Pam said “not an Osprey, and whatever it is I need it for my list!”



I looked and said, “I think it’s a Jaeger, but which Jaeger is the question.” I had seen all three species of Jaeger while on a trip to Alaska in the summer of 2012. We began snapping distant photos and continued walking, hoping the bird would come closer. We then referred to the Sibley app on our phones to compare Parasitic, Pomarine and Long-tailed Jaegers. Our first observations were that the bird was relatively beefy and had a blunt group of feathers extending beyond its tail.

After we rounded the point, we got very lucky as the Jaeger circled around and flew toward us, giving us an opportunity to get many closer photos in good light. Our initial conclusion was that this was a pomarine Jaeger, later confirmed by Steve Calver after I sent him a cell phone photo of one of my pictures. It was a life bird for both John and Pam and made up for the fact that we found no shorebirds on our survey.

Fast-forward two weeks to June 14th. I went to the beach for an evening walk and happened to meet up with Audubon member and Oatland Island Wildlife Staff member Eric Swanson. Eric had been looking for Sandwich Terns and we briefly spoke about the Jaeger. Eric headed back towards the jetties while I turned to go back to Polk Street. Imagine my surprise when Eric came running back saying he had just seen the Jaeger.

We watched as it swooped low over the flocks of gulls, flew over the water, and then back over the dunes. My camera somehow got stuck in video mode and I was unable to get photos while it was closest to us. I did finally correct the situation and got several not great but identifiable photos. Comparing them to the ones taken 2 weeks earlier, it looked like the same bird but the tail was longer. With his experience with raptors at Oatland, Eric confirmed that two weeks was about the right length of time for tail feathers to regrow after a molt.



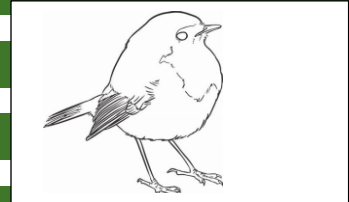
So, if you happen to be out at the north end of Tybee, keep your eyes open for our visiting Pomarine Jaeger. Good birding.

Contact:

Facebook: [Ogeechee Audubon](#)

Email: Ogeecheeaudubon.help@gmail.com

Website: www.ogeecheeaudubon.org



Two-Banded
Courser

Amboseli
National Park,
Kenya

Photos – Leslie
Weichsel



New Opportunity for Young Birders: Fledgling Birder age 12 years and younger. \$5 membership fee.
All benefits of Adult Membership. Each Fledge will receive a special sticker.

Ogeechee Audubon Chapter Membership Form – 2020

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.