

THE MARSHLANDER

OGEECHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

March - April, 2022, Volume LII, Issue II



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, and Rose Talbert
Field Trips	Diana Churchill, Brittany Dodge, and Katie Higgins
Programs	Leslie Weichsel, 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.

Please join us for the April Public Meeting on April 19th at 7pm at the First Presbyterian Church, 520 Washington Avenue, Savannah

This meeting is our Annual Meeting and the Nominating Committee will present the slate for the elections of officers at this time. A brief update on the status of Ogeechee Audubon will be presented.

In addition, a proposal for an amendment to Article I, Section 1 (Membership) of the ByLaws will be proposed.

The addition to this section is as follows:

Ogeechee Audubon Society celebrates the diversity of our membership, 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.

The amendment must be voted on and be accepted by a majority of

members in good standing present at the meeting.

Speaker

Melanie Furr, Director of Education, Georgia Audubon
(melanie.furr@georgiaaudubon.org)

Director of Education at Georgia Audubon since 2014, Melanie develops and teaches programs about birds for audiences of all ages and backgrounds, as well as provides professional development for educators. A licensed wildlife rehabilitator, her interest in birds was sparked while feeding orphaned baby birds as a volunteer wildlife rehabilitator, and in 2018, she became the custodian for Georgia Audubon's first education ambassadors, two Ruby-throated Hummingbirds injured in window collisions. Melanie is a former high school English teacher and holds a Masters of Arts for Teachers degree from Agnes Scott College. She is a certified Master Naturalist and serves on the board of the Environmental Education Alliance of Georgia and the advisory council for K-12 Education at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Passionate about wildlife and nature, she documents her wildlife adventures and musings about nature on her blog and social media page, My Eco-centric Life. She is the mother of two college students and three rescue cats.

Attendees must be fully vaccinated and remain masked for the duration of the meeting.



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Field Trips and Surveys, – Get out into Nature!

Ogeechee Audubon is conducting field activities with guidelines in place to keep us safe. We are all in this together as we adapt to the new “normal”. Please read the following guidelines. Everyone is expected to agree to follow these requirements in order to participate in the Field Trips.

- Participants who are fully vaccinated will not be required to wear a face mask
- Participants who are not fully vaccinated will be required to wear a face mask for the duration of the field trip
- All participants should follow general social distancing practices
- Please do not share binoculars, scopes or other equipment
- Please do not carpool with participants outside your household
- By attending field trips sponsored by Ogeechee Audubon Society, you acknowledge that these activities may be hazardous to you and your health and agree voluntarily to participate.

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.

****SUN, March 6; 3-5pm; SUN, MAR 20 & 27; 4-6pm: Rusty Blackbird Surveys at Savannah Christian Preparatory School. 1599 Chatham Parkway, Savannah, GA 31408.**

Leader Stan Gray. 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 (4:00pm for the 3/20 and 3/27 surveys).

****SUN, March 13: Savannah Christian Preparatory School Full Property Survey:** Meet at the entrance gate at 8:30 am. Survey duration usually 4 hours and involves moderate walking. Stan Gray -

graysirsgarden@comcast.net

Field Trips!

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.

****SAT, March 12: Sterling Creek Park 8:00 am to 11:00 am.** We will search for winter birds, rails and perhaps an early spring migrant or two. Meet by the restroom building at 8 am. Leader Pam Smith pavercel@gmail.com. Difficulty - Moderate with 2-3 miles of walking on flat terrain. **Richmond Hill, Ga 31324**

****SUN, March 27: Wormsloe Historical Site 8:30 am to 11:30 am.** We will looking for lingering winter birds and early spring migrants. Meet at the entrance to Wormsloe at 8:30 am. Limit 15 people with reservations required – please email trip leader Katie Higgins (kt.higgins@uga.edu) or sign up here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/60B0944AEA62EA2FA7-oas>. Ogeechee Audubon will be picking up the per person entry fee - usually \$10 or \$6 if we have 15 people. Difficulty Easy. **7601 Skidaway Rd, Savannah, GA 31406**

Forsyth Park Migratory Bird Walks:

****Thursday mornings from 7:45 am - 9:15 am. April 7, 14, 21, 28, & May 5th.**

Meet at the Fountain and tour around Savannah's beautiful and historic park watching for Spring Migrants. Leader Diana Churchill dichurchbirds@gmail.com Difficulty: Easy

****SUN, April 10: Mary Kahrs Warnell Forest Education Center 8:00 am to 11:30 am.** We be on the lookout spring migrants and lingering winter birds. Limit 12 people with advanced reservations required – Please email leader Chris Brown okstatevet92@gmail.com. Difficulty - Moderate with extensive walking. **5960 SR-17 Guyton, GA 31312**

****SAT, April 23: Earth Day at Joseph Tribble Park 10:00 am to 11:30 am.** Meet at the Park entrance. Leader Susan DeRosa susanderosa55@gmail.com. Difficulty - Easy. **Largo Drive Savannah.**

****SUN, April 24: James Webb Wildlife Management Area 8:00 am to 12:00 pm.** Target species include Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Bachman's Sparrows, Indigo Buntings, Prothonotary Warblers and more. Meet at the entrance at 8 am. Leader Steve Wagner sjwgnr@hotmail.com Difficulty easy to moderate with driving and walking. **2680 Augusta Stage Coach Rd. Garnett, SC 29922.**

****SAT, April 30. Skidaway Island State Park 7:30 am to 11:00 am.** Targeting spring migrants. Meet in the parking lot of Skidaway Island Methodist Church. Leader Steve Fox sfox573@gmail.com. Difficulty easy to moderate. **54 Diamond Causeway, Savannah, GA 31411.**

Volunteer Opportunity!

Help! We need volunteers to fill the feeders at the UGA Marine Extension Center and Aquarium on Skidaway Island. You may remember that recently Ogeechee Audubon received generous donations in memory of OAS members Joyce Fowler and Bob Paddison (Diana Churchill's dad). The board decided to put these funds towards adding to the bird feeders that were located at the UGA Marine Extension Center (MAREX) and Aquarium. The board thought this would be an ideal way to recognize Joyce and Bob and share their a passion for birds with the visitors to the aquarium. The memorial feeders are attracting lots of birds and are needing to be refilled regularly. So, if you live near the aquarium or just want an excuse to take a lovely drive to the aquarium occasionally, please let us know at ogeecheeaudubon.help@gmail.com and we'll add you to the list and show you the ropes.

Christmas Bird Count Results

Savannah, 2021:

Compiler Larry Carlile

It's not surprising that participation in this year's Savannah Christmas Bird Count was up given that there was less concern over the status of the pandemic. However, the number of hours logged birding was down, as was the number of species recorded. Last year, 45 participants logged 172 hours and recorded 155 species. This year, 63 participants logged 140 hours and recorded 152 species. I believe this can partly be explained by the unseasonably warm temperatures we experienced (the high was 82°F vs 71° in 2021) and fairly strong winds that gusted up to 18 mph during the day. The strong winds certainly drove me out of the field earlier than normal!

This year, we dipped on several species that were present last year: black-bellied whistling-duck, redhead, common loon, American bittern, green heron, common ground dove, ruby-throated hummingbird, black-chinned hummingbird, brown creeper, winter wren, American pipit, field sparrow(!), purple finch, and pine siskin.

Other interesting tidbits were:

- The number of bald eagles was up a bit this year (29) versus last year (21).
- There were high counts for willet (74) and cattle egret (15) this year.
- There more laughing gulls recorded (1,716, a high count) than ring-billed gulls (828).
- The number of tree swallows, while not a low count, were lower than normal with only 480 reported.
- There were a few count week species of note: sandhill crane and Wilson's phalarope, both observed at the spoils site.

Thanks to all who participated in the count, and your prompt submission of eBird reports and the aggravating, but necessary, cover sheets. I look forward to receiving your reports in January of 2023!

Harris Neck, 2021:

Compiler Susan De Rosa

A look at the numbers:

- Number of Participants: 30 in 12 groups (vs 25 participants in 2020)
- Number of Areas: 20 (27 in 2020)
- Number of hours: 73.75 (69.75 in 2020)
- Mileage: 111 miles (121.75 in 2020)
- Number of Species: 128 (135 in 2020)
- Number of individuals: 11,758 (9870 in 2020)

Highlights:

- Number of bald eagles: 15*
- Tree swallows: 1827*
- Hairy woodpecker: 3 reported by two groups-both seen and heard
- Low numbers for Lesser Yellowlegs, Sanderlings, and Barred Owl. Could be because certain areas weren't surveyed. Owling times were similar to past years.
- Dabbling duck numbers seem low perhaps due to mild fall.

*Bald Eagles: 25 total sightings. 9 were seen perched. 5 juveniles were soaring and one 2yr. old noted over Woody Pond. Some reports did not have specific times so difficult to determine which birds could have been the same individuals seen. Best estimate is 15 BaEa.

*Tree Swallows: Massive feeding flocks over marshes multiple times throughout day. Flock sizes estimated counting by tens. One flock of ~750, several others of 200+.

Field Notes

Fort Stewart, January 30, 2022

Matt Tozer

We started the field trip to Fort Stewart well before sunrise, at the Love's truck stop, just off exit 90 on I-95. After those of us who had mis-set our coffee pots the previous night grabbed a little salvation from inside, we set off to a spot known to trip leader, Larry Carlile, to sometimes hold Woodcocks. The Woodcocks and their unusual courtship rituals were the reason for the trip's uncivilized start time of 6 am. Around dawn and dusk, the species will repeatedly "peent," or make a call that seems more frog-like than bird-like before making spiraling display flights. Finding one of these courtship areas is by far the best way to detect these incredibly cryptically plumaged odd shorebirds.

So, we followed Larry in our vehicles, out of the parking lot, off the highway, and down a dirt road. We pulled over when we came to a bit of a clearing, just as a little bit of a glow was beginning to appear in the East. The air was cold and completely still. The forest was magically quiet, as is only possible on such wintry, calm nights. We waited in silence for 10 to 15 minutes. The stillness was interrupted every few minutes by distant hooting Barred Owls and once by an even more distant Great Horned Owl. Eventually, as the light continued to grow, Northern Mockingbirds and Carolina Wrens began making their presence know. Several groups of Wood Ducks also began streaming over. But as light continued to grow, we realized that we were going to dip on peenting Woodcocks.

Nevertheless, we boldly carried on. The day's trip had only just begun and we had several more exciting target species to go for. Our next stop was a known cluster of nest trees for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Fort Stewart has a robust, and well-monitored (by Larry and his colleagues) population of this habitat specialist. In a short time, we heard, and then all

eventually saw several of these birds. As we were leaving the site we were treated to hearing and ultimately viewing Hairy Woodpeckers, which can be even more difficult to find in this corner of Georgia than the Red-cockadedes.

Next, we headed to a weedy field known for wintering Henslow's Sparrows. The field had such a heavy coat of frost, it could almost have been snow-covered. We formed a line and began to march across the field searching for these incredibly skulky, secretive birds. On our second pass, just as disappointment seemed to be knocking on the door, a tiny, slightly greenish sparrow lifted up and flew, no more than a few feet above the ground, into a low clump of bushes. We were able to locate the bird in the clump and everyone was treated to spectacular looks of our target species! For me, and several others in the group, this was a life bird and definitely the highlight of a pretty spectacular day.



Henslow's Sparrow
Photo Credit Diana Churchill

Hutchinson Island, February 6, 2022, Christopher Brown

Despite cold and wet conditions, our trip to Hutchinson Island proved more successful than expected. The trip was divided up to cover three areas of the island, each differing in habitat types. The first segment started at "The Reserves". This grassy undeveloped housing area on the north-central end of the island always provides something special. Right off the bat, we were blessed with a nice aerial display of two Northern Harriers flying low over the grass headed north towards the marsh. Yellow-rumped Warblers were prevalent in the shrubbery. Both Savannah Sparrows and Eastern Meadowlark made an appearance too. At the north end of "The Reserves" one has good views of The Little Black River and the Savannah Spoils Site in South Carolina. Looking towards the spoils site, the trip leader spotted a dark-bodied duck flying low over the water with white secondary flight feathers. When the duck landed it appeared to have a brown wispy head crest. After closer inspection with a spotting scope, it was determined to be a Red-breasted Merganser. A nice first of year (FOY) bird and lifer for most of the group.

After this sighting, the group traveled to the racing pit area (second segment of our trip) in search of Western Kingbirds that were spotted a few weeks earlier. The habitat types in this area consists of small tracts of hardwood forest, edge, and savanna. To our luck two Western Kingbirds were heard calling almost immediately. All members of the group had great views of these beautiful birds and most were blessed with a new lifer! This is a great species to see in Georgia, with Florida being the only reliable state to view this species in winter on the east coast. After scanning edge and hardwood forest habitat, we stumbled upon a beautiful Loggerhead Shrike vocalizing in a tree.

We then moved on to the east end of the island for our final segment of the trip. Vegetation predominantly consisted of non-native trees (Chinaberry) with mixed shrubbery. Orange-crowned Warbler, 50 American Robin, White-throated Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, & Blue-headed Vireo were all highlights from our final trip segment. Overall, it was a great day on Hutchinson Island with a total of 45 species observed.

Looking for your Observations:

Leslie Weichsel

Emily Williams a PhD student at Georgetown University presented to Ogeechee Audubon Meeting on February 15th an update on her multi-year, multi-state doctoral project researching the migration of the American Robin.

As part of this long-term study, Emily had banded American Robins last year at both Forsyth Park and Daffin Park here in Savannah! I asked if she could provide us information on how to report any of the banded Robins to her as Ogeechee Audubon plans to go to both of these areas for field trips this spring.

Emily provided us with the following:

To provide a bit of context for my work, I have been color banding American Robins across the DMV since early March 2021 and will be doing so for the next 3-4 years. I've attached a Google Earth image with yellow thumbnails of all the places I banded robins in this year, and also a photo of how the bands look like. You can see that none were banded in Rock Creek Park, but robins move as it so happens(!), so there's a chance robins I banded from elsewhere may be hanging out in spots you may be visiting as part of the CBC. This work is part of my PhD dissertation research understanding the migratory ecology of robins. I have banded 123 robins and have attached an excel file of their band combinations so you can have them on hand.

As for reporting, you can send reports of banded birds to this email (ejw75@georgetown.edu) and ideally please include: date, time, and location (x/y coordinates; format something like this: 38.74014 -77.24790), what kind of substrate it was on (on ground, in a tree, etc.) and any pertinent notes (was it in a flock? Hanging out by itself? Eating?). Another thing to keep an eye out for is whether you see if the bird is tagged. I have attached a photo of a couple of tagged robins so you have a frame of reference for what to look out for.

Below I've included a guide on reading color bands on the legs of a robin. Ideally, this is done with binoculars, but if your bird is close enough you can often see the colors without magnification.

1. Band number and color band combination

- i. Each bird will receive 1 aluminum USGS band and 3 colored leg bands.
- ii. The colors I am using are as follows:

R = **Red**
O = **Orange**
b = light **blue**
Y = **Yellow**
G = **Green**
B = dark **Blue**
W = **White**
K = **black**
A = **gray**
P = **Pink**
M = **Mauve**
X = USGS aluminum band

How to read: left leg, top (closest to body) to bottom (closest to foot), right leg, top to bottom

To read the robin's combo in the photo to the left:

Ex: GR-RX Left leg Right leg

G/Green R/Red

R/Red X/Metal band



Let's keep our eyes out for these banded birds and any other American Robins that may be visiting our area!

Nest Building: American Robin

Observational Notes from my Garden in Savannah

Carol McCray Davies

May 23, 2021

7:00am

This morning, and for most of the day, I watched an American Robin gather sheets of green moss off of patio pavers with her beak to build her nest.

First, she would gather loose chunks of carpet moss in her beak, take it to the birdbath a few feet away to dunk and soak several times to saturate, then fly off to come right back again and gather another beak full.

The spongy moss mass was almost too large (and heavy with water) for her to hold and fly with. She each time wets it thoroughly before flying off out of my sight. Back again in seconds to collect more!

She also gathers thin strands of Spanish moss (from the ground) and flies away with it trailing in the air under her as she carries it up and away! The nest must be nearby!

Hours later Mrs. Robin is back gathering mud for her nest building. Since there is no wet mud available she makes it herself, with a mouth full of dry dirt /soil and bits of dead grass/vegetation she moistens in the birdbath, dunking it over and over until it forms a thick mud in her mouth.

Then, back again to the birdbath water to wash out her beak and mouth before digging for more dirt to mix with water forming just the right consistency of mud (tabby) to build the perfect cup-shaped nest Robins are famous for! It's now 3:00pm, and she's been at it since 7:00am this morning!

Membership Reminder!

Hi! I am Mary Lambright, Vice-president of OAS and the person who keeps track of membership. Happy New Year! Did you know? Ogeechee Audubon Society membership is for one-year, starting January 1. Some of you have already renewed for 2022 (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 are getting this newsletter via MailChimp, you at least have paid through 2021. 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, Pam Smith, 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. If we do not receive your dues by 3/31/21, we will assume you are not interested in renewing and will remove you from our membership which will also remove you from our MailChimp list and you will no longer receive newsletters and other announcements.

Disclaimer: Membership to Ogeechee Audubon Society does NOT include membership to National Audubon Society with its subscription to the magazine, Audubon but you are encouraged to join both organizations. For more information about National Audubon Society go to <https://www.audubon.org/>

Ogeechee Audubon Chapter Membership Form – 2022

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.

_____ 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