

# ***THE MARSHLANDER***

## **OGEECHEE AUDUBON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER**

May - June, 2022, Volume LII, Issue III



### **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 Lambricht
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.

### **Welcome to New and Returning Officers:**

**President - Sue De Rosa**  
**Vice President - Rose Talbert**  
**Secretary - Patti Seanor**  
**Treasurer - Pam Smith**

### **Meet New OAS President: Sue De Rosa!**

I want to introduce myself since I'll be filling the rather large shoes of Leslie Weichsel plus all the other people who have previously guided Ogeechee Audubon. Birds have always seemed to be part of my life. My dad, a life-long Boy Scout, always had feeders in our yard, fashioned out of repurposed milk jugs, and my mom delighted in seeing the first blue bird where we lived in Northern Virginia. Being a Girl Scout through High School helped me appreciate the out of doors

through a multitude of camping trips, hikes, and adventures. I earned BA and MS in Biology, worked at the US Environmental Protection Agency in Cincinnati, lived in Maine for a year, and then returned to Cincinnati. After staying home for 15 years in Atlanta to raise three sons and a daughter, I started my teaching career. I taught science in Atlanta and Savannah at the middle and high school levels for 15 years, mainly focusing on Environmental Education. Additionally, I earned my Environmental Educator certificate so participate in several citizen science opportunities such as the sea turtle patrol on Tybee Island. After going to the Hog Island teacher camp through OAS's generous scholarship, I was really jumpstarted into birding. Before and after my retirement, I have gone on birding trips to Puerto Rico, Arizona, Texas, Galapagos, and Alaska. Each trip has increased my appreciation of our fellow feathered inhabitants of the Earth plus has made me not only want to protect their habitats but also share the wonder of them with others. I am looking forward to helping Ogeechee Audubon be involved in the effort of sharing and caring for birds.



## Many Thanks to Leslie Weichsel!

By Diana Churchill

I was talking to former Ogeechee Audubon President Dot Bambach sometime back about 2014 and we were discussing the future of the organization. Dot told me that she had her eye on one Leslie Weichsel. Leslie had come to Savannah to retire after a 40 plus year career as a nurse. She and her husband Jeff had been living in Rhinebeck, NY for 30 years and raised their 3 children there. Jeff loved the history part of Savannah and Leslie was drawn to the outdoor natural world of the tidal low country. She had been a member of the Ralph Waterman Bird Club in Dutchess County, New York.

Leslie found Ogeechee Audubon and began attending meetings and field trips.

“She has all the skills,” Dot told me. "I am going to recruit her for Vice President, and groom her to take over when I move.”

And as Dot spoke, so it came about. In April 2015, Leslie was elected Vice President of Ogeechee Audubon, and in April 2016, she took over as President.

During her 6 year tenure, we had board retreats to review the bylaws and re-vamp the old committee structure of the organization. She took on doing an inventory and location of all of our assets.

Becoming increasingly hooked on birds, Leslie also traveled overseas during her time as President, and entertained us with witty presentations about the adventures of the "Accidental Birder" in China as well as Africa.

She also came up with the idea of having bird walks in addition to our standard field trips. Walks were intended to be simply that - a group of interested people getting together to explore an area and learn the birds together with no one designated as “leader.”

It also fell to Leslie to lead Ogeechee Audubon during the not-yet concluded period of the pandemic. Under her guidance we tackled total shutdown, zoom meetings, guidelines for gradually safely resuming our activities, and more.

In addition to all those stellar administrative skills, I particularly appreciate Leslie for her sense of humor and fun. At her last board meeting where we should have been acknowledging her, she presented mini “Oscars” to all the board members with witty descriptions of each member’s skills and service.

While Leslie is off to fulfill new Grandmotherly responsibilities, first for Hudson and now twin boys in California, she has offered to continue serving Ogeechee Audubon as historian and keeper of our archives.

Brava Brava Leslie for service well and lovingly rendered!!!

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Please join us for the June Public Meeting on June 21 at 7pm at the First Presbyterian Church, 520 Washington Avenue, Savannah; Speaker TBA

## **Field Trips and Surveys, – Get out into Nature!**

### **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, June 19: Savannah Christian Preparatory School Full Property Survey:** Meet at the entrance gate at 8:30 am. Survey duration usually 4 hours and involves walking about 3 miles over some uneven terrain.  
Stan Gray - [graysirisgarden@comcast.net](mailto:graysirisgarden@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.

#### **Forsyth Park Migratory Bird Walk:**

**\*\*Thursday morning from 7:45 am - 9:15 am. 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](mailto:dichurchbirds@gmail.com) Difficulty: Easy

**\*\*FRI, May 13: Tybee Island 6:00 pm 8:30 pm.** We will observe the usually abundant shorebirds, gulls, and terns.  
Meet at Jaycee Park at 6 pm. Leader Diana Churchill ([dichurchbirds@gmail.com](mailto:dichurchbirds@gmail.com)). Difficulty: Moderate; 2 miles of walking in soft sand. **30 Van Horne Ave, Tybee Island, Ga 31328**

**\*\*SAT, May 21: Kingfisher Pond 8:00 am to 11:30 am.** Come to this often-overlooked section of Savannah National Wildlife Refuge as we look for wading birds, summer songbirds, black-bellied whistling ducks, and maybe a purple gallinule or two. Meet in the parking lot of Kingfisher Pond at 8am. Leader Matt Tozer([mctozer@yahoo.com](mailto:mctozer@yahoo.com))  
Difficulty: Moderate; walking on some uneven terrain. **Rte. 17 Hardeeville, SC 29927 (Just South of Shannon Road).**

**\*\*May 20-22: Georgia Ornithological Society Spring Meeting in Hiawassee, Georgia.** Visit [gos.org](http://gos.org) for details.

**\*\*SAT, June 4: Harris Neck NWR 8:00 am to 11:30 am.** We will take in the wading bird extravaganza as well as search for Painted Buntings and other nesting songbirds. Meet at the entrance to the refuge at 8 am. Leader Katie Higgins ([kt.higgins@uga.edu](mailto:kt.higgins@uga.edu)) Difficulty: Easy to Moderate; driving and walking. **5000 Wildlife Dr NW, Townsend, GA 31331.**

**\*\*SAT, June 25: Sterling Creek Park 8:30 am to 12:00 pm.** Target species include nesting Indigo and Painted Buntings, Summer Tanagers, and hopefully some feeding Mississippi and Swallow-tailed Kites. Meet at the parking lot at the end of the gravel driveway leading into the park (near the restroom) at 8:30 am. Leader Pam Smith ([pavercel@comcast.net](mailto:pavercel@comcast.net)) Difficulty: Moderate to Rigorous; 3 miles of walking on rough paths. **Elbow Swamp Road, Richmond Hill, GA 31324**

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## *Christmas Bird Count Results*

**Richmond Hill, 2021:**  
***Our Newest CBC Circle***  
Compiler Stan Gray

The Richmond Hill Christmas Bird Count BC was initiated in December 2020 by the then Naturalist for the Ford Field & River Club (FFRC) and current OAS Board member, Brittany Dodge. This past year, Ogeechee Audubon (OAS) joined forces with Brittany and FFRC to co-sponsor and conduct the CBC, bringing additional resources into the planning and implementation of the count. In all, 26 birders participated in the December 15, 2021 CBC, divided up into 10 teams (parties), covering roughly 74 miles by foot, car, golf cart, and boat. The count circle includes an amazing eleven (11) eBird hotspots, a large swath of the easternmost training/recreational areas of Ft. Stewart, and the 9400-acre Vallambrosa Plantation (a restricted access gem bordering the Ogeechee River). At the end of a fun and rewarding day, we had logged 111 species. Extraordinary #'s of scavenger species were carefully documented at Waste Management's Superior Landfill site by the team working there. In addition, from one prominent observation point at the landfill, 22 distinct Bald Eagles were sighted at one time. Rare bird forms were submitted for Mute Swan, Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Prairie Warbler, Ovenbird, and Henslow's Sparrow. The Mute Swans are resident at the Savannah South KOA Holiday park. Hairy Woodpecker, while observed not infrequently to the west of the count circle, are uncommon in the count circle area except on Ft. Stewart (where they were observed). Red-cockaded Woodpecker are very common on Ft. Stewart, again where they were seen, but nowhere else in the count circle. Henslow's Sparrow are very uncommon to rare throughout the region; the three (3) seen at Ft. Stewart were well photographed. Two other species, seen occasionally but still infrequently in winter near the coast, Prairie Warbler and Ovenbird, were well photographed as well.

Thanks to the Ford Field & River Club, a delicious mid-day Low Country Boil luncheon was offered to all birders. We anticipate that despite the fact that this count is planned to be held each year on the first Wednesday of the count period (mark your calendars for **December 14, 2022**), the number of participants and intensity of area coverage should increase significantly with time. This count circle contains many of the favorite local birding destinations for OAS and other birders, and offers endless possibilities as a future premier CBC.

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## *Field Notes*

### **Wormsloe Historic Site, March 27, 2022**

Katie Higgins

Wormsloe Historic Site located on Isle of Hope in Savannah is one of the most visited state parks in Georgia. It boasts of a picturesque, live-oak-lined entrance drive and the tabby ruins of the colonial estate of Noble Jones (1702-1775). A mixture of terrestrial habitats can be found on site including mixed oak maritime forest, tidal marsh and a remnant stand of long-leaf pine supporting a number of resident and migratory bird species.

The March 27 field trip to Wormsloe hosted 18 OAS members who split into two groups to cover the extensive Wormsloe trail system. Historic site manager, Gretchen Greminger allowed guests to enter the park early to beat the crowds. She and her husband, Nathan Nightingale, joined us in birding the trails. Winners for those who traveled the greatest distance to bird with us were the McCredie's who live in Costa Rica! They had so much fun that they continued their coastal Georgia birding adventure on Skidaway Island the following day.

Over 20 species were sighted and heard by our group. Highlights included a Lesser Yellowlegs and Little Blue Heron seen by Larry Carlisle's team and a Prairie Warbler seen by all. The Prairie Warbler was also caught on camera and shared by Rachel Green.



*Prairie Warbler*  
Photo Credit Rachel Green

### **Mary Kahrs Warnell Forest Education Center, April 10, 2022**

Christopher Brown

Our trip to the University of Georgia Mary Kahrs Forest Center in Guyton, GA produced a total of 38 species. Due to public land limitations, the bird species in Effingham county are heavily underreported – this gave Ogeechee Audubon a special chance of adding some valuable citizen science data to eBird. The importance of documenting wildlife (such as birds) in underreported rural areas is critical towards the establishment and conservation of both current and future recreational areas (which helps preserve our wildlife!). A total of 11 people participated in our walk. Highlight birds included a likely breeding pair of Red-headed Woodpeckers, multiple singing Ovenbirds, singing Prairie Warblers, and a migrating Broad-winged Hawk. We are grateful Gail Westcot, director of the forest center, allowed us to bird this beautiful property.

### **James Webb Wildlife Management Area, April 24, 2022**

Matthew Tozer

Participants met trip leader Steve Wagner at the breathtaking oak-lined entrance way to the Webb Wildlife Management Area. Part of the surrounding forest floor was still smoldering from a very recent controlled burn. Such burns are vital to maintaining the longleaf pine/wiregrass plant community. There we were treated to hearing several Red-headed Woodpeckers, a Prairie Warbler, and a Bachman's Sparrow. A little further down the road we stopped to look for a Yellow-Breasted Chat which was heard by the group but remained hidden. At that spot we also picked up Orchard Oriole and Blue Grosbeak.



Red-cockaded Woodpeckers are a site specialty, but they made us work a little bit on that day. We had stopped at several known clusters of nest trees without any luck. Finally, after returning from a bit of a walk up a side road we heard and then located a group of three. As participants admired the woodpeckers, a Swallow-tailed Kite appeared and circled at treetop height for several minutes, giving everyone a great view.

We headed over to the rookery where we saw close to 40 Little Blue Herons in various stages of nesting. There were smaller numbers of nesting Great Egrets, Cattle Egrets, and Anhingas. A highlight was the Wood Duck box posted near the board walk, in which a nest holding over 10 eggs

For the final stop of the trip, we headed down to the end of Bluff Lake Road where the pine forest gives way to cypress swamp to search for Prothonotary Warblers. Though the water was unusually high and we weren't able to get into the woods as far as usual, we soon heard and then found a very obliging "Swamp Canary." Just as we were about to call it a day, Steve heard a Swainson's Warbler singing a little ways off into the woods. As we stared into the trees, hoping this skulkiest of creatures would come in just a little bit closer, Steve spotted a Barred Owl quietly observing the same patch of forest!



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# OAS Continues Monitoring Over-Wintering Populations of Rusty Blackbirds

Stan Gray

The Rusty Blackbird (*Euphagus carolinus*) has been undergoing one of the most profound chronic long-term and acute short-term declines of any North American bird species. This is the conclusion of the International Rusty Blackbird Working Group, a group of biologists, conservationists, and other professionals, formed in 2005 and dedicated to researching and reversing this decline. Estimates based on citizen science projects place the total population loss since the 1960's at 85-95%! Despite extensive recent studies, the causes of this decline are still somewhat speculative, and point to no one factor. However, one of the key contributors appears to be the dramatic loss of wooded wetlands on southeastern wintering grounds.



*Rusty Blackbird*  
Photo Credit Pam Smith

For the past three winters (specifically November-April), a survey team from OAS has been methodically observing and documenting the populations of Rusty Blackbirds congregating on the campus of the Savannah Christian Preparatory School (SCPS). Some years ago, local birders had discovered the importance of this site for overwintering Rusties, and in July 2019, OAS concluded a cooperative agreement with school officials, allowing us to periodically visit the restricted access campus to count and record these birds. For the first two winters, counts were conducted essentially every week, whereas for this past winter, the frequency of visitation became every other week. The standard protocol established was that visits would be on Sundays from 3:00 – 5:00 PM. A discovery early on was that while Rusties may be dispersed throughout neighboring wetlands during most of the daylight hours, in the mid-late afternoon they would appear in the vicinity of the school courtyard. Favoring the litter from pecan trees in the courtyard, they would periodically descend onto the grassy expanses in and around the courtyard, thus making counts exceedingly accurate. Over the past three years, the OAS survey team has come to understand the behavioral patterns of the Rusties on site, and this knowledge has been submitted in extensive comment sections of eBird reports.

The importance of the SCPS site and surrounding wetlands cannot be overstated. Well over 90% of the time, the numbers of Rusty Blackbirds observed on the campus exceed any other reported numbers within the southeast U.S. On December 13, 2020, OAS birders achieved a high count of 611 birds. For each of the three years, the numbers on campus peak in mid-December; it is assumed that from this unique centralized location, flocks then disperse the rest of the winter to other

freshwater wetland sites farther south and west. While the overall numbers were highest in the winter of 2020-21, the patterns of presence have been consistent each year, with the notable exception that small flocks remained on campus this spring until at least April 17. Normally, they have completely departed the area by late March.

Thanks to the enthusiastic support given to this project by SCPS school officials, OAS intends to continue counting Rusty Blackbirds from the time of their fall return, typically by the end of the second week of November. In late October, we begin monitoring eBird reports along their southward migration routes, in anticipation of seeing the first returning bird(s) on campus. We are very fortunate to share our Low Country home with these amazing and beautiful birds.



*Rusty Blackbird*  
Photo Credit Pam Smith

**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 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.*

\_\_\_\_\_ 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