



The Citizen Scientist *Volume 4, Issue 1*

Gearing Up For Spring!

Welcome to our third year of the Citizen Scientist newsletter. We appreciate your interest in wildlife conservation, research and monitoring in the state of Georgia, and we want to extend a “thank you” to all those who have helped in the past. We received about 800 Loggerhead Shrike records and are in the process of analyzing these data. Volunteers helped run 54 Breeding Bird Survey routes last year and have been helping with the final edits on the Breeding Bird Atlas (remember that), which depended largely on volunteer surveyors and writers. We are about to publish the “Amphibians and Reptiles of Georgia” (out this spring), which was dependent on volunteer efforts to find and report herp records from across the state. Volunteers helped tally a record number of shorebirds on our coast this winter (103,003) and banded about 400 birds at Panola Mountain State Park and Joe Kurz WMA.

Far from being satisfied however, we have more opportunities for citizen involvement this year than ever, and it is not just for the birds... we have options for plant and herp-lovers as well! We encourage people of all skill levels to find a suitable project and pitch in this year. Whether you want to take on a nightjar or Painted Bunting survey in your area; pick up a Breeding Bird Survey route; look for color banded shorebirds, shrikes or kestrels; help band birds; monitor frogs in nocturnal surveys or herp drift fences during the day; or become a botanical guardian for a local population of rare plants – we can help get you involved!

Clearly, the need for data on a number of species far exceeds our ability to collect it, and we rely heavily on birders, herpers, butterflies and botanists to put their skills to use.

We are also interested in helping to nurture the next generation of biologists and citizen scientists so we offer a number of educational events as well. Please feel free to join us on a birding boot camp or help mentor a team of young birders for the Youth Birding Competition.



Herp survey volunteers.

-Nongame Conservation Section staff

At a Glance—Newsletter Highlights:

- 2008 Birding Boot Camps
- Bird banding volunteers needed
- Herp monitoring opportunities
- Bird education and outreach
- Bird survey results
- Become a Botanical Guardian

Save the dates: 2008 Birding Boot Camps

We are getting excited about this year's Birding Boot Camps, especially about revisiting Southwest Georgia. We will see how this year goes, but potentially will alternate coastal Georgia and Southwest Georgia Boot Camps each year.

The Birding Boot camps are designed to teach and refresh the skills of bird identification by sight and sound. We cover specific monitoring programs such as the Breeding Bird Surveys, targeted bird surveys, and general point count procedures. Once participants are comfortable with identifying birds by sight and sound, we encourage them to volunteer their skills for one of the Nongame Conservation Section's monitoring and research projects. Our current focus is to boost participation in the Breeding Bird Survey as we are still short of our goal of 90 routes across the state each year.



Boot camp participants searching for the elusive Swainson's Warbler

Southwest Georgia Boot Camp—April 29-30

Participants will stay at Seminole State Park. Sites that will be visited will include River Creek WMA, the newly acquired Silver Lake tract, which is the first state owned land with Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, and potentially Greenwood Plantation or the Wade Tract.

Piedmont Boot Camp—May 5-6

Participants will visit sites including Piedmont NWR and Bond Swamp NWR, Rum Creek WMA, and farmland west of Forsyth.

Mountain Boot Camp—May 8-9

Using Vogel State Park as the base, participants will visit a number of mountain sites including Brawley Mountain, Ivy-log Gap, Brasstown Bald and Coopers Creek WMA.

Thanks to the generous cooperation of the Georgia DNR State Parks & Historic Sites Division, free (but limited) housing is available at Vogel State Park for the mountain Boot Camp and at Lake Seminole State Park for the Southwest Georgia Boot Camp. If you are interested in participating or have questions, please contact Tim Keyes at tim.keyes@gadnr.org. Lodging will be based on a "first-contact, first-served" basis. Contact Tim Keyes as soon as possible for free accommodations at these two State Parks.

Sharp eyes needed for kestrel surveys

The Southeastern American Kestrel is believed to have been a bird of open pine forests. Since few of these forests remain the population has tumbled in Georgia. A few remnant populations are hanging on using alternate habitats, often pastures and other open habitats along high-voltage powerline rights-of-way. Hollow sections of older poles and towers have provided nesting sites, but as old structures have been upgraded these nest sites have been lost. The Georgia DNR in cooperation with the Joseph W. Jones Ecological Center, Georgia Southern University, Georgia Power and MEAG, has been studying this problem, putting up artificial nest boxes along these powerline rights of way and monitoring nesting success. In 2007, 23 birds were color banded in 20 nest boxes in Taylor County. Orange tags with unique numbers were affixed to their legs. As nesting season approaches and the migrant northern-nesting American Kestrels leave the state, keep an eye out for color-banded birds. Since many of our banded birds are coming into adulthood it is likely they will be dispersing, possibly quite far from Taylor County where they were banded. You may have difficulty getting the numbers, but even if you see a kestrel with bands let us know!



Adult, female Southeastern American Kestrel (F.s. paulus) sitting on eggs in nest box located in the Coastal Plain in Georgia. Photo by Dr. John Parrish, GSU.

For more information on the Southeastern American Kestrel survey in Georgia and to volunteer for this project, contact Nathan Klaus at nathan.klaus@gadnr.org

Bird Banding at Panola Mountain State Park and Joe Kurz WMA

Since moving to Georgia in August 2007, I have begun several bird banding projects. All the work for these programs has been performed by individuals of varied backgrounds who have generously volunteered their time. Costs of operating these stations have been borne by donations of those individuals and a grant from the Georgia Ornithological Society. Two of the projects are banding stations on state-owned land. They were started at the request of DNR biologists to collect data which will be analyzed with respect to the habitat management plan at each location. This information will help determine if that management produces its desired results. They are at Joe Kurz Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Meriwether County, and Panola Mountain State Park in Rockdale County. The third is an attempt to capture and band Loggerhead Shrikes in order to add to our knowledge base of this sharply-declining species.



Kentucky Warbler photo by Charlie Muise

At Joe Kurz WMA we are studying the breeding birds of a recently retired agricultural field. DNR plans to convert this field to native warm season grasses and forbs, which should help grassland breeding bird species. The goal of the bird banding is to give feedback to the managers so they can see the results of their work. This station is a member of a continent-wide project called Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) which is managed by the Institute for Bird Populations in Point Reyes, CA (www.birdpop.org). We open 10 mist nets for six hours per day, during nine days spread over the breeding season. Each net is made of very thin, almost invisible black nylon material. For the sake of statistical analysis we open the same size and type of nets at the same locations each time. Last year we were able to capture 139 birds of 25 species. The top three species - Indigo Bunting, Yellow-breasted Chat, Northern Cardinal - accounted for about 60% of all captures.



Sedge Wren photo by Charlie Muise

The Panola Mountain State Park project monitors wintering birds, primarily sparrows. This area was also once agricultural land, but the work to bring back native flora has been going on for several years. We have captured 255 birds of 23 species there. The top species are Song, Swamp, Savannah and Field sparrows. The captures of individual White-crowned Sparrow and Sedge Wren are promising indicators of this area's value as grassland habitat.

change. Theories include changes in use of pesticides, changes in agriculture use (specifically the loss of fencerows associated with the change to larger scale farming), overall loss of habitat, and decreased availability of barbed wire and large thorn-bearing trees.

A goal of bird banding is to encounter birds that have already been banded. This usually occurs when a bander captures a bird he or she previously banded, but can include capturing a bird banded by someone else, or finding a dead bird which has been banded. Anyone who finds a banded bird should immediately contact a bird bander or the Bird Banding Lab so the information can be reported. While we have not yet recaptured a shrike, both of the banding stations have captured numerous banded birds. The most important and interesting was a Blue Grosbeak caught at Joe Kurz WMA. It was originally banded less than a mile away in 2004, making this bird at least six years old.

- Charlie Muise, master bird bander



Swamp Sparrow photo by Charlie Muise

If you are interested in learning more, or would like to help, contact Charlie Muise at cmmbirds@yahoo.com

2008 Marks the Year of the Frog!

This year marks the launch of Georgia's participation in the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program (NAAMP). Developed by the United States Geological Survey, NAAMP is an international study investigating the distribution and relative abundance of amphibians in North America. Standardized monitoring data collected from across the country will be analyzed for patterns of amphibian stability or decline on local, regional and national levels. Volunteers are asked to drive a predetermined route (or routes), stopping for five minutes to listen and report frog species and their relative abundance at 10 established wetland stops. Three specific "windows" of listening periods are designated to account for the seasonal activity differences between various species, so each route is run three times per year. Additionally, each volunteer must annually pass (65% or greater) an online frog call identification quiz. For 2008, we have 28 volunteers running 32 of the 78 total routes in Georgia. We would ideally like to have all routes covered for the 2009 season and beyond and are encouraging interested volunteers to bone-up on your frog call identification skills and join us next year in this study. Georgia frog calls can be listened to on several websites (see links below), or you can purchase the "Calls of the Wild – Vocalizations of Georgia's Frogs" CD from the Nongame Conservation Section (call 478-994-1438 for more information).



Georgia frog call reference sites:

<http://jcmaerz.myweb.uga.edu/lab/GANAAMP/index.htm>

<http://wwknapp.home.mindspring.com/GAFrog.Toad.html>

"Amphibians and Reptiles of Georgia" - Place your order today!

In other herp news, the long anticipated book "Amphibians and Reptiles of Georgia" is *in press* and The University of Georgia Press is now accepting orders (see flyer on page 5 for details). Many subscribers of Citizen Scientist were former volunteers for the Georgia Herp Atlas (GHA) project and contributed significantly to our understanding of amphibian and reptile distributions in the state. GHA data are reflected in the accuracy of the range maps found in the book. To show appreciation for the contributions of GHA volunteers, those who submitted acceptable records will find their names in the book's acknowledgments section.

Fall Line Sandhills Natural Area Herp Monitoring

For those of you interested in things that creep and crawl have we got a neat opportunity! Several drift fence arrays (long strips of aluminum flashing with traps on either end) have been erected on Fall Line Sandhills Natural Area in Taylor County. These traps are being opened and monitored for a week at a time, several times throughout the year. We hope to develop a more complete species list for this unique property, which already boasts numerous tracked and even a few threatened herpetofauna. Over time we hope to document changes in populations as habitat is shifted from an agroforestry landscape to a longleaf pine sandhill communities. In the coming year we will plan to erect similar traps on nearby Black Creek Natural Area, which already has healthy sandhill vegetation.



If you are interested in helping monitor these traps, or if you would like to help erect new traps as part of a volunteer program, please e-mail Nathan Klaus at nathan.klaus@gadnr.org

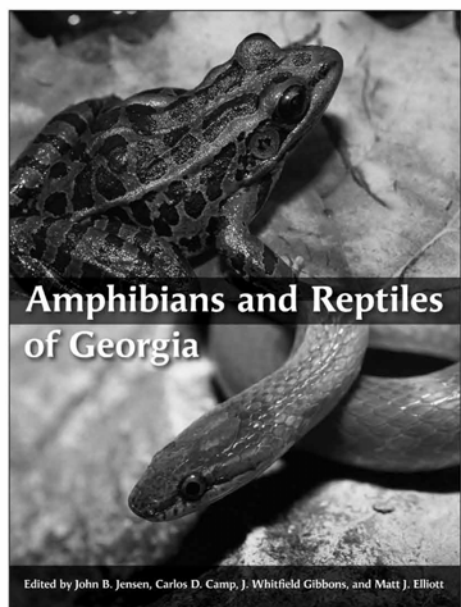
Sign-up today for important volunteer efforts across the state to help protect and conserve Georgia's amphibians and reptiles!

New from THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA PRESS

Amphibians and Reptiles of Georgia

Edited by John B. Jensen, Carlos D. Camp, Whit Gibbons, and Matt J. Elliott

The only comprehensive guide to the state's diverse herpetofauna



July 2008
 7½ x 10 | 592 pp. | 478 color photos | 3 tables
 182 maps | 1 figure | 24 line drawings
 Flexibind, \$39.95t | 978-0-8203-3111-9

A hidden world of amphibians and reptiles awaits the outdoor adventurer in Georgia's streams, caves, forests, and wetlands. *Amphibians and Reptiles of Georgia* makes accessible a wealth of information about 170 species of frogs, salamanders, crocodylians, lizards, snakes, and turtles. Throughout, the book stresses conservation, documenting declines in individual species as well as losses of local and regional populations.

Color photographs are paired with detailed species accounts, which provide information about size, appearance, and other identifying characteristics of adults and young; taxonomy and nomenclature; habits; distribution and habitat; and reproduction and development. Typical specimens and various life stages are described, as well as significant variations in such attributes as color and pattern. Line drawings define each group's general features for easy field identification. Range maps show where each species occurs in Georgia county by county, as well as in the United States generally. State maps depict elevations, streams, annual precipitation, land use changes, physiographic provinces, and average temperatures.

The book includes a checklist, a chart of the evolutionary relationships among amphibians and reptiles, a list of the top ten most reported species by major group, and a table summarizing the diversity of amphibians and reptiles in the state's five physiographic provinces. *Amphibians and Reptiles of Georgia* is an authoritative reference for students, professional herpetologists, biologists, ecologists, conservationists, land managers, and amateur naturalists.

Carlos D. Camp is a professor of biology at Piedmont College. **Whit Gibbons** is a professor of ecology at the University of Georgia and the former Head of the Environmental Outreach and Education Program at the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory. **Matt J. Elliott** is a program manager for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division, Nongame Conservation Section. **John B. Jensen** is a senior wildlife biologist for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division, Nongame Conservation Section.

FEATURES

- Nearly 500 color photographs
- 24 line drawings showing each group's defining features
- Almost 200 range maps detailing county-by-county distribution
- Detailed species accounts written by 54 regional experts providing information on size, appearance, and other identifying characteristics of adults and young; taxonomy and nomenclature; habits; distribution and habitat; and reproduction and development
- Introductory sections providing overviews of physiography, climate, and habitats of Georgia, the Georgia Herp Atlas Project, taxonomic issues, conservation, and herpetology as a science and a career
- A selection of frog and alligator vocalizations at www.ugapress.org/AmphibsAndReptiles

To order:
 PHONE 800-266-5842
 FAX 706-425-3061
 E-MAIL books@ugapress.uga.edu

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Bird Education Updates

Youth Birding Competition—May 2-3

Hopefully many of you were able to see the GPTV special on “Citizen Science” which highlighted a number of programs from Christmas Bird Counts to Giff Beaton’s dragonfly work. The show also included a significant introduction to the Youth Birding Competition, following Owen Kinney’s teams throughout the day. The Youth Birding Competition was also highlighted as a “Virtual Field Trip” on the International Migratory Bird Day website (www.birdday.org). Requests for more information about this event have come in from many other states and even Australia. Who knows, within the next few years Youth Birding Competitions may be cropping up all over the world!



For the 2008 Youth Birding Competition (YBC) we received more than 100 entries for the bird art contest, and the winning artwork (left) by Kelly O'Mara, 12th grade student from Darlington School will be



Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher artwork by Kelly O'Mara—Winning artwork for the Youth Birding Competition.

showcased on the 2008 YBC T-shirt. Team registrations have steadily come in — recently surpassing 100 participants! Most exciting are a number of new teams that came in out of the blue. The registration deadline was the end of March.

This year the Youth Birding Competition will take place on May 2-3, and as in years previous, finish at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center with an awards ceremony and banquet. Both Atlanta Audubon Society and the Georgia Ornithological Society have generously donated money for prizes, and T.E.R.N. has again provided the bulk of the funding that allows us to maintain this as a free event.

Thank you T.E.R.N. for your continued support of the Youth Birding Competition!



Enjoy these excellent entries in the 2008 Youth Birding Competition Art Contest!

Bird Education Updates—*continued*

B.E.N. and B.E.A.C.

Much progress has been made over the last year in the arena of national bird education efforts. What began as a conference in Austin TX in February of 2007 has generated two working groups that strive to promote bird conservation through education, particularly through the existing Partners in Flight (PIF) network and structure.

The Bird Education Network (B.E.N) is housed within the Council for Environmental Education (C.E.E.) and has developed a draft strategic plan. This can be viewed at (<http://www.birdeducation.org/>). The draft highlights five main threats to birds and targets audiences for education, addressing each of these threats. Much of the focus is getting conservation information from the larger PIF community and making sure it gets into the hands of educators in ways that are useful. It also has helped connect a large number of people involved in bird education around the nation in efforts to share programming and ideas. Through this network, we have been able to distribute our Wingspan banner, which has been reproduced in many other states, and distribute information about our Youth Birding Competition, which has generated significant interest. Several other states are expected to start similar programs inspired by Georgia.

B.E.A.C., the Bird Education Alliance for Conservation, is in the process of developing a strategic plan as well. They also conducted a survey of bird educators last year and hope to use the responses to help craft their approach to providing for the needs of bird educators nationally. Georgia DNR will be involved in compiling information for educators on all the conservation priorities from each PIF Bird Conservation Region (BCR).

2009 National Gathering: Bird Conservation Through Education Conference comes to Jekyll

If you are involved in bird education and conservation, mark your calendars for next year's conference on Jekyll Island February 22-26, 2009. Bird educators from around the country working with nature centers, bird observatories, banding stations, and state and federal agencies will converge on the Georgia coast. If you are involved in bird education in Georgia, plan to attend this workshop and become involved in some of the growing national efforts. More information can be found at <http://www.birdeducation.org> and in the flyer below:



Join BEN in

Jekyll Island

February 22-26, 2009



The Bird Education Network (BEN) Committee, Council for Environmental Education, and Flying WILD will host the 2009 *National Gathering: Bird Conservation through Education* at the Jekyll Island Club Hotel on Jekyll Island, Georgia. You're invited!

The BEN Committee is working hard to plan an incredible agenda for our second *National Gathering*. Bird education practitioners, bird education provider groups, managers, and government personnel will all find sessions of interest. Field sessions will hit popular birding hot spots while modeling best educational practices. The National Bird Education Strategy will be a priority topic for discussion.



Jekyll Island is home to a staggering number of bird species year round. The island is part of the Colonial Coast Birding Trail and is a designated Important Bird Area (IBA). It's a birder's paradise and the perfect location for a winter conference! Join us for an exciting week of bird education!

For more information visit:
www.jekyllclub.com
Look for conference updates at:
www.birdeducation.org



Bird Education Updates—*continued*

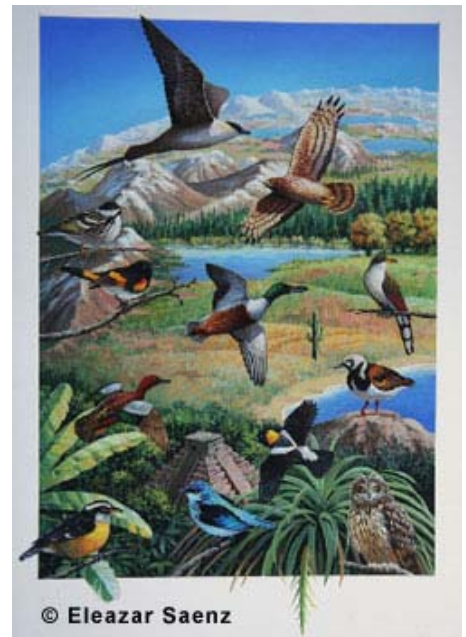
International Migratory Bird Day—Tundra to the Tropics: Connecting Birds, Habitat, and People

Migratory birds travel long distances between breeding and non-breeding sites throughout the Western Hemisphere. In 2008, International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) will explore the birds that make these fantastic journeys, the habitats on which they depend, and the people who are important to the conservation of birds and their habitats along the way.

IMBD is officially celebrated on the second Saturday in May in the U.S. and Canada. While most events will take place on May 10, 2008, we encourage you to organize your program, event, or festival when it best suits you and the birds. Many IMBD resource materials are available on the IMBD Web site (www.birdday.org) and are not dated and may be used year-round.

The 2008 theme provides a wonderful opportunity to recognize the important habitats in your locale and the groups and individuals that contribute to their protection. Explore what each habitat offers migratory birds, whether it is a place to rest, a nesting site, or a winter home.

For more information on IMBD and how to start a festival or event in your community, visit www.birdday.org or contact Tim Keyes at tim.keyes@gadnr.org



Georgia's Colonial Coast Birding and Nature Festival—Jekyll Island Convention Center



Jekyll Island - Georgia
October 9-13
2008

This year's festival offers outstanding field trips to Georgia's barrier islands and other natural areas, seminars, Family Fun Day (Saturday, October 11) - with many fun filled, hands-on activities, and a Saturday evening banquet and keynote address by special guest speaker Pete Dunne. Visit www.coastalgeorgiabirding.org for further information and registration dates and deadlines.



Join the fun at
Georgia's Coastal
Birding & Nature
Festival!



Bird Education Updates—continued

PIF Bird Education Box Reminder

To those involved with bird education, remember the PIF Bird Education Boxes distributed at nature centers throughout the state? There are 22 boxes stationed across Georgia that are available for loan free of charge. These boxes contain binoculars, field guides, videos, books and lesson plans for a wide range of bird activities. They are a perfect resource for teachers or nature centers wanting to get kids interested in birds. For a map of existing boxes and contacts, visit www.georgiawildlife.com, chose “Nongame Animals & Plants” then “Wildlife Education.”

Georgia’s “What’s Your Wingspan Banner” Takes off

We have made the artwork for our 14-foot long banner on bird wingspan available on-line (www.birdday.org) for free download. This banner reproduces the life-size silhouettes of 20 species, ranging from the 12-foot Wandering Albatross to the 2.6-inch



Bee Hummingbird. Many nature centers have downloaded this image and made their own wingspan banners. Photos of the banner have made the cover of the Bird Education Network’s Strategic Plan cover. Wild Bird Centers around the United States have also been producing these banners for use in store events.

Fledgling Birders

If counting birds with kids one time a year is just not enough, check out the new Fledgling Birders program, which encourages monthly youth bird counts for public and private school throughout the country. Young birders compete for prizes as well and are entered into a random drawing for additional prizes. For more information visit <http://www.fledglingbirders.org/index.html>.

Nongame wildlife e-newsletter: Sign-up today!

Whether the subject is wood storks or bog turtles, right whales or sandhills, a new e-mail newsletter from the Nongame Conservation Section covers the state’s wide range of nongame creatures and natural habitats.

The first issue of the bimonthly “Georgia Wild” was mailed in January. Topics included a big find for Rafinesque’s big-eared bats, how nongame work aids other wildlife and sportsmen, and new research exploring power-line habitat and nesting American kestrels. The second issue was just released this month—sign-up today for your copy or visit the Web site below for highlights.

Signing up is easy and free! Visit the Nongame Conservation Section at www.georgiawildlife.com. (Click on “Nongame Animals & Plants” and the e-news signup link.) Archive copies are available on-line.



Help needed to search for Ceruleans

Georgia DNR and the US Forest Service, as most of you probably know, have been experimenting with managing forests for Cerulean Warblers on Ivy and Gum Log gaps in the Chattahoochee National Forest north of Blairsville. Many of you visit these gaps each year in search of Ceruleans, as it is the most reliable nesting area for them in the state. Based on elevation and forest condition, 30 different plots were chosen and selective cutting and shelterwood cuts were made. The goal was to recreate the structurally diverse canopy typically caused by tree fall gaps in much older forests. These gaps provide critical vertical foraging structure for Cerulean warblers throughout their range, while the large emergent trees provide nest sites.

We have found Ceruleans in several of these cuts in the past, but feel that we could benefit greatly from increased survey efforts. In light of this the USFS will mark each site along the road with a unique number and collect GPS coordinates.

We hope that birders visiting these sites will be able to collect basic presence and absence data on Ceruleans between late-April and mid-June at as many sites as they can visit. Survey information and protocols will be posted on area bulletin boards and data sheets will be posted on the DNR Wildlife Resources Division's Web site at www.georgiawildlife.com.

Protocol

- Listen for Cerulean warblers for 5-minute period at each site.
- Record date, time, site number, and number and location (above or below road) of Cerulean warblers heard/observed.
- If Cerulean warblers are located between numbered sites, record approximate mileage from numbered site (GPS coordinates if possible) as well as information listed above.
- Send information (including surveys where no ceruleans were heard) to Jim Wentworth at jwentworth@fs.fed.us

For further information contact:

Jim Wentworth
U.S. Forest Service,
P.O. Box 9
Blairsville, GA 30514
706-745-6928



Cerulean Warbler photo by Giff Beaton

2008 Mid-winter shorebird survey results are in

On January 28, about 60 skilled birders distributed themselves along every stretch of beach in Georgia for the annual mid-winter shorebird survey. This effort has grown from its modest beginnings of trying to locate wintering Piping Plovers to encompass all shorebirds and even some wintering waterfowl. The survey occurs over one high tide event, when shorebirds are most concentrated on our beaches. Every barrier island is visited; as well as several named and unnamed sandbars and spits. The main value of this study is to track long-term trends in shorebird use of Georgia's beaches, and to locate as many banded shorebirds as possible (see shorebird color band article on page 9).

Care should be taken in over-interpreting one year's data, but it is interesting to note that in 2008, roughly twice as many birds (103,003) were counted than in 2006 (54,714) and 2007 (47,554) counts. These numbers were driven by high counts of Semipalmated (12,456) and Black-bellied (7,806) plover, Willet (1,415), Short-billed Dowitcher (7,707), and the ever-numerous Dunlin (59,235). Piping Plover numbers have remained remarkably stable over the last few years, hovering around 200 birds. Wilson's Plover sightings were high this year, with 66 individuals counted. Red Knot numbers were low, with only 208 individuals compared with 1,083 in 2007 and 485 in 2006. Alone, this probably would not signify much, but coupled with plummeting populations across much of their range, this only adds to the concern for the future of this globetrotting species.

If you are interested in joining this effort or receiving the complete records from this and previous year's counts, please contact Russ Wigh at rdwigh@bellsouth.net.

From red-legged Oystercatchers to green-legged Godwits, what is up with our multicolored shorebirds?

Have you ever been wandering on the beautiful expanses of Georgia's barrier island beaches and seen a shorebird with color bands on its legs? Have you wondered why these birds are banded and whether someone might like to know about it? Birders similar to you have been providing valuable information on the location of banded shorebirds for years. Right now, there are four primary species of shorebirds that are being color banded; the American Oystercatcher, Piping Plover, Red Knot and Marbled Godwit. The benefit of color bands of course is that the bird doesn't need to be recaptured to be identified; the color combinations can be documented from a distance.

If you do happen upon one of these species and notice the bands, please carefully record location, date, and not only the colors, but also the band positions (listed from top to bottom on right leg, then left leg). Without all this detail, it may be impossible to identify which individual bird you spotted. Several observers have managed to get digital photographs of these color-banded birds, which is an excellent way to document the individual.

American Oystercatcher

Observers are often able to get closest to these birds by boat, but you can usually approach them carefully on land and get close enough to see the band with the use of a spotting scope. American Oystercatchers are being banded from Massachusetts to Florida, and each state uses a unique color. Each oystercatcher receives 2 identical color bands so even if the bird is roosting with one leg up, a band should still be exposed. Each band has a 2-digit code (such as E1 or J7) repeated twice on it. A metal band should also be seen on the lower portion of one leg. You can sometimes read these two-digit codes with binoculars if you sneak up to the bird. If you see banded American Oystercatchers, please record location, time, date, band color and 2-digit code, and how many other Oystercatchers were in the same flock. Georgia's birds are banded with red, but birds from other states visit in winter. Also, some Georgia birds go north to breed and are banded in other states. Your data will help researchers up and down the east coast determine critical information such as the age of first nesting, and fidelity to nest sites, as well as to link wintering and breeding grounds for different populations, assess wintering site fidelity, and eventually develop age and mortality estimates for these birds.

American Oystercatcher color bands:

MA = Yellow, NJ = Orange, VA = Black, NC = Green, SC = Blue, GA = Red.

Red Knot

The Red Knot is a candidate species for federal listing under the Endangered Species Act. Their populations have plummeted in recent years. Any records of banded birds are very valuable, though a spotting scope will likely be required to read the code. Red Knots banded in the US typically have a light green flag band with a 3-digit code or numbers and letters on one upper leg, and another simple color band on the other upper leg.



Red Knot photo by Todd Schneider, DNR

Marbled Godwit photo by Todd Schneider



Marbled Godwit

Georgia is the only state banding Marbled Godwits. One question we are trying to answer is whether Georgia's wintering Godwits breed in James Bay or the Great Plains. They are being banded with green flag bands, as well as other color bands. Later this year, Marbled Godwits will be fitted with satellite telemetry packs so their flights can be documented.

Piping Plover

Georgia's wintering Piping Plovers are banded on their breeding grounds, typically in the Great Plains and Great Lakes, but also the northeast coast. Based on past records of banded birds, it appears that Georgia's

-continued on page 10

Multicolored shorebirds—*continued*

barrier island beaches are particularly important for the Great Lakes breeding population. Piping Plovers are banded on the upper and lower legs (tibia and tarsus). Since birds walk on their toes, tarsal bands will appear to be on the lower leg below a backwards-bending knee (in fact the heel). Tibial bands will be above this joint. Piping Plovers may also have up to three colors per leg, often with a split band (one with two colors on it).

Reminder—In all cases of reporting, please try to carefully document the color and arrangement of bands, in the following sequence: upper right, lower right, upper left, lower left. Please also document the place, time and date of the observation as well as the number of conspecifics present.

All data can be sent to the Nongame Conservation Section's coastal office:
Brad Winn, program manager
brad.winn@gadnr.org

Nightjar Survey Network grows—needs volunteers

In recent years, conservationists and the general public have come to share the general sense that populations of nightjars are declining throughout North America. In the spring of 2007, The Center for Conservation Biology constructed the Nightjar Survey Network (NSN) to begin the process of collecting data on the population distribution and population trends of Nightjars across broad regions of the United States. The Network was initially introduced into the southeast and is being expanded in 2008 to provide coverage throughout the contiguous United States.

Last year 59 routes were run in the southeast tallying a total of 215 Whip-poor-will, 591 Chuck-wills-widow and 65 Common Nighthawk. Ninety-percent of routes had some nightjars documented. With 12 routes run in Georgia last year, we were second only to Florida in participation.

The Nightjar Survey Network relies on volunteer participation by conservation-minded citizens, biologists, and other like-minded groups to adopt and conduct survey routes. Nightjar surveys are easy to perform and will not take more than two hours to complete. They are modeled after the Breeding Bird Survey, but obviously are run at night. Based on evidence of increased feeding, calling and breeding by nightjars when the moon is bright, they must coincide with a clear moonlit night. Volunteers conduct roadside counts at night, during specific time windows when the moon is ≥ 50 percent illuminated, by driving and stopping at 10 points along a predetermined 9-mile route. At each point, the observer counts all nightjars seen or heard by species during a 6-minute period. No artificial broadcasts of the species' calls are used.

The NSN has short and long-term objectives. Short-term objectives, hopefully met over the next 4-5 years include:

1. Gaining a better understanding of population distribution of nightjars across their breeding range.
2. Learning how the composition of different habitats in a landscape influences nightjar abundance.
3. Improving the performance of the survey design.

Long term objectives, which have time horizons of 10 years and beyond include:

1. Determining the scale and magnitude of population changes among nightjars.
2. Providing alarm signals at specific locations if nightjars are becoming imperiled.

Please visit the United States Nightjar Survey Web site for more details including location of routes, instructions, and results; www.ccb-wm.org/nightjars.htm, or contact Mike Wilson at mdwils@wm.edu



Chuck-will's-widow photo by Todd Schneider

Volunteers needed for “Eastern Painted Bunting Population Assessment and Monitoring Project”

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources in cooperation with The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey is participating in a four-state program (Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina) to monitor the eastern population of the Painted Bunting. The eastern population is in decline over much of its range largely due to changes in historical breeding habitat resulting from various aspects of human related activity. The “Eastern Painted Bunting Population Assessment and Monitoring Project” was established to obtain population density estimates through standard point count efforts. The results will be used as a basis for future management and research goals.

Eastern Painted Bunting
Population Assessment and Monitoring Project



Within the state of Georgia there are two strata/sample areas. The inland area, delineated by suitable bunting habitat roughly west of the I-95 corridor, runs as far inland as the coastal plain drainages of the Ocmulgee, Oconee, Ohoopsee and Savannah rivers. This area consists of about 30 road-based transects. Transects are comprised of 12 points with a minimum of 500 meters separation between points. At each predetermined point along the road, qualified volunteer observers will be tasked to conduct 5-minute observations to see or hear any Painted Buntings. Each transect will be sampled three times during the breeding season which runs between May 1 and the end of June. The target time for count observations is important and should be within four hours after sunrise or two hours before sunset.

The second sampling area is that of the coast, east of I-95. Many of these points are located on state, federal, or private lands. Coastal sites consist of six points sampled in a manner consistent to those of the inland sites.

For additional information on the “Eastern Painted Bunting Population Assessment and Monitoring Project,” visit the project Web site at: <http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/point/pabu/>

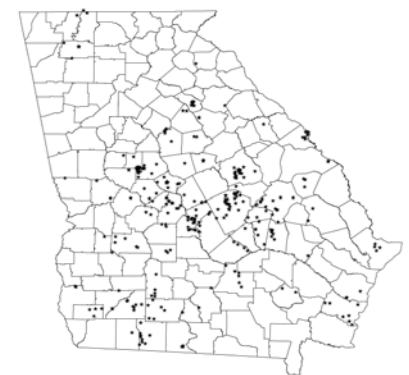
To volunteer as an observer for Georgia, contact:

Chris Depkin, Georgia DNR, (843) 384-4244, Depkin@aol.com

Bran Winn, Georgia DNR, (912) 262-3128, brad.winn@gadnr.org

Shrike roadside survey completed—Shrike banding continues

After taking incidental loggerhead shrike sightings for two years we have accumulated about 800 records of shrikes and shrike habitat. Data entry is largely complete and an initial look at the data on GIS layers shows great promise. Clearly this survey effort favors roads, and parts of the state where participants were most active, however these biases do not prevent us from collecting a great deal of habitat information. We know shrikes prefer open country, but do shrikes prefer certain habitat types above others? Is one type of row crop more often used than another? Are there thresholds for certain habitat types that must be met to support shrikes on the landscape, and do these thresholds vary for different habitat types? Do these preferences change at different times of the year, or by physiographic provinces? Our database is large enough now that we hope to be able to answer some of these questions, ultimately building a habitat suitability model for each physiographic province. These models will show where the greatest likelihood exists that shrikes can be found and may help guide private lands programs.



Georgia shrike survey results

A second project using color bands to uniquely identify birds will be initiated this summer. Charlie Muise, a master bander from Lamar County, has begun banding birds around Lamar and Monroe County and will soon begin banding around Laurens County as well, using locations from this database to aid in finding birds. If you would like to assist with banding activities, please contact Nathan Klaus at nathan.klaus@gadnr.org

Botanical Guardians to the rescue! Citizen scientist Martha Joiner at Manassas Bog

Martha Joiner is a self-described natural born gardener. She became a native plant advocate wandering through her homesite in Statesboro before construction began. She was struck by the beauty of the native woods; the plants there already had composed a gardener's delight. Martha has since made a study of how to grow rare native species. She earned a Masters in Botany at Georgia Southern specializing in native flora, and has worked with the Georgia Southern Botanical Garden and volunteered with the Georgia Plant Conservation Alliance (GPCA).

Martha shares her thoughts about monitoring an important pitcher plant bog in Southeast Georgia, called "Manassas Bog." This is a complex of privately owned pitcher plant bog wetlands that exist along five miles of a power line right-of-way near Claxton. The bogs were discovered by botanist Roland Harper around 1930. Subsequently, plant inventory determined that three species of pitcher plant grow in the bogs: yellow, dwarf, and purple pitcher plants. Martha is fascinated by Manassas because of "...all the rare plants! There's species there that don't grow anywhere else in Georgia. Plus, Manassas is so rich; it's full of the more common bog plants that are so beautiful. Each little bog is different.... it's a treasure." In addition to the pitcher plants, there are state-protected purple honeycomb-heads and flame-flower, several orchids, and many other native wildflowers and grasses.

Martha and her husband Hew have been visiting Manassas once per month since 2001, "except when it's too hot!" The monitoring effort began in response to a standard herbicide treatment to the right-of-way that killed many pitcher plants. Now, the GPCA and GA DNR have forged an agreement with Georgia Power not to use herbicide at Manassas Bog. Instead, Martha and Hew cut back shrubs manually that encroach in the right-of-way. They also look for disturbances to the bogs, watch for evidence of trespassing by all-terrain vehicles (ATV's), and inventory plant species and blooming times. "Learning to monitor was intimidating at first, because I am not a trained taxonomist," notes Martha. "But I found there are so many resources for volunteers, volunteers are so needed, that I received much training just for nothing."



Martha and Hew Joiner working at Manassas



View of Manassas bog

Martha reports their observations directly to Heather Alley of the State Botanical Garden in Athens, who coordinates the GPCA's Botanical Guardians volunteer program and passes new knowledge on to botanists throughout Georgia. To the Nongame Conservation Section, Martha and Hew are essential as eyes and hands for an important site that the state botanists simply cannot visit sufficiently to protect. Martha's reports keep the status of this remnant patch of Georgia's botanical diversity bright on the botanists' radar screen. It was Martha's consistent notices of increased ATV damage to the bogs in 2006 that gave necessary urgency to deter ATV use in the right-of-way. In October of 2007, with funding from The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (T.E.R.N.), DNR, Georgia Power and GPCA biologists installed fences and warning signs to deter ATV use at the bogs.

Martha has also involved the local landowners in her work. She has contacted all the pertinent owners, occasionally meeting with them onsite to immerse them in the microcosmos of wildflowers on their property. By sharing her enthusiasm, Martha has helped DNR gain agreements to implement the anti-ATV fencing and conduct prescribed burning.

Botanical Guardians—*continued*

For Martha, becoming a Botanical Guardian has enriched her experience. “I’ve met so many great people in new fields that I wouldn’t have met otherwise. I’ve learned about rare plants, ecology and hydrology of pitcher plant bogs, met committed landowners, and developed a new eye for variation in nature.” Simultaneously, she’s found a niche for her personal expertise in conservation horticulture. With seeds she collected at Manassas in 2002 from purple pitcher plants, Martha raised about 60 baby ‘purps’—as she affectionately calls the squat plants—and, with GPCA volunteers, planted 42 of them near their parent pitchers in October 2007. Fortunately, the planted ‘purps’ have enjoyed nourishing winter rains, and a few are sprouting flower blossoms for the coming spring.



Purple pitcher plants that Martha raised from seed collected onsite, and replanted in Oct 2007

“By volunteering to monitor one special place, you can learn a great deal about your own area,” Martha insists that Manassas Bog has done as much for her, as she for it. “You gain knowledge about what’s in the local environment, have chances to see how animals and plants interact, and even learn about the local history and how people have helped to shape the land.” Martha says that for Hew and her, visiting Manassas is a highlight of their month. “We love it! We take a picnic lunch and spend the day. It’s a peaceful place.” For Nongame Conservation Section biologists, working with friends like Martha and Hew is certainly a highlight of a career in natural resources. THANK YOU CITIZEN SCIENTISTS!!

- Lisa Kruse, Nongame Conservation Section botanist

For more information about the GPCA Botanical Guardians Program, visit <http://www.uga.edu/gpca/project6.html>

The costs and benefits of the Breeding Bird Survey: *For less than the cost of your morning coffee*

Thanks to those of you who ran Breeding Bird Survey routes (BBS) last year. We had 54 routes run statewide during the 2007 breeding season. Unfortunately, there were 21 additional assigned routes that were never run. We really need to get all assigned routes run and even beef up the number of routes statewide to about 82 in order to statistically assess population trends in Georgia in a meaningful way. There are clearly many skilled birders out there who are more than capable of running a route.

The commitment (cost) of running a BBS route is one morning a year. Given the importance of our time, the busyness of our schedules, and the cost of gas these days, this is not insignificant. What, you may ask, is the benefit? If you have ever seen a population trend line for a North American bird that began in 1966—thank a BBS volunteer. If you have ever been involved with Partners in Flight (PIF), the most significant bird conservation organization in the western hemisphere—thank a BBS volunteer—as PIF was brought into existence in response to population trends uncovered by BBS. If you are grateful for the discovery of declining populations of interior forest nesting birds, or grassland birds, or shrub-scrub nesting birds hopefully in time to stem the declines—thank a BBS volunteer. If you have ever used population data to either prioritize management efforts or push for federal listing of rare species—chances are BBS volunteers should be thanked yet again. If you have ever seen actual number estimates for total populations of many North American breeding birds—thank a BBS volunteer. So, while the cost is not insignificant, most of what we know about North American bird population trends and many other conservation efforts are built directly on the foundation of the Breeding Bird Survey.

Admittedly, a BBS route may not be the most exciting morning of birding for the year, but it just may well be the most important for the long-term management and conservation of many of our beloved birds. For birders already confident in their ability to identify Georgia’s birds by sight and sound, we have 18 routes ready and waiting. It’s time to step up to the plate.



The Citizen Scientist

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Help Support Georgia's Nongame Wildlife

Georgia residents who have purchased a nongame wildlife license plate for their vehicle can be proud that they have helped support the conservation of many different nongame plant and animal species in the state. These popular tags are made available through the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) to raise money for conservation. Available for a one-time fee of \$25, these two plates include the hummingbird with trumpet creeper blossom and the bald eagle with American flag.

The bald eagle and hummingbird plates fund a variety of nongame projects including efforts to aid the recovery of Georgia's bald eagle population. As recently as the 1970s, no active bald eagles nests could be found in Georgia. Fortunately, through the successful recovery and conservation efforts conducted by state and federal wildlife agencies nationwide, this is no longer the case. In 2007, WRD surveys documented 113 nests in Georgia, fledging a total of 140 young eagles. This success has helped account for the delisting of the bald eagle from the federal threatened and endangered species list.

The bald eagle/American flag plate and the hummingbird plate support the Nongame Conservation Section. The Section works to protect Georgia's nongame and endangered wildlife through efforts such as monitoring the state's bald eagle population, conserving swallow-tailed kites, protecting loggerhead sea turtle nests on coastal beaches and restoring longleaf pine/wiregrass habitat for species such as red cockaded woodpeckers, gopher tortoises and many species of songbirds. There are no state general fund revenues provided for nongame wildlife conservation, education and recreation programs. These important projects are funded solely through federal grants, direct donations and fundraising initiatives like the nongame wildlife license plate.



WRD's nongame wildlife plates are currently available at any county tag office and can be purchased for a one-time fee of \$25. Tags can be purchased at the office counter or by checking the appropriate wildlife license plate box on your mail-in registration form. For online renewals, visit <http://mvd.dor.ga.gov/tags>

Georgians can also contribute monetary donations to help fund the Nongame Conservation Section by donating to the Wildlife Conservation Fund on the State Income Tax Checkoff. This tax season, you can "Give Wildlife a Chance" and take part in wildlife conservation by indicating your donation on line 26 of state income tax form 500, or on line 10 of form 500EZ.

For more information on Georgia's State Income Tax Checkoff and nongame wildlife license plates and the important projects they support, visit www.georgiawildlife.com