



**BIRDS
GEORGIA**

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Bird Beyond: Building Connections Through Community Engagement

By Dottie Head, Director of Communications

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Wingbars is the official newsletter of Birds Georgia and is published four times a year. We feature news, upcoming events, meetings, field trips, and projects. We hope you will join us. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect policies of Birds Georgia.

White-eyed Vireo. Photo by Annalise Kaylor, Bird Georgia Member.

At Birds Georgia, you'll often hear us say, "Everyone is a birder, they just may not know it yet." Using that frame of reference, our community engagement team is committed to introducing birds and bird watching to people across Georgia. Birds are a catalyst for conservation, and learning more about birds can lead people to a deeper understanding of the natural world and healthy ecosystems. Birding and spending time in nature has also been linked to enhanced mental health, and who among us does not need the sense of peace and tranquility that birding and spending time in nature brings?



Working with volunteers to install a pollinator garden at the Heather Ivy Society. Photo by Dottie Head.

Community engagement at Birds Georgia is a big umbrella that covers lots of programs, including field trips, Georgia Bird Fest, and volunteer coordination, but at its heart our community engagement team is working to introduce the benefits of the outdoors to people and places that are historically marginalized by traditional conservation organizations. Making birds and nature more accessible to ALL was one of the driving factors behind our rebranding last year, and remains even more relevant today.

Open any news source, and you'll see that depression, anxiety, and other mental and physical health issues are increasingly common in our local communities. Our work to build meaningful connections with nature through birding improves mental and physical health outcomes.

The first step in reaching out to historically-marginalized communities is to identify them. Working with a GIS (Geographic Information System) specialist from National Audubon Society, Birds Georgia's community engagement team has rolled out an innovative program called Bird Beyond. Using GIS technology, we are able to generate a socioeconomic map using color-coded neighborhood planning units of Atlanta based on median income layered with a map of eBird checklists. Not surprisingly, we found a direct correlation between areas that have lower median incomes and areas that have had very few eBird checklists submitted over time. Using this information, we are able to identify parks, greenspaces, and neighborhoods that would be good targets for our community engagement programming. As time and budgets allow, we are working to build partnerships with community organizations to connect, listen, and learn so that we may bring relevant and timely programming to the residents. In time, we hope to expand Bird Beyond to encompass all of Georgia.

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From the Executive Director

Celebrating Spring Migration



Jared Teutsch

Spring has arrived, and along with it we've been treated to the sights and sounds of migrating birds. The Barn Swallows have returned to nest in my barn, and we've been seeing lots of warblers in the tree tops gleaning insects as they prepare to nest or continue their migratory journeys.

By the time you read this, the 9th annual Georgia Bird Fest will be in the rear-view mirror. This year's event was the most successful event yet, and we were delighted to see so many members and guests at the first-ever Georgia Bird Fest Summit, in Athens. Dr. J. Drew Lanham delivered an inspiring address on "Coloring the Conservation Conversation," and we had many other compelling speakers, some fun field trips, and, as always, delightful camaraderie with our birdy friends.



Painted Bunting. Photo by Larry Smith.

As you read through this issue of *Wingbars*, you can see a small sampling of all the great work that is taking place across Georgia thanks to the generous support of our members and donors. Our habitat restoration team is busy creating bird-friendly ecosystems across the state, and, now that we have a certified burn team, we'll be better able to manage and restore more bird-friendly habitat than ever. Our community engagement team is continuing and building

upon their great work sharing the joy of birds and birding with communities across the state. And our Project Safe Flight program is gaining traction in coastal Georgia, with volunteers in both Savannah and Brunswick who are patrolling routes, collecting birds, and helping us gain a better understanding of where coastal bird-building collisions are taking place. If you haven't already, we encourage you to sign up to receive lights out alerts on nights of peak migration so that you can help birds have safe passage by reducing or eliminating outdoor lighting between 12:00 and 6:00 AM.

After a successful Georgia Bird Fest, we're looking forward to some well-deserved relaxation this summer, but we're also already hard at work planning for our annual September events as part of the newly redesigned Fall Flyway Festival. Look for more information to come in the Bird Buzz e-newsletter or in the August issue of *Wingbars*.

In the meantime, happy migration!

Cheers,
Jared

Igniting Change: Birds Georgia's Fire Training Experience

By Logan Jones, Habitat Program Specialist

Birds Georgia has a new tool in their toolbox. Recently, members of the Birds Georgia conservation team – consisting of Sebastian Hagan, Sarah Tolve Manning, and Logan Jones – underwent comprehensive fire training led by the IBT (Interagency Burn Team) at Hard Labor Creek State Park.

This particular training, encompassed a pack test, online coursework, and physical training, and was designed to equip participants with an FFT2 (wildlife firefighter type II) certification (wildland firefighter type II) that aligns seamlessly with Birds Georgia's commitment to ecological restoration.

The IBT is an agreement between private, state, and federal partners that are focused on burning to help rare wildlife. Some of the IBT organizations include the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), The Orianne Society, The Longleaf Alliance, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Tall Timbers, The Nature Conservancy, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Georgia Forestry Commission. Many of these organizations also sent staff to join in training and to lead activities such as fire shelter deployment, burn plan management, pacing and orienteering, pumps, engines, hoses, and much more.

The recent training not only strengthened staff expertise but also solidified Birds Georgia's desire to actively engage in prescribed fires in partnership with IBT. Our goal is to align Birds Georgia's conservation efforts with burning whenever feasible, recognizing the ecological benefits it brings to our landscapes.

Prescribed fires have been proven to be instrumental in fostering early successional songbird habitat. Strategic burns create open spaces and clearings that are conducive to the growth of native vegetation, providing crucial nesting sites and foraging opportunities for early successional songbirds. These intentional fires mimic natural ignition processes, promoting biodiversity and maintaining the balance of ecosystems. Furthermore, prescribed fires help reduce the accumulation of dense vegetation, which can otherwise

hinder the growth of native plants and limit the availability of suitable habitats for songbirds. By restoring a more open and diverse landscape through controlled burns, Birds Georgia is able to enhance the overall health of the ecosystem and create conditions that are particularly favorable for the flourishing of early successional bird populations.

This new certification better positions our staff to support organizations across the state that conduct burns, including our partners at the DNR. This spring, Birds Georgia's conservation staff has been assisting with prescribed burns in collaboration with the IBT and DNR at places like our restoration meadow at Panola Mountain State Park, Chattahoochee Bend State Park, and at other sites.

Stay tuned for updates as Birds Georgia continues to work with partners to foster and improve healthy ecosystems through informed and strategic fire management practices. Together, Birds Georgia aims to kindle positive change and preserve the ecological balance of our landscapes for birds and future generations.



Sebastian Hagan, Logan Jones, and Sarah Tolve Manning were recently certified to construct prescribed burns by IBT.



Gabe Andrie monitoring a recent burn in the restoration meadow at Panola Mountain State Park. Photo by Sebastian Hagan.



The restoration meadow at Panola Mountain State Park post burn. Photo by Sebastian Hagan.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT On Marc Goncher

By Steve Phenicie

(This is the 61st in a series on Birds Georgia volunteers, board members, and staff.)

Not everything that happened as a result of the pandemic was negative. Marc Goncher used the period of restricted activity to get serious about birding. Now, just four years later, he's the chair of Birds Georgia.

Birding allowed him to nurture another passion, photography, and on one of his first times out he photographed a hard-to-find Prothonotary Warbler, which inspired him to keep going. Marc's old boss, Linda DiSantis, herself a former chair of the organization, persuaded him to join the board, saying that his background as an environmental lawyer would be useful.

Marc says the leading thrust of his tenure will be planning for the organization's centennial in 2026. The group was founded as the Atlanta Birding Club in 1926. He will also encourage diversity on the board – racial, ethnic, occupational, and geographic – as Birds Georgia works to broaden its appeal.

Last year, while vice chair of the board, Marc chaired the task force that studied whether to shed the Audubon name. When the decision was made, Marc issued a statement expressing the desire to make people of all backgrounds feel welcome. He noted a declining awareness of the Audubon brand and the need for a name that reflects the organization's focus – birds.

This year Marc enjoyed a two-week business trip to Singapore. When he wasn't working, he hired the co-author of a Singapore and Malaysia birding field guide, Lim Kim Seng, to show him around. On another business trip he escaped for a couple of hours to bird in Hyde Park in London. He's managed to take brief detours to bird on family

trips to Costa Rica, Israel, and Italy, and with especially memorable ones in Guatemala. There he convinced his family to make a special trip to see the Resplendent Quetzal, Guatemala's national bird, and later spent an epic day in Tikal National Park, where he saw or heard 86 species and photographed two rarely seen pumas.

Marc grew up in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C., and came to Atlanta in 1993 to attend



Marc Goncher

Emory University, staying to attend Emory's law school. He started his legal career in private practice in Savannah and was hired by former chair and then City Attorney Linda DiSantis to join the City's law department, where he served for 12 years, a large portion of which was spent advising the city on

compliance with the Clean Water Act. He became the deputy city attorney who managed the finance legal team, advised the City Council, and reported to the city attorney. He has also been an assistant attorney general for the Georgia Attorney General Office's Environmental Section. Since August 2016 he's been the environmental, safety and sustainability legal counsel for The Coca-Cola Company, to manage a wide range of issues on a local, national, and global scale.

His wife, Brynne, although not a head-over-heels birder, likes to paint and draw the pictures that Marc takes. Brynne is a lawyer for Piedmont Healthcare, and they have three boys, Harrison, 17, Talan, 14, and Simon 11. The two older boys attend Midtown High, and Simon goes to David T. Howard Middle School. They live in the Morningside neighborhood in the City of Atlanta.

THANK YOU!

A Million Thanks...

... to **Gavin Allvine, Melinda Hicks, Leena Shah** and **Jim Stratton** for helping with Master Birder field trips to Panola Banding Station ... to those who have assisted with our community engagement outreach via festivals, field trips and Bird Fest 2024: **Patrick Maurice, Chad Posick, Malcolm Hodges, Kathryn Dudeck, Jonah P. McDonald, Joy Carter, Ken Boff, Carrie Harper, Shannon Fair, Anne McCallum, Jim Ferrari, Theresa Hartz, Sandra Murray, Nathan Farnau, Peter Stangel, Kathy Harte, Gabe Andrie, Logan Jones, Sebastian Hagan, Dottie Head, Sheridan Alford, Kiana Leveritte, Roseanne Guerra, Beverly Fooks, Jenn Downs, Melanie Furr, Adam Betuel, Janet Brookes, Georgann Schmalz, Maribel Fernandez, Gus Kaufman, Vinod Babu, Wes Hatch, Nathan Griswell, Andrew Dreelin, Henry Adams, Lauren Wilson, Sam Holcomb, Kim Kenley, Phillip Prichard, Wendy Hoback, Kevin Hayes, Alix McHardy, Susan Berthelot, Ella Siefert, Alex Stach, Max and Carolyn Brown, Anne and David Hurley, Sarah Tolve, Heather Levy, Elizabeth Mackie, Lisa McGarrie, Robert McDonough, Angela Lewis, Laura Breyfogle, Kevin O'Toole, Jay Davis, Steven Seligsohn, Joanna Parkman, Laura Carruth, Kelly Daire, Becca Dill, Robyn and Steve Newman, Abby Cox, Paul Campbell, Maggie Stephen, Sally and Greg S. Bergquist, Jeff Kerlagon, Barbara Powell-Schager, Irena Rowe, Jency Shell, Cathy McGraw, Lindsey Mangham, Casey Chaviano, Leenah Shah, John Harty, Bryan Shelby, Jack Bruce, Terry Miller, Michelle Page-Rivera, Anne Marie Yarbrough, Yvonne Single, and Marline Kelly ... to **Joy Carter**, who donated native plants to use in the Heather Ivy Garden installed by the Habitat Restoration Team ... to those who participated in our Muhly Grass Seed Planting Event at Altama WMA in February: **Stephanie Hooks, Linda Wunder, Susan Rodgers, Mary Mellow, Ahmad Faramarzi, Shelly Gardner, Andrea Newell, Susan Tarnower, Mike Chapman, Elizabeth Tufts**, and**

(Continued on Page 5)

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Thank you to our Georgia Bird Fest Patron Supporters

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Thank you to our 2024 Georgia Bird Fest Sponsors:



Fall Versus Spring Migration: Migratory Bird Stopover Density Across Georgia

Thanks to a generous grant from the Disney Conservation Fund, Birds Georgia has been working with Dr. Kyle Horton at Colorado State University (CSU) to measure migratory bird activity over the state during spring and fall migration. These maps were the result of that work.

Each fall and spring, billions of migratory birds travel across North America, making their way between breeding grounds and wintering grounds. These birds must constantly confront changes to the landscapes below caused by natural and man-made forces, including the rapid proliferation of brightly lit nighttime landscapes.

While migration takes part in the skies, birds must stop along the way to rest and refuel. Birds Georgia wants to know WHERE these birds are stopping and to gain a better understanding of WHY they choose these locations.

By pairing migration intensity measurements from nearby weather stations with other environmental variables, the CSU team was able to train a machine learning model that predicted migration intensity in Georgia during spring and fall from 2000 to 2020. With these predictions, they were

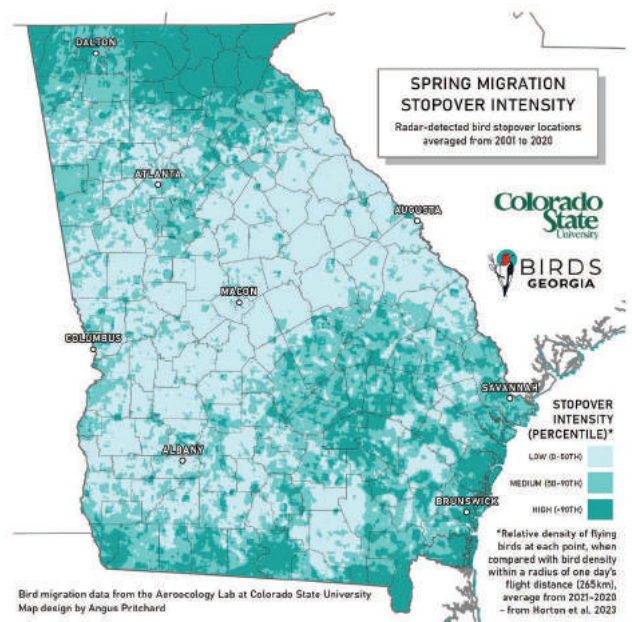
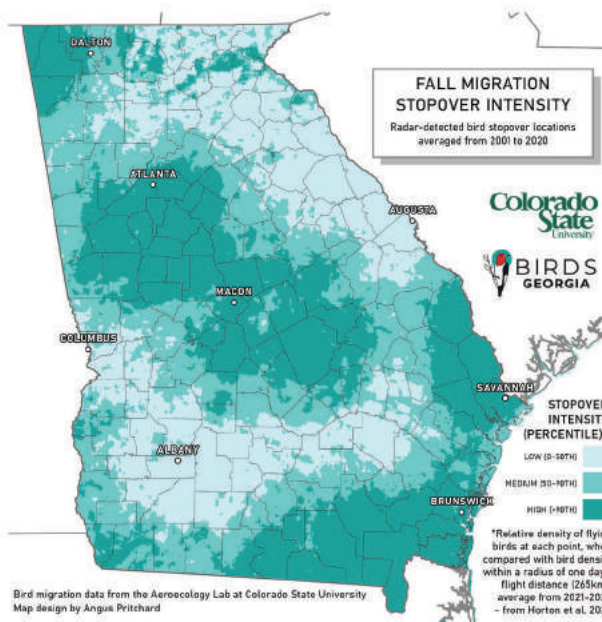
able to establish regions considered hotspots of bird migration stopover and refueling. The darker areas on the maps represent higher concentrations of birds stopping over to rest and feed.

In more than 70% of the models that were created, skyglow (or night time lighting) was identified as a highly influential and consistently positive predictor of bird migration stopover density across Georgia and the United States.

The findings of this study point to the ever-expanding threat that brightly lit night skies pose to birds, particularly during migration. In short, migratory birds are extremely sensitive to nighttime lighting, which acts like a magnet pulling them into brightly lit areas and cities, where they face threats ranging from building collisions to predation.

In recent years, the Colorado State Team has been working with state organizations, like Birds Georgia, to provide state-level migration forecasts, enabling us to issue Lights Out alerts on nights of peak migratory bird activity.

Learn more about this project or view the nightly forecast for Georgia enabled by this technology



Welcome New Birds Georgia Staff Member

Please join us in welcoming Jenn Downs as Birds Georgia's new systems coordinator. Jenn is replacing Adam George, who is moving on to other opportunities but will continue as a Birds Georgia volunteer field trip leader.

Jenn is a former UX Designer in the startup, nonprofit, and government tech space and has spent many years as the volunteer treasurer/IT person for local nonprofits. She's currently going back to school to study finance and public administration to bring these professional interests together. She's also had a long-standing interest in automation and AI for everyday use.

Outside of work and study, you can find her obsessing over birds, rescuing dogs, baking, and being creative in many mediums (music, writing, comedy, photography, and folk art and crafts). Her current projects include making bird whirlygigs, learning how to bake tarts, and a foster dog named James.



Jenn Downs

Species Profile: The Boat-tailed Grackle

By Steve Phenicie

“When you go back to Atlanta, why don’t you take some of those Boat-tailed Grackles with you?” That was the comment made a few years ago by a coastal resident to a group of metro area birders.

These often noisy birds – which can leave messy droppings, damage crops and have a call sometimes described as harsh – won’t win any Miss or Mr. Congeniality awards from human beings. Other birds aren’t enamored with them either, because of their aggressive behavior, which can include gobbling up eggs and nestlings.

As their name suggests, the most prominent feature of the males, their tail, is kind of like Dolly Parton’s wigs – big and showy. This bird is smaller than a Fish Crow but larger than a Common Grackle, with males glossy black all over. Females – which almost look like a different species – are dark brown above and russet below, with a subtle face pattern made up of a pale eyebrow, dark cheek, and pale “mustache” stripe.

You won’t find them anywhere near Atlanta – only along marshes, beaches, flooded fields, and mudflats near the Atlantic and Gulf coasts from Connecticut to Texas except in Florida, where they pretty much inhabit the entire state. Their diet includes aquatic insects, snails, crayfish, crabs, mussels, shrimp, tadpoles, frogs, small fish, grasshoppers, and caterpillars. For variety, they add parking-lot french fries, bread, rice, dog food, commercial bird seed, and fruit crops.

The boat-tailed Grackles nest in colonies, usually near water: in cattails, sawgrass, or bulrushes, in bushes or saplings at edge of a marsh, or in taller trees. The nest is generally less than 12 feet above ground or water but can be much higher. Nesting and raising the young is mostly a female affair. She builds a large, bulky cup of twigs, grass, weeds, bulrushes, Spanish moss, or other materials, often with mud added to

the base and lined with fine grass.

There she usually lays two to four pale greenish blue eggs and incubates them for 13 to 15 days. Feeding the young is entirely her responsibility, too, and they leave the nest about 12 to 15 days after hatching.

Some cool facts about the Boat-tailed Grackle:

- When it comes to getting around, these birds don’t exactly compete with Delta. Most spend their lives within about 10 miles of where they hatch.
- Until the 1970s, this bird was considered to be the same species as the Great-tailed Grackle, but the two overlap on the coasts of Texas and Louisiana without interbreeding.
- They are fairly common within their restricted range, but populations declined by about 47 percent between 1966 and 2014, according to the North America Breeding Bird Survey. Partners in Flight estimates the global breeding population at 2 million, with all of them in the United States.
- Their eye color varies with range. Gulf Coast and inland birds have dark eyes, but Atlantic birds have pale eyes.
- Their most serious predators are yellow rat snakes that attack their nests, but they are also preyed upon by rats, alligators, and Purple Gallinules.



Boat-tailed Grackles. Photo by Jerry Golub, Audubon Photography Awards.

Travel with Birds Georgia in 2025

Join Birds Georgia staff and members on one of our small-group birding tours to deepen your appreciation of nature and bird conservation locally and farther afield. Limited spaces remain in the following trips:

- Montana and Yellowstone: Where the Mountains Meet the Plains (June 1 to 8, 2024, with optional extension June 8 to 10)
- Nebraska in Spring: Platte River Cranes and Prairie Chickens (March 10 to 15, 2025)
- Cuba: Unbeatable History and Diversity (April 5 to 16, 2025)
- Southwestern Spain’s Best Bird Sanctuaries: Extremadura, Coto Donana, and Tarifa (April 7 to 17, 2025)

Additional trips will be announced this summer. Learn more and register at <https://www.birdsgeorgia.org/travel.html>

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Birds Georgia's Travel Program offers small-group travel with knowledgeable guides to exciting regional, domestic, and international locations. Special care is taken to develop custom itineraries for each tour that will appeal to all levels of bird and nature enthusiasts.

TRIPS WITH OPENINGS

- **Montana and Yellowstone: Where the Mountains Meet the Plains** (June 1 to 8, 2024, with optional extension June 8 to 10)
- **Nebraska in Spring: Platte River Cranes and Prairie Chickens** (March 10 to 15, 2025)
- **Cuba: Unbeatable History and Diversity** (April 5 to 16, 2025)
- **Southwestern Spain's Best Bird Sanctuaries: Extremadura, Coto Donana, and Tarifa** (April 7 to 17, 2025)

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Bird Beyond *(Continued from Page 1)*

To date, Bird Beyond has allowed us to successfully identify new communities and connect with new community partners who can assist us in our mission of introducing more individuals to the wonders of bird watching. By forging partnerships with refugee groups and mental health facilities, Birds Georgia is able to leverage bird watching as a powerful tool to introduce new perspectives on the outdoors.

Here are just a few examples of recent community engagement projects:

- One of the areas identified through Bird Beyond was the English Avenue Community on Atlanta's Westside. For the past several years, our community engagement team has been partnering with St. Mark's AME Landmark Church and Beloved Community Inc., a local community partner already working in the area, to listen and understand the community's needs and desires better and offer targeted educational and engagement programs. We learned that the community has a need for informational workshops on various topics, including invasive plant management/weed control, best planting/maintenance practices, and wildlife management for public spaces, and we've been working with our conservation team to deliver this programming. Plans are underway to refurbish and repurpose some local greenspaces. To date, we have also conducted similar outreach using Bird Beyond at Adams Park and the surrounding Cascade Heights community.
- Through an innovative partnership with Skyland Trail, our community engagement team has brought the benefits of outdoor recreation and birdwatching to the mental health sphere through programs or events. Located in Atlanta, Skyland Trail is a nonprofit residential mental health treatment organization for adults and adolescents. We are partnering with Skyland Trail to host field trips for clients and patrons who would benefit from outdoor leisure and education, providing them with tools to benefit their overall physical and mental health by enjoying the outdoors. With a focus on using birding as a tool for success, we strive to make birds and nature more accessible to all Georgia individuals and communities.
- In early April, Birds Georgia staff, along with some dedicated volunteers, gathered at Heather's House, a residential facility in southwest Atlanta, run by the Heather Ivy Society, for women living with HIV. The team installed a beautiful pollinator garden at the home, planting a variety of native plants, like mountain mint, lyreleaf sage, spotted beebalm, and butterfly weed, that will attract the native insects on which birds feed. Set in a beautiful, wooded yard, the Heather Ivy Society plans to add benches so that residents have a tranquil space to relax, decompress, and enjoy the flowers, pollinators, and the many bird species that visit this area.
- For the past several years, the community engagement team has been working with the Refugee Women's Network, leading birding hikes and education events for refugee and immigrant families who have resettled in Georgia. Many of these women developed a love of birds in their countries of origin and are thrilled to learn more about



*Introducing birds and birding to diverse populations, like this group at Morehouse College, is a priority of Birds Georgia's community engagement work.
Photo by Kiana Leveritte.*

the birds here in Georgia. Introducing them to the joy of birds and spending time in nature provides mental health benefits for these women, many of whom are survivors of war, conflict, and displacement.

- Another key initiative involves empowering youth stakeholders to lead community projects through our Teen Trips Program, fostering environmental stewardship and engagement among younger generations. By investing in these projects, we are working to create lasting impact within communities and ensure that future generations are equipped to care for their local environment.

"It has been truly heartwarming to witness the therapeutic and adaptive benefits that peaceful recreation in our natural spaces can have on rehabilitation and acclimation to new environments," says Sheridan Alford, director of community engagement. "Through these initiatives, Birds Georgia continues to expand its reach and impact, ensuring that bird watching remains accessible and inclusive to all members of our community."

In the years to come, Birds Georgia will seek to expand our reach and deepen our impact through community engagement programming, including expanding Bird Beyond, across the state to make greenspace and wildlife more accessible for all Georgians with particular emphasis on historically marginalized communities. Our goal is to inspire



*Barn Swallow mother feeding her offspring.
Photo by Phillip Yabut.*

environmental stewardship, foster community connections, and empower individuals to become advocates for healthy greenspaces in their own neighborhoods.

Community Science: Help Birds Georgia Survey for Chuck-will's-widows This Summer

By Sarah Tolve Manning, Coastal Conservation Coordinator

Georgia's birds face a number of challenges, ranging from habitat loss and degradation, collisions with structures, pesticide use, climate change, and more. Some of the most unique and awe-inspiring birds in Georgia facing these threats are the nightjars. There are three species of nightjars in Georgia: the Chuck-will's-widow, or "Chucks," Eastern Whip-poor-will, and the Common Nighthawk. While all three of these species are worthy of conservation action and increased engagement, Birds Georgia has chosen the Chuck-will's-widow as our focal species for 2023 to 2025.

Camouflaged and Crepuscular

A bird that is heard far more often than seen, the Chuck-will's-widow sings out its name across the Georgia landscape on late spring and summer nights, just after dusk and on bright moonlit nights. Very little is known about this elusive, nocturnal species, in part because they are notoriously difficult to locate. Their mottled brown plumage provides perfect camouflage as they roost during daylight hours among dried leaves and tree branches. Despite their range being widespread across the state, little is known about what attracts them to various habitats.

Over the next few years, Birds Georgia, in collaboration with multiple partners, hopes to help fill in some of the gaps about this species and create more suitable habitat to help these birds thrive. We will accomplish this by investing resources and expertise into restoring native habitat, assisting with Chuck-will's-widow focused research projects, and engaging the public in order to gain a better understanding of statewide population numbers and migratory behavior.

Surveying, Simplified

Birds Georgia is encouraging participation in the Nightjar Survey Network program run jointly by the Center for Conservation Biology and the Maine Natural History Observatory as part of the emerging Global Nightjar Knowledge Network. While it is already a robust nationwide program, there is currently little data being reported across Georgia. We are also partnering with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the University of Georgia to ensure routes done across Georgia are scientifically and statistically sound. By participating in this project, you're ensuring the future of our secretive summer singers across the state.

We are recruiting volunteers to conduct survey routes with

the Nightjar Survey Network. These routes are conducted alongside roads by a personal vehicle with a partner and involve point counts. Point-count surveys are when an observer counts all birds detected by sight and sound while stationary at a location during a specified amount of time. During the survey, you count the total number of nightjars seen or heard over a six-minute period, then continue to your next point, in one-mile intervals. Luckily, nightjar calls are quite distinct and easy to recognize.

When: Routes should be conducted on clear, full-moon nights during one of the following windows in 2024: April 15–May 1, May 15–May 30, or June 13–June 28. For additional information or to sign up, please contact Sarah Tolve at sarah.tolve@birdsgeorgia.org. Learn more about our nightjar project on our website at www.birdsgeorgia.org/chuck-wills-widow.



Chuck-will's-widow. Photo by Dan Vickers.

Reporting Incidental Sightings Is Valuable, Too

Can't quite find the time to commit to a formal survey but want to help? Do you occasionally encounter Chuck-will's-widow or one of the other nightjar species? You can still contribute valuable data on their abundance and distribution by adding your sightings of chucks and other birds to eBird.

eBird Volunteers

If you are an eBird user, we would appreciate any effort you can put toward detecting Chuck-will's-widows and related species. Plan to begin approximately 20 minutes after sunset and listen for the species' distinctive calls. Birds generally begin calling about 30 minutes after sunset and continue until it gets too dark to see their prey but occasionally call throughout the entire night.

When you begin your effort, be sure to start a new checklist and note the date, time, and location so that your sightings can be complete. Traveling, stationary, and incidental checklists are all valuable, as is noting any and all species seen or heard. If you hear any nightjars and feel comfortable doing so, adding an audio recording to your list would provide extra value.

During the breeding season, Chuck-wills-widows tend to favor open areas with sandy soils, open pine forest, oak woodlands, and the edges of swamps. However, we lack robust data on this, and they could be just about anywhere. You never know what you may find until you get out to look and listen!

Birds Georgia Receives Grant for Habitat Restoration Along Chattahoochee River

Birds Georgia was recently awarded a Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grant from the Georgia Ornithological Society (GOS) for a habitat restoration project that will restore riparian meadows and wildlife corridors along the Chattahoochee River. The restoration project will focus on restoring early successional habitat at the Cochran Shoals Unit of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (CRNRA).

“We’re excited to receive this generous grant from GOS to restore bird-friendly habitat at Cochran Shoals CRNRA,” says Adam Betuel, director of conservation for Birds Georgia. “The Cochran Shoals Unit is a popular birding spot because it includes a mix of microhabitats, including riparian meadow, riparian woodland, and beaver-maintained wetland making it possible to see a wide array of birds throughout the year, but particularly during spring and fall migratory periods.”

Part of the project will focus on restoring the “sparrow field,” a roughly seven-acre portion of the area that is known to host an array of sparrows, including notable species such as Grasshopper Sparrow, Henslow’s Sparrow, Clay-colored sparrow, and LeConte’s Sparrow, among the more regular suite of species like Song Sparrows and Chipping Sparrows. Henslow’s and Grasshopper Sparrow are both listed as High Priority Species on Georgia’s State Wildlife Action Plan.

“As part of the grant-funded work, Birds Georgia will not only restore some of the sparrow field, but also improve its ecological value by removing non-native species and introducing a greater diversity of native plants that would help beneficial pollinating insects including species like the endangered monarch butterfly,” says Adam Betuel, director of conservation for Birds Georgia.

In recent decades, many birds that rely on open and early-successional habitats have seen a decline in population due to habitat loss, pesticide use, and a variety of other factors. Grassland birds in particular have seen a decrease in population by about 53% since 1970 according to a 2019 study (<https://www.3billionbirds.org/findings>) conducted by

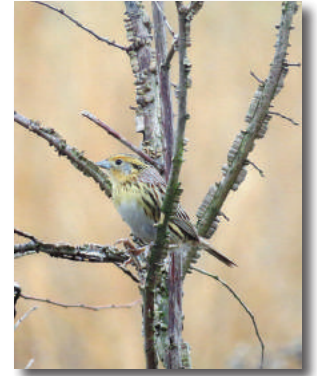
the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and other partners.

In collaboration with the National Parks Service at CRNRA and the Chattahoochee National Park Conservancy, Birds Georgia will improve and restore a minimum of 16.5 acres of bird-friendly habitat at the Cochran Shoals Unit of CRNRA, including the “sparrow field.” The remaining acreage will be treated for invasive plant species and opened up where possible to support early successional habitat acting as a buffer to protect the meadow space from problematic plant species. Birds Georgia’s Habitat Team and volunteers will remove non-native invasive plant species and knock back undesirable woody species, install new native vegetation, and promote the spread of currently existing native vegetation.

In the future, Birds Georgia will be seeking grant funding to create a wildlife corridor connecting the historic “sparrow field” to a site that is being opened up and restored into more grassland habitat for the introduction of a federally endangered plant species. This will be done in partnership with the National Park Service, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Power, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other organizations.

Birds that will benefit from this improved habitat include Indigo Bunting, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and overwintering sparrows, as well as other resident and migratory birds who utilize riparian meadow and woodland habitat.

“In addition to the on-the-ground conservation work, Birds Georgia will engage, activate, and educate the public to understand Chattahoochee watershed concerns through community conservation work days, community science initiatives, and seasonal field trips,” says Betuel. “The Cochran Shoals Unit is one of the most birded locations in metro Atlanta (as evidenced by the more than 200 bird species and more than 4,500 check lists submitted via eBird at this location) and is an ideal candidate for additional education and engagement.”



Lincoln's Sparrow.
Photo by Adam Betuel.



Grasshopper Sparrow.
Photo by Adam Betuel.

Woo Hoot! Make a Gift to the Annual Fund

Georgia’s birds face unprecedented challenges. Habitat loss, pollution, and other human-caused threats are putting birds’ survival at risk. That’s where you come in. By supporting Birds Georgia’s Annual Fund, you help fund essential education, conservation, and community engagement programs that are working tirelessly to protect Georgia’s bird populations. Whether it’s providing educational resources to schools, restoring crucial habitats, or advocating for protection policies, every gift you give helps ensure a brighter future for Georgia’s birds. Make a gift today at www.birdsgeorgia.org/donate.



Eastern Screech Owl.
Photo by Mary Kimberly.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY

Field Trip: Legacy Park – Beginner-focused | Leader: Josh Jackson
Sunday, May 5, at 8:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Field Trip: Reynolds Nature Preserve | Leader: Anne McCallum
Wednesday, May 8, at 8:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips

Volunteer Workday: Island Ford Unit of Chattahoochee River NRA
Monday, May 13, at 9:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit <https://www.birdsgeorgia.org/volunteer.html>

Field Trip: Murphey Candler Park | Leader: Kevin O'Toole
Saturday, May 18, at 8:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Field Trip: Ivy Creek Greenway at George Pierce Park | Leader: Terry Miller
Sunday, May 19, at 8:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Early Birds Book Club
Sunday, May 26, at 2:00 PM
Via Zoom Meeting

The Early Birds Book Club welcomes all who enjoy reading about birds, birding, and birders. We are a “no commitment” book club – some folks join us every time and others occasionally. The Early Birds will meet virtually via Zoom for the May Meeting. The group will be reading *The Comfort of Crows*, by Margaret Renki. Learn more or sign up today at <https://www.birdsgeorgia.org/early-birds-book-club.html>



Volunteers assist with planting a pollinator garden at Heather's House in southwest Atlanta. Photo by Dottie Head.

JUNE

Field Trip: Dunwoody Nature Center | Leader: Shannon Fair
Saturday, June 1, at 8:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Field Trip: Legacy Park – Beginner-focused | Leader: Josh Jackson
Sunday, June 9, at 8:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Field Trip: Reynolds Nature Preserve | Leader: Anne McCallum
Wednesday, June 12, at 8:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips

Early Birds Book Club
Sunday, June 23, at 2:00 PM
In person at Manuel's Tavern

The Early Birds Book Club welcomes all who enjoy reading about birds, birding, and birders. We are a “no commitment” book club – some folks join us every time and others occasionally. The Early Birds will in person at Manuel's Tavern prior to the Birds Georgia June Meeting at Manuel's. The group will be reading *Ten Birds that Changed the World*, by Stephen Moss. Learn more at <https://www.birdsgeorgia.org/early-birds-book-club.html>



Blue Grosbeak. Photo by Fi Rust, Audubon Photography Awards.

JULY

Field Trip: Legacy Park – Beginner-focused | Leader: Josh Jackson
Sunday, July 7, at 8:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Field Trip: Reynolds Nature Preserve | Leader: Anne McCallum
Wednesday, July 10, at 8:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips

Field Trip: Morgan Falls Overlook Park | Leader: Roseanne Guerra
Saturday, July 20, at 8:00 AM

To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.



Black and White Warbler. Photo by Philip Yabut.

Wingbars

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Conservation through the Lens: The journey of a wandering nature photographer, with Josiah Patrick

Sunday, June 23, 2024 | 3:30 PM
Manuel's Tavern

Free to attend, but registration is requested at www.birdsgeorgia.org/birds-georgia-at-manuels-tavern

Join bird and nature photographer Josiah Patrick for a discussion of the lessons he has learned about the power of community level conservation and the majestic species found throughout his journey birding and shooting in North and Central America and in his home country of Trinidad and Tobago. Josiah will share a variety of images of the stunning fauna and flora found during his travels, to highlight the importance of habitat, conservation, and community in its preservation.

Josiah Patrick is a nature photographer, school counselor, and budding naturalist. Josiah has always felt a unique connection to nature. His journey as a first-generation immigrant led to him to search for a place that felt like home in a space that often felt unfamiliar. This eventually led to long walks in the woods surrounded by strange, beautiful noises and creatures that recalled distant memories of home. After receiving a camera, he was able to explore an even closer inspection of the beautiful fauna and flora that inhabited these spaces. Inspired to aid in its preservation. Josiah uses his photography to help share a love and deeper understanding of the bird and animal species seen during his journey to natural spaces around the world. He aims to offer a colorful perspective about his journey and hopes to inspire others to do small acts of conservation within their own communities.



Josiah Patrick will share his photography at the June Meeting at Manuel's.