



Georgia Important Bird Area Coordinator's Report

February, 2009

General:

The Rusty Blackbird (RUBL) Blitz went well with many reports issued from Georgia. Prior to the blitz I combed the GABO archives for a 4-month period and sent all RUBL sightings to the researchers. Perhaps most important was the way this species was really placed more firmly in the front of most birders' minds.

I finished requirements to obtain my "red card" so that I can help with both wildfires and prescribed fires. On Tuesday, February 24 I helped DNR and Nature Conservancy with a prescribed burn in the sand hills region of Taylor County. I have firm plans for 2 burns and tentative plans for others in March.

I attended the Eastern Initiative meeting on Jekyll Island January 11-13. I Met lots of Audubon scientists and policy makers, as well as two people who oversee grants. I learned about and was encouraged to apply for a grant for volunteer conservation projects. My attendance was made possible by the work of JIA's Christa Frangiamore, who encouraged the host hotel to donate my stay. My update on the Georgia IBA program was well received.

I toured Lake Seminole WMA, Lake Seminole State Park and Silver Lake WMA via kayak, foot and vehicle. I Talked with Bryan Gray, who is the manager of the state park. He asked for some assistance compiling a park checklist and asked me to encourage birders to report sightings. He is eager to work with the IBA program. On our way out we left him with a list of birds we observed. While at Silver Lake WMA we found a dead Double-crested Cormorant, which was banded. I removed the band and reported it when we arrived home. It was banded June 25, 2001 in Ontario. Sadly, we noted 2 other dead cormorants, which were both hanging from fishing tackle.

I met with both LuAnn Craighton and Season Platt of Callaway Gardens during a recent trip there. We discussed past, present and future (both planned and hoped-for) management of both the 10,000 acre "preserve" section and the more heavily developed section. We agreed to work more closely together in the future, with both clear and more generalized ideas discussed. I will likely provide a banding demo for their education program in the next year, and we are working ways for them to get me more data from their work.

Website We have a new, simpler URL: <http://www.atlantaudubon.org/iba/>

Global IBAs: I am now collecting data for the possible nomination of Swamp of Toa, Fort Benning and Little Tybee as Global IBAs.

Fundraising & Donations:

Tellabs Foundation declined to fund us, citing their lack of a strong presence in our area.

Please remember to use www.goodsearch.com and www.goodshop.com. When you sign up, choose Audubon Atlanta, and all proceeds will go to the IBA program. I could not sign up as "Georgia IBA" because the name had to match the 501(c)(3) number which they require.

I submitted a proposal to [AGL Private Foundation](#).

I submitted an application for a Volunteer Day grant from Together Green. Chuck Remington "strongly encouraged" me to apply after he saw my presentation to the NAS Eastern Initiative meeting on Jekyll, which included a few slides about our grass seed collection day.

I submitted an application for a [GOS Opportunity Fund grant](#), prior to the March deadline.

Programs:

I presented on Burrowing Owl research to Atlanta Audubon on February 22.

I gave a "Birds of Prey" presentation to 100 pre-k students at Lamar Primary School on February 25, 2009

I will give my Burrowing Owl presentation to Columbus Audubon on March 5.

I will give my "Sparrow identification" presentation to Oconee Rivers Audubon on April 2.

As part of the Southern Company's Stewardship Partners Meeting in Gulfport Mississippi, I will give a short overview of the grassland restoration work at Joe Kurz on April 15-16.

I am interested in speaking with any group that is interested in birds. Feel free to send me contacts, or give my information to groups that may want me to present to them. I have several programs on bird banding, dragonflies, citizen science, IBA, burrowing owls, and sparrow id. I do not charge a fee, but happily accept donations to the IBA program, and also request permission to put out a donation box.

Conservation Issues

There has been yet another delay in the meeting to discuss possible management for Golden-winged Warblers in Chattahoochee National Forest. This meeting, initially scheduled for February 18, was originally requested by some trail groups, which are very vocally opposed to the management. Recall that I instigated a number of letters and emails in support of the management just prior to a deadline for comments. The Southern Environmental Law Center

has been hired to fight the management for this sharply declining species. They are trying to prevent “too many bird people” from attending this meeting, so it is possible my invitation will be rescinded. While the comment period is over, I encourage all experts to continue to express their opinions regarding this work. The opposing groups continue to have some incorrect information on their websites regarding the age and quality of the forest, the status of Golden-winged Warbler, etc. I am concerned that the delays may be part of the plan to delay any management until it is too late to do anything to benefit birds in 2009.

Phinizy Swamp vegetation removal: Several people brought to my attention some serious vegetation removal, demanded by the FAA, due to the belief that large numbers of blackbirds would endanger aircraft at a local airport. After the near disaster caused by a bird strike in New York, I decided to lay low on this issue. I talked to Lois Stacey on the phone. She shared with me that vegetation was not actually removed. Rather, the dead stalks from last year were blown over with the use of airboats. The primary plants are cattails, cutgrass and bulrush. These plants are all likely to come back next year, so this management should not have a long-term effect on breeding birds. Lois stated that numbers of waterfowl and wading birds appear to be up, while Rusty Blackbirds remain the same. Red-winged Blackbirds seem to still be in the area, but not in the immediate location. Lois’ primary concern was that numbers of rails are substantially lower (recent CBCs reported ~300 Sora, while there were 8 this year). However, she tempered her concern by informing me that prior to the opening of the 12 cells of the treatment facility, there were few or no rails here. It is possible that rails spread into this new habitat upon the opening of the facility, and have now gone back to more traditional locations. Lois will give me a tour of the area on April 5.

Volunteer events

Bird Island: We have officially planned **Sunday, March 15** (this is different from the tentative date) as the day to remove invasive woody plants from this new shorebird nesting/roosting area in the river off Brunswick. I have received a great deal of interest in this project.

Privet eradication at Joe Kurz: On **Saturday, April 18** we will wage war with privet from 1pm until we are tired. This will occur at my study site, which was burned at the end of January. We will focus on several shrub islands as well as at the southwest corner of the field, which is starting to be invaded by both native and non-native woody plants.

Cane Restoration at Joe Kurz: I am working with Tim Keyes for a potential project to plant some cane which will be salvaged from future construction efforts elsewhere.

IBA Graduate Assistantship: Jonathan has received some funding from GOS to help with the radiotelemetry work.

IBA COMMITTEE:

Giff Beaton
Ken Blankenship
Mike Chapman
Bob Cooper
Jim Flynn
Jim Gilreath
Noel Holcomb

Myra Hundley
Chuck Hunter
Nathan Klaus
Vanessa Lane
Priscilla Marshall
Charlie Muise
Debbie Sue Mumford

Bob Sargent
Georgann Schmalz
Lois Stacey
Steve Wagner
Jim Wilson
Brad Winn