



Georgia Important Bird Area Coordinator's Report

July, 2009

General:

Lots of good news this month...

The big news is that US Fish and Wildlife Service has declared Jeopardy on the proposed Fort Benning expansion! This appears to be great news for Red-cockaded Woodpecker, an endangered plant, and some prime longleaf pine habitat. More information, including the entire FWS report can be found at <http://www.benning.army.mil/EMD/program/legal/index.htm#17>

More good news: The US Forest Service has given the green light on 2 different projects for which we have provided written and verbal support: the Golden-winged Warbler work at Brawley Mountain, and the open pine/oak woodland restoration work at Watergauge Road in the Chattooga District of Chattahoochee NF.

Articles about the success with Cerulean Warbler work in Chattahoochee NF have been sent to GOS (by Nathan Klaus) and to Georgia's 8 Audubon Societies (by myself).

I had a great phone conversation with Carolyn Johnson of Piedmont NWR, regarding the IBA program giving them more support. Last year we helped with their CBC, allowing them to have 3 field groups, rather than the 2 they have had in recent years. Carolyn says that was extremely helpful. I pledged to try to drum up similar support this year. I also offered to try to get a few people to assist with quail covey counts at the end of October/beginning of November this year. But the big topic was our Volunteer Conservation Day event which will be on **Saturday, September 26**. The primary work will be around RCW cavity trees. Read below for the details. I would love for each of you to attend a Volunteer Conservation Day this year.

Monitoring:

I spent Tuesday, July 28 at Oconee National Forest, helping with vegetation work on cane plots. Nathan Klaus and Tim Keyes put together Over 40 of these plots a number of years ago. They are divided into several management techniques to see which would best help species such as Swainson's Warbler. Our measurements included "belt transect" stem counts of cane, canopy density, ground-level density, etc. It appears that fire can cause a lot of harm in these lowland cane plots. One which has not been burned in a decade was in wonderful shape, and we even found the nest of a golden mouse. Even in the burned plots there was a good

difference between those with treatment and those which were controls, indicating the efficacy of the work.

Please check out this interesting article about the MAPS program and the importance of coordinating different monitoring regimes. <http://www.birdpop.org/pubs/JWM2008.htm>. The article also touches upon MAPS' ability to help determine the cause of species' declines with more detail.

Habitat Management:

Nathan Klaus and I sprayed more Bermuda Grass and Johnson Grass at Joe Kurz on the 17th. The primary study field had a lot to spray, but is coming along, and seed was sown that same day – the tractor with drill was actually following us around the field, planting a section after we sprayed it. All of the scrub islands we planned to remove are now gone. The large area of wisteria immediately to the south of the field is also looking great. There is a HUGE pile of dead invasive woody plants in the center of the new field, which I believe Fred plans to burn in the fall. As expected, bird banding and observation numbers and diversity within the field have dropped off since work began in earnest this spring, but I expect a modest rebound in 2010, and a bigger one in 2011. I can't wait for the day when we get a return of Eastern Meadowlarks or Grasshopper Sparrows.

Unfortunately, the other treatment field at Joe Kurz is looking a lot worse. There is a lot more Bermuda, and we were not able to check it out until after seed had already been sown by a WMA volunteer (the area manager is now in charge of Sprewell Bluff State Park, and therefore is on Joe Kurz even less – yet another negative aspect of the decision to close Sprewell Bluff). Because the seed had already been planted, we could not spray that field. So we can only hope that the natives outpace the invasives, or we'll need to start anew in that field.

A very exciting news item is that Barn Owls have been heard in our study field each of the last 2 banding days! We hope they will find and occupy the box we hung this winter.

Fundraising & Donations:

Big thanks to Georgann Schmaltz, who recently donated 4 mist nets and 2 banding pliers to our program! This helps our monitoring efforts tremendously.

We have received the first disbursement of funds from the TogetherGreen grant.

Catharine Kuchar of AAS and I have completed a joint grant application from Sprint. The IBA portion would be a match to the NFWF grant.

Please encourage friends and family to use www.goodsearch.com and www.goodshop.com. When you sign up, choose Audubon Society – Atlanta. For each use they will make a donation to the IBA program. I could not sign up as “Georgia IBA” because the name had to match the 501(c)(3) number. So far we have had very low participation in this free fundraiser, and have earned just \$6.19 as of June 12.

Nominations:

To my knowledge, people are still working on 2 nominations. One is for Sandy Creek Nature Center, Sandy Creek Park and the trail connecting them, all in Clarke County. The other is for Oconee WMA and Rock Hawk. If you would like more information on either of these, I would be happy to put you in touch with the people doing the work.

Programs and articles:

I spoke to an environmental science class at the Ellijay Campus of Dalton State College on July 15. We went over the IBA program and various types of citizen science such as eBird, CBCs, BBS routes, etc. The professor, Lynda Jenkins, made her students responsible for all information I gave them for their exams.

I will conduct 2 educational banding demonstrations in upcoming months; Saturday, November 14 at Callaway Gardens, and another on an as-yet undetermined date in Chattahoochee National Forest.

I have been asked to help with Atlanta Audubon's Master Birder classes. I will be leading 3 components, plus a field day in October.

I have also been asked to run a 2-day sparrow workshop in November or December. I'll lead one evening in the classroom and one day in the field.

I will speak to Ogeechee Audubon (Savannah) Society on September 15.

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 "canned" programs including bird banding, dragonflies, citizen science, burrowing owls, and sparrow id. I could also give a program specifically about the IBA program, but most groups would likely prefer a different program, with a 10-minute intro to the IBA program at the end. I do not charge a fee, but happily accept donations to the IBA program, and also request permission to put out a donation box.

My recent article concerning the USFS decision to go ahead with GWWA management was sent out with the Ocmulgee Audubon newsletter.

Conservation Issues

See the good news in my notes at the top.

I recently signed the letter below. You may want to do so as well: "This scientist sign-on letter urges Quebec's premier to hold to his pledge to protect 50% of Quebec's Boreal--an area amounting to 130+ million acres that would be made off limits to industrial development.

If interested in signing, you can go to: <http://interboreal.org/scientifiquesQC/index.php?lng=eng>

And if you were able to forward to colleagues that would be a great help as well of course."

Jeff Wells
Senior Scientist
International Boreal Conservation Campaign/Boreal Songbird Initiative
www.interboreal.org
www.borealbirds.org

Volunteer events

Marking and painting RCW cavity trees at Piedmont NWR: We will meet at NWR headquarters at 9am on Saturday, September 26, which is

Woody plant removal: We will work on "Bird Island" off the coast of Brunswick on September 12, with a backup day of the 13th.

IBA COMMITTEE:

Giff Beaton
Ken Blankenship
Mike Chapman
Bob Cooper, University of Georgia
Jim Flynn, Atlanta Audubon Society and GOS
Jim Gilreath, Ocmulgee (Macon) Audubon Society
Noel Holcomb, Former DNR Commissioner
Myra Hundley, Albany Audubon Society
Chuck Hunter, US Fish and Wildlife Service, NABCI
Nathan Klaus, Georgia DNR Senior Biologist
Vanessa Lane, Oconee River (Athens) Audubon Society
Priscilla Marshall, Columbus Audubon Society
Charlie Muise, Georgia IBA Coordinator
Debbie Sue Mumford, Coastal Georgia Audubon
Bob Sargent, GOS President
Georgann Schmalz, Birding Adventures
Lois Stacey, Augusta-Aiken Audubon
Steve Wagner, Ogeechee Audubon
Jim Wentworth, US Forestry Service
Jim Wilson
Brad Winn, Georgia DNR