



Georgia Important Bird Area Coordinator's Report

November - December, 2009

General:

Please forgive the missed November report. With all my travelling, I simply was unable to provide a good report. This will cover November and December, 2009.

I attended the annual meeting of the American Oystercatcher Working Group in Oyster, Virginia November 9 – 10. Among the topics discussed were ways different states deal with “sharing the beach” issues; ways to deal with the limited number of alpha/numeric codes when only 2 spaces are available; how do use band observations that come from the general public; ways to better share data, and the role of the new coordinator. As with last year, I came away with an improved understanding of the issues involved in conserving this species. The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network has released a new Conservation Plan for AMOY, which can be found at <http://www.whsrn.org/conservation-plans> Members of the AMOY WG played a major role in this, and our own Brad Winn was cited in several places.

For the last 6 weeks I've been “talking them up” the Christmas Bird Count season, including a post to GABO. I have helped with counts at the following IBAs: St. Catherine's Island, Rum Creek and Piedmont NWR, Carter's Lake and Harris Neck NWR. I plan to help at Eufaula on January 2nd. GOS has a list of CBCs and dates at <http://www.gos.org/cbc/cbc.html> I hope every one of you helped with at least one count.

For the Rum Creek/Piedmont NWR and Carter's Lake counts I opened my Saw-whet Owl nets. While we caught no owls, we did record 2 owl species and also American Woodcock on the Carter's Lake Count. The fact that we had nets open also generated some interest.

Now that the year is over, I have entered all my bird banding data into the database and proofed it, and am in the process of analyzing the Joe Kurz WMA data to see what we can learn. I plan to submit the analysis to GOS for publication in the GOSHawk this year. After next year I should have enough data to publish in the Oriole. Information on both periodicals can be found at <http://www.gos.org/publications/publications.html>

I've received more training for my prescribed fire work, courtesy of Georgia DNR and the Prescribed Fire Council. On December 4 I took part in an 8-hour off-road vehicle class at Hard Labor Creek State Park. On the 10th and 11th I took the 16-hour chainsaw class at Fort Benning. These classes could have cost a lot of money, but because of my involvement in ecological prescribed fires last year, the classes were provided at no cost, and even included lodging. I

plan to help in 6 to 10 fires in 2010, starting with the “sandhills fire week” the 2nd week of February.

Monitoring:

It is time to plan for **Christmas Bird Count** (CBC) season. I’ve started “talking them up” including a post to GABO. I plan to help with several CBCs this year, and encourage as many participants as possible. GOS has a list of CBCs and dates at <http://www.gos.org/cbc/cbc.html> I hope every one of you will help with at least one count. I’ll be counting at 4 different IBAs.

There will be another **Rusty Blackbird Blitz** January 30 – February 15. Pierre Howard and Nathan Farnau will do much of Georgia’s organizing. Please contact them to help. h_pierre@BELLSOUTH.NET and natwan@HOTMAIL.COM

I will participate in the annual winter shorebird count on Friday, February 5. I told organizer Russ Wigh that I’d be happy to count on any IBA, and that I’d be happy to assist in recruiting more observers, if he wishes.

There are tentative plans for a May survey of Wilson’s Plover and American Oystercatcher along the entire GA coast.

We are catching a LOT more birds at Joe Kurz, now that management changes are under way. On November 6, 20 and 29, we captured 55, 98 and 126 birds, respectively. Compare this to October, November and December of 2008, when we never caught more than 25 birds in a day, using the same nets in the same locations at the same time of day, in similar weather. Of great interest is the presence of Vesper Sparrows each of the last 3 banding sessions – a species we never saw, heard or caught last fall or winter. And while we have caught a handful of Savannah Sparrows in the past, that has been the 2nd most-caught species each of the last 4 banding sessions. In 2 recent banding sessions we caught more of this species than we collectively did in all of fall and winter, 2008. While we have a long way to go, the changes in bird species and number are very heartening.

I will help Nathan Klaus with radio telemetry of Loggerhead Shrikes this breeding season. We can use some help. He can also use help for a similar project with American Kestrel.

I’m still seeking someone to count Bachman’s Sparrows at Swamp of Toa this spring. Let me know if you’re available or know someone who is.

Habitat Management:

The grass seed collection at Pickett’s Mill went well on November 7, attracting 21 volunteers. This was the first attempt to collect native plant seeds at this location, and the stock is spread fairly wide, so we were very happy with the several pounds of seed collected. Some seed will be used at Sweetwater State Park, while the rest will be raised into plugs, along with the seed we collected other days. While we doubled our effort over last year with 4 collections in as many counties, we had no problem recruiting adequate help. This demonstrates a nice public interest in conserving Georgia’s grasslands.

We installed a Barn Owl box at Joe Kurz WMA. Thanks to Mark Freeman for donating it. It is right across from the deer check station, so hopefully refuge manager Fred Granitz will have the opportunity to see some owls soon! So far there has been no use of the first one we installed. We may need to move it higher up the tree.

Fundraising & Donations:

I finished a grant application to GOS for work at Altamaha WMA and Joe Kurz WMA. It would also cover our grass seed collection work. Much of the grant was inspired by conversation over the GABO listserv regarding the perceptions some birders have of the management at Altamaha. I spoke at length with several members of DNR and some birders, and developed a plan based on those conversations. If funded, we will assist DNR to replace 2 failing water control devices, and recover a trail to give access to 3 impoundments on Champney Island. It sounds like there is a good deal of interest in volunteering for these projects. Coastal Georgia Audubon has signed on with us and sent a letter of recommendation to GOS.

I would like to add a PayPal button to the IBA website so people can make contributions. Donna Wensink is giving us some advice on that, and Jim Flynn will handle the technological aspect.

Thanks to Ted Theus for a generous donation.

I donated the mileage used to attend the AMOY Working Group meeting back to the IBA program.

We received a small check from Goodsearch.com. I use them as my primary search engine and it works great. Judging from the monthly numbers I may be the only person who uses them. I would greatly appreciate YOU trying it out to help the IBA program.

To make a tax-deductible donation to the IBA program, send a check to my address, made out to "AAS" with "IBA" in the subject line.

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.

Programs:

I taught 3 classes and led a field day for Atlanta Audubon Society's Master Bird Class. The 20 participants were a pleasure to spend time with and had many good questions about bird anatomy, behavior and conservation. These graduates are now obligated to volunteer on bird monitoring and conservation projects. Some have asked to have their name put on the IBA volunteer list, while others inquired about specific projects.

- My presentation to Oconee Rivers Audubon on December 3 was very well received.

- I ran a 2-day sparrow workshop, consisting of an evening in the classroom on December 5th and a day in the field on December 12th. The classroom went well, but poor weather scared

folks away from the field day. If I am invited to do this again next year I will suggest going earlier in the year – some participants also seemed a bit squeezed by the holiday season.

- I will teach the “bird watching” component of the Master Naturalist class at Chattahoochee Nature Center on February 4. On a related note, I am also taking the Master Naturalist class, which meets monthly. I will not be presenting to my own class.

- I will present again to Southern Wings on February 8.

-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 including bird banding, dragonflies, citizen science, 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.

Volunteer Conservation Days

The Together Green folks were very appreciative of the fine article Charles Seabrook wrote in the AJC about the grass seed collection at Panola Mountain State park. In all, the 4 grass seed collection days were attended by 55 people, who dedicated 204 hours into collecting over 35 pounds of seed! Thanks to all the awesome volunteers, particularly Ashley Harrington, Eddie Hatchett, Phil Delestrez and Elaine Nash. That article and a local one are below.

<http://www.barnesville.com/archives/1503-Opportunities-now-available-for-nature-preservation.html>

http://www.ajc.com/lifestyle/sparrows-make-return-trip-193740.html?cxtype=rss_news_128746

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