



## Georgia Important Bird Area Coordinator's Report

*April 2010*

### **General:**

The IBA collection of the GOS journal the Oriole continues to grow. We have all issues dating back to June, 1981, and most of those back to March 1976. We would love to obtain older copies. Thanks to the generosity of donors, we have multiple copies of many issues. I have sent several of them to GOS to fill gaps in their collections. I would like to make these available to the various Georgia Audubon Societies and other ornithology-related groups in the state.

We had a great weekend for Altamaha WMA. On Friday the 9<sup>th</sup> I led a roundtable meeting of Altamaha stakeholders. Many good ideas were shared, we jointly compiled a list of potential threats to the habitat, and we were given updates by both WMA managers and the city of Darien, which is working to increase eco tourism. On Saturday the 10<sup>th</sup> I led a group of volunteers in clearing a neglected trail around some impoundments. That we were planning to come inspired management to get the bush hog out there the day before our arrival. With that big work out of the way, we were able to clear a lot of the trail. While I was in the area, I gave a site/birding tour for a YBC team. The Darien News printed a nice story and printed a picture I took of volunteers working hard.

Thanks to the combination of nice weather and spring migration, April is perhaps the peak birding month in Georgia. So it's no surprise that there are many fun events across the state. I was able to help with two of them this year.

I was happy to help with the Youth Birding Competition (YBC), which was a tremendous success once again. Despite periodic rain throughout the state, over 130 kids had a great time, learned a lot, and even earned money for the non-game program. I was amazed at the artwork, and impressed as always with the organization that Tim Keyes brings to such events.

The annual spring meeting of Georgia Ornithological Society (GOS) was in Athens this month. It was well attended and featured Scott Weidensaul as the keynote speaker. Many participants enjoyed birding at the State Botanical Gardens and Whitehall Forest, which jointly comprise one of the newest IBAs in the state. Joel McNeal and I talked up ebird a lot.

## **Monitoring:**

I helped with burns at Oconee National Forest and Black Creek WMA. Several other burns were cancelled due to rain and other circumstances. I am registered for mini-fire academy this summer, where I will receive training to move to the next level, called Firefighter II. There is no cost to the IBA program.

Wayne Shaffner's monitoring of Bachman's Sparrows (BACS) at Swamp of Toa is turning up a lot of good information. He has found dozens of territories, for which he is taking GPS coordinates. Because some management changes are in the works, we will use this data as a "before" picture to see how this species of concern is affected. The WMA is divided into different units, with a management plan for each. We have the history and current vegetation status of each unit, and will correlate those with use by BACS. After some units are logged, we will monitor how the species reacts over time.

On April 20, as part of the BACS work, I joined Wayne, Nathan Klaus, Alan Ashley and Roy Brown for a BACS blitz. In 4 hours we searched hard to document as many BACS as we could. Wayne designed the routes based on both his experience this year and the results of last year's BACS blitz. Despite uncooperative weather, we found 17 singing males. Next year we would like to have 3-4 more participants.

Nathan Klaus and I are monitoring several Loggerhead Shrikes (LOSH), to which I have attached radio telemetry transmitters. This is tough work, with bleeding fingers and hot hours spent in the field. Two of the shrikes have also succeeded in removing the transmitters, but we have already found 1 nest and 2 likely nest trees. And we are starting to get a feel for several territories. The 2 dropped transmitters will be given to new, hopefully more cooperative, birds. The data gained from this will be added to what Jonathan Gray and Jim Cox collected at Tall Timbers and in Clarke/Oconee Counties last year in an effort to learn more about LOSH habitat usage. We will need to do this at least one more year.

In May I will help with a Georgia coast-wide survey of Wilson's Plover and American Oystercatcher.

This summer I will assist Nathan Klaus in conducting bird surveys on the cane plots where we conducted vegetation surveys last year. This is the final phase of an apparently successful habitat experiment he and Tim Keyes began nearly a decade ago. The plots are on IBAs: Oconee NF, Rum Creek WMA, Joe Kurz WMA, and Piedmont NWR.

## **Habitat Management:**

WMA Manager Fred Granitz and I have a plan for eradicating privet from certain discrete locations within our Joe Kurz WMA study site. Our volunteer days on April 2 and 30 worked towards that cause. In addition, the banders have been killing little areas of privet during slow times at the nets. It will be interesting to see the change in bird life in the one major island where we have removed approximately 1/3 of the privet, and also nets 10 and 11, which adjoin the field where Fred killed a lot of wisteria last year.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service is releasing for public review and comments the Draft Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment (CCP). The plan will provide the direction for all aspects of refuge management over the next 15

years. The CCP will be available at the Piedmont NWR office in Round Oak and at the Jones County Library. Contact the Refuge at [piedmont@fws.gov](mailto:piedmont@fws.gov) or call 478-986-5441 for more information.

## **Fundraising & Donations:**

We are still waiting to hear if we have received another year of Together Green funding for Volunteer Day efforts.

I've sent DNR all the information thus far requested regarding the potential for them to lend some financial support to the IBA program.

Many thanks to Vicki and Harry DeLoach, who donated money to make nest boxes.

Please encourage friends and family to use [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com) and [www.goodshop.com](http://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:**

On April 14 I spoke to a combination of science classes and environmental club at Gordon College.

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.

## **Conservation Issues**

I made several calls to my state Senator regarding HB 1055, and posted messages about it to the GABO listserv. Unfortunately, it passed on the last day of the session, and is expected to be signed. This bill affects the two license plates which support the non-game conservation section of Georgia DNR. It would increase the fees for those who have the bluebird or eagle plates, require annual payments for 3 years, but divert most of that money away from non-game to the general state fund. Many Georgia birders helped speak out about this, wrote letters, and called their state legislators, but to no avail. It is now imperative that we find other methods of funding the non-game division, in the event many people choose to discontinue their plates.

## **Volunteer Conservation Days**

The April 2 privet pull at Joe Kurz WMA in Meriwether County was attended by a small core of very hard-working people. We cleared most of the area by the entrance to the field and a small stand that survived fire and spray because it was at the base of a tree. We also removed about 40 feet of old barbed wire, a number of cans, some broken glass and other trash. While privet

was the target, we also took out our aggressions on some sweetgum trees and Japanese honeysuckle.

On April 10 nine participants helped clear the trail around Ansley Hodges Impoundment at Altamaha WMA in McIntosh County. Several of us first greeted sunrise from the tower at the north end of the refuge, then birded/naturalized for about an hour before getting to work. Holes were filled, debris and trash picked up, vines cut, invasive plants removed. Perhaps of greater significance was talk by leaders of Coastal Georgia Audubon Society about possibly adopting maintenance of this trail.

On April 30 fourteen Americorps volunteers killed a lot more privet at Joe Kurz WMA. Volunteers have logged hundreds of hours on this project, and the results are nice to see. We have several large piles of dead privet, and some native plants are starting to grow in these areas which previously had none. Wisteria, Japanese Honeysuckle and a few other exotics are usually killed on the side, and trash is also picked up.

### **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