Wingbars

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BIRDS GEORGIA

INSIDE

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 polices of Birds Georgia.

Great-crested Flycatcher with fly. Photo by Susan Berthelot.

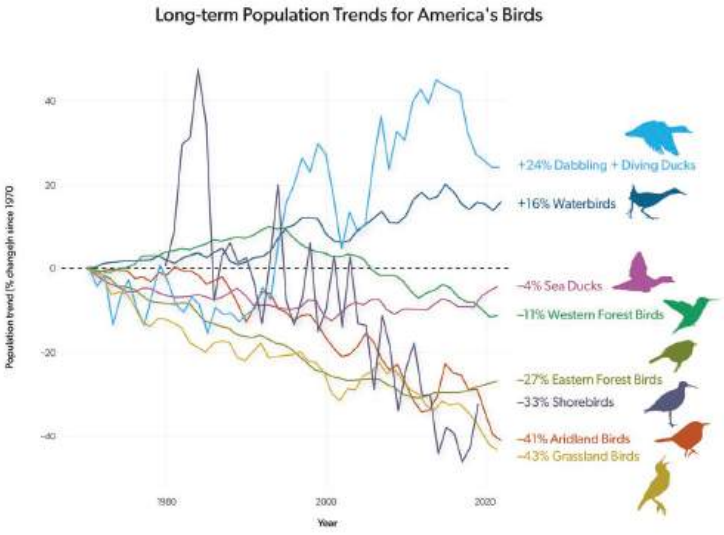
U.S. Bird Populations Continue Alarming Decline

2025 State of the Birds Report Calls for Urgent Conservation Action

By Dottie Head, Senior Director of Operations

The latest State of the Birds Report is out, and it's not great news for birds. Released in mid-March, the 2025 State of the Birds Report reveals continued widespread declines in American bird populations across all mainland and marine habitats, with 229 species requiring urgent conservation action. The report comes five years after the landmark 2019 study that documented the loss of three billion birds in North America over 50 years. The report, produced by a coalition of leading science and conservation organizations, including National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, was released at the 90th annual North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Louisville, Kentucky.

The State of the Birds Report revealed that waterfowl species, like Northern Shoveler, have also declined in recent years. Photo by Dana Lynn Brooks.



State of the Birds long-term population trends. Courtesy of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

Key findings from the new report show that more than one-third of U.S. bird species are of high or moderate conservation concern, including 112 Tipping Point species that have lost more than 50% of their populations in the last 50 years. That includes 42 red-alert species facing perilously low populations, such as Wilson's Plover, Florida Scrub Jay, and Saltmarsh Sparrow – birds that are at risk without immediate intervention.

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From the Executive Director

Spring Is in the Air

Jared Teutsch

Achoo! As I write this column, the spring rains are washing away to worst of the pine pollen. But along with the pollen comes the Barn Swallows, Chimney Swifts, Wood Thrushes, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, and all the warbler species. My yard is a cacophony of bird song. The columbine, coral honeysuckle, tulip poplars, and oaks are flowering and putting out leaves, providing insects and nectar for all of the hungry migratory birds..

By the time you read this, we'll be more than halfway through the 10th annual Georgia Bird Fest. Thanks to everyone who has joined us for this annual fundraiser, and a special thanks to those of you who joined us for the Georgia Bird Fest Summit on Jekyll last month. There are still some events with openings in May, so if you haven't had a chance to join a Georgia Bird Fest event there is still time to participate.

Sadly, the most recent State of the Birds Report reveals that bird populations are continuing to decline due to habitat loss, climate change, and environmental degradation. The good news is that we have a proven blueprint for success, but it is clear that we and all conservation partners must do more if we hope to reverse the worrisome decline of bird species. We hope you'll consider making a gift to our annual fund, joining us for a habitat restoration workday, or supporting Georgia Bird Fest so that we may continue this important work building places where birds and people thrive across Georgia. What's good for birds is good for people, too!

Ruby-throated Hummingbird and bee. Photo by Susan Berthelot.

Even as Georgia Bird Fest winds down, we're already looking ahead to our Fall Flyway Festival in September as well as the Centennial Celebration of Birds Georgia in 2026. 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

Staff Updates: Welcome, Brooke Michael

Please join us in welcoming Brooke Michael, who has joined Birds Georgia as our new communications coordinator. With a background in video production and storytelling, Brooke is going to be working to help us share the good news about the work Birds Georgia is doing around the state in digital form.

Brooke is a communications specialist and storyteller with a passion for climate and the environment. She spent eight years with The Weather Channel, writing and producing for TV broadcasts and contributing to the network's live reporting on extreme weather events, including Emmy-nominated coverage of Hurricane Harvey. In 2020, Brooke joined The Weather Channel's Pattrn team, focusing on climate change science and solutions. A digital-first brand, Brooke helped grow Pattrn's presence on social media to more than 800,000 followers across various platforms.

Brooke is a mom to two young boys, Brandon and Luke, and it was Brandon who first sparked the family's interest in birding. After he picked up a copy of *The Kids' Guide to Birds of Georgia* and read it cover to cover, Brooke and Brandon began going on walks around their Marietta neighborhood, armed with binoculars and the Merlin Bird ID app. Two years, several Birds Georgia field trips, and countless hours of birdwatching later, Brandon has far surpassed Brooke's knowledge of birds. Brooke hopes her new role at Birds Georgia will soon help her catch up to him.

Welcome to the flock, Brooke!

Coastal Conservation and Growing Our Community Impact

By Sarah Manning, Coastal Conservation Coordinator

Spring is well underway here on the coast. April showers have brought about a vigorous greening of the landscape and a steady start to the breeding season for our coastal birds. By the time this is published, the first clutch of Eastern Bluebirds (nest laid March 13) will have fledged from my nest box, and no doubt a second brood will be underway.

GaBby, the Piping Plover, on the beach at Cumberland Island. Photo by Sarah Manning.

Early migrants along Georgia's coast, Piping Plovers have been moving the state through the state since early March. Since fall 2023, we've been monitoring and reporting wintering and migrating Piping Plovers on Cumberland Island National Seashore in order to document the use of the seashore by Piping Plovers of other species. The bands help us identify which population they belong to. One of the plovers we've reported includes GaBby named for her green, blue, and yellow bands. She's the oldest recorded Great Lakes Piping Plover and breeds at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan. She is now in her sixteenth year! Will she defy the odds and make it back to her Michigan breeding grounds? Another Great Lakes Piping Plover that winters on Cumberland Island is YOGi, whose bands are yellow, orange, and green; he breeds at Silver Lake State Park in Michigan and is the father of the famous "Monty" of Chicago – Monty and partner, Rose, became quite famous in Chicago for being the first nesting Piping Plovers in the Chicago area since 1948.

Other coastal species, including American Oystercatcher, Wilson's Plover, and Willet, have already been hard at work defending territories, attracting mates, and incubating eggs on our beaches. Along with our regular Piping Plover surveys, we monitor the nesting American Oystercatcher pairs on Cumberland Island, which range from seven to nine pairs on the beach annually. Interestingly, one of the oldest known living American Oystercatchers also lives on Cumberland Island. She was banded in 2001, making her at least 25 years old.

Colonial nesting birds, including Black Skimmers, Royal Terns, and Least Terns are settling down on sandbars, beaches, and manmade bird islands. This season, we will be monitoring the newest Bird Island in Camden County in partnership with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR) thanks to a grant from the Georgia Ornithological Society. The bird island was constructed in 2024 by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and GA DNR, and it provides approximately 2.7 acres of habitat raised above 9.9 feet – keeping the seabirds' nests high and dry in the event of high tides. The bird island is also isolated, which helps keep mammalian predation and human disturbance to a minimum. We can't wait to share the results of this breeding season at the Cumberland Dividings Bird Island later this year.

Other species, including Red Knot, Whimbrel, and Ruddy Turnstone, are busy refueling along the coast, preparing for a journey to the high Arctic. When visiting beaches this summer, be considerate of birds and remember to share the shore.

Red Knots foraging along the Georgia coast. Photo by Sarah Manning.

Meanwhile, millions of migratory birds are passing through our state's airspace each night, on their way to their northern breeding grounds. This includes Georgia winter regulars like the Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and marathon migrators, like the Blackpoll Warbler. You can help ensure these birds make it to their destinations safely by signing up for our Lights Out alerts to pledge to reduce or eliminate unnecessary outdoor lighting at your home or business. 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. We're entering our tenth year of collision monitoring through Project Safe Flight in metro Atlanta and along Georgia's coast. Volunteers are always needed to patrol routes. Since 2015, we've cataloged more than 5,200 birds of 140 species that have collided with buildings.

Installing Feather Friendly Film at Camden County High School. Photo by Jill Shelton.

Birds Georgia has been addressing this issue by installing bird-friendly film on select buildings across the state thanks to a grant from the Disney Conservation Fund. We are putting the finishing touches on the installation of 2,200 square feet of Feather Friendly® film at the Camden County High School Fine Arts Building in Kingsland. More than 25 volunteers assisted over the course of three volunteer workdays, including students from the High School Beta Club and the Camden County Audubon Society. Additionally, 375 square feet of material was installed on the University of Georgia Marine Extension campus in Brunswick. Studies have demonstrated this product's efficacy with a successful reduction in strikes of more than 95%.

We are always looking to expand our coastal community and engage new partners and communities. This year, we're excited to continue recruiting volunteers for the Nightjar Survey Network, certifying Birds Georgia Wildlife Sanctuaries, getting our hands dirty with habitat restoration projects, monitoring routes and buildings for Project Safe Flight, and continuing our species-specific monitoring, outreach, and education efforts.

Please reach out to Sarah Manning at Sarah.Manning@BirdsGeorgia.org about any of the aforementioned programs.

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT
On Jim and Valerie McMullian

By Steve Phenicie

(This is the 66th in a series on Birds Georgia volunteers, board members, and staff.)

Few people have been involved in National Audubon's Climate Watch program longer than Jim and Valerie McMullian. It rolled out nationally in 2016; Jim and Valerie, who reside in Smyrna, got involved the next year.

The McMullians' square includes Austell, Lithia Springs, and Sweetwater State Park. They don't live within the square but chose it because of its availability and the lure of the state park.

Selfie of Valerie and Jim McMullian.

So what have they experienced through the years? "Almost every year we have had to move a site," Jim says. "People moving things into our location or buildings being built or things being torn down," Valerie adds. "Loss of habitat." Noise is on the upswing everywhere, and occasionally they run into a goose or a human who doesn't appreciate their presence.

The McMullians have long been involved in environmental matters, particularly climate. They have participated in Feederwatch and other Cornell University studies as well as an environmental study at Cascade Park led by the city of Atlanta. They belong to such organizations as the Sierra Club and Chattahoochee Riverkeepers and a hiking group, Terrific Tuesday Adventures. Both are Master Birders.

They used to be scuba divers and lament the growing problems of coral bleaching, cruise ship damage, and invasive species. When they gave up scuba, birds beckoned. "It was people like Nikki Belmonte, Adam Betuel, Melanie Furr, Georgann Schmalz, and Giff Beaton who provided encouragement and spurred us farther in the world of birds," they say.

Jim, who is originally from Fort Pierce, Fla., met Valerie, who was born in San Antonio, in an undergraduate class at the University of Houston. Jim earned a degree in architecture; Valerie's field was microbiology. Jim ended up going to work for a subsidiary of Halliburton Co. and during one project rubbed shoulders with former U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney when he headed that firm. Jim later worked for a nonprofit in Houston.

Valerie worked for the Baylor College of Medicine, doing primary cancer research for about five years. She decided that being a doctor was not in her future, so she went back to school to get a degree in finance and went to work for Coca-Cola in its Minute Maid unit. She was transferred to Atlanta in 2007. Both Jim and Valerie are now retired.

If you'd like to participate in Climate Watch, it is not too late for this season. For more information, contact Sarah Manning at sarah.manning@birdsgeorgia.org or go to https://www.audubon.org/news/participant-resources-climate-watch.

Help Birds Thrive – Give Today to the Annual Fund

Georgia's birds need you. Habitat loss, climate change, and pollution are putting bird populations at risk. Your support of Birds Georgia's Annual Fund fuels critical conservation, education, and community engagement efforts, from restoring vital habitats to inspiring the next generation of conservationists. Every gift helps protect the birds we love and the habitats where birds thrive. Make your gift today at www.birdsgeorgia.org/donate

THANK YOU!

A Million Thanks...

... to **John Harty** and **Jay Davis** for their help with Master Birder field trips ... to J**eff Scott** and the **Henry County Water Authority** for hosting our annual Taking Wing spring workshop for teachers at Cubihatcha Outdoor Center ... to **Ed Higgins**, Master Birder for helping at CoastFest ... to **Ed Higgins, Joel and Josie Landers**, and **Dr. Grayson Day** for another successful volunteer workday at Camden County High School installing Feather Friendly Film ... to **Steve and Rona Cook** for helping plant 100+ pollinator plants in our Muhly Meadow on Jekyll Island ... to our Avian Advocate team for certifying Wildlife Sanctuaries in Atlanta: **Melinda Langston, Michele Buchanan, Lou Clymore, Sheryl Berg, Joy Carter, Georgia Lamar, Annalise Kaylor, Mary Anne Hindes, Kelly Plaskit, Maggie Stephen, Esther Stokes, Susan Hanson, Tara Mostowy, Jennifer Ruscilli, Barbara Powell-Schager**, and **Paula Grad** ... to our new and returning Atlanta Project Safe Flight Volunteers for starting off our Spring Collision Monitoring: **Larry Klink, Nancy Kennell, Paul Miller, Adrianne Miller, Karen Osborne, Kelly Bryan, Jay Davis, Mary Kimberly, Gavin MacDonald, Sharon Harp, Cheryl Hensley, Mike Brune, Mike Ayling and family, Cole Ruberti, Mike Ruberti, Brittani Long, Addison Schultz, Laurel Gross**, and **Maureen Carroll**; and our growing cohort of Coastal Project Safe Flight Volunteers in Savannah: **Rachel Green, Gracie Bliss, Kathryn Moore**, and **EcoAdvocates on the Georgia Southern University Armstrong Campus** ... and Brunswick, College of Coastal Georgia students and staff: **Claire Hannah, Andie Cardona, Damien Scott and Dr. David Stasek; Tristen Dittman, Dr. Susan Muller**, and **Coastal Georgia Audubon members** ... to **Hana Sato** of Oglethorpe University for assisting with the cataloging of our Project Safe Flight specimens this spring ... to **Ruth Mead, JP Moss, Lois Stacey**, and **Mac McCall** for helping

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A Million Thanks

(Continued from Page 4)

out with Master Birder's Augusta cohort ... to **Anthony Simmons** and **Jesse Kamps** for helping with the restoration efforts at Laverlea Preserve ... to those who helped at privet-pulling workdays and native planting workdays at Cochran Shoals, Lyon Farm, Panola Mountian, Wilburn Farm, and RiverLands Showcase Park: **Alex Hinerfeld, Emma Horne, Jenna McLoughlin, Patrick Mascarenhas, Phillip S. Prichard, Joseph Roberts, Courtenay Dusenbury, Ian Gibson, Barb Marston, Michelle Smith, Collin Argo, Haizel Allen, Larry Stevens, Martin Brown, Tanner Biggers, Mireille Lofquist, Louis Gurka, Gabriel Mills, Emmie Harvard, Katherine Carroll, Morning Washburn, Whit Kirkland, James Archambault, Alex van de van de Sandt, Anna Clark, Morgan Gonzales, Steve Cook, Rona Cook, Lynn Weinberg, Sallie Dixon, Jay Davis, Casey Chaviano, Nick Chaviano, Julie Schrodt, Jeremy Wu, Apolo Song, Alison Valk, Claire Provano, Inyoung Jang, Chanho Kim, Travis Sanchez, Justin Canfield, Amy Nicholas, Emmanuel Castillo, Jay Blessing, Kai Spriggs, Frank Holden, Brad Beebe, Kathryn Stenberg, Lindsay Barnes, Pete Walton, James Hudson, Reilly Johnson, Michael Lewis, Auden Lewis, Joel Lawson, Juan Castillo, Helga Lewis, Andrew Eichenblatt, Jessica Reissig, Nick Senter, Aubrey Senter, Lorie Paulez, Anabel Paulez, Matias Paulez, Larry Swartz, Rieza Soelaeman, Megan Wyatt, Jack Curran, Kelsey Gray, Lorie Paulez, John Michael Nicovich, Samantha Durfey, Luke Wylie, Rebecca C Clifford, Heather Haney, Catherine Lynn Trippe, Elise Livius, Layla Hudaib, Isabelle Moskowitz, Elise Livius, Kamelly Alejos, Kale Bryant, Steve Friedman, Anabel Paulez, Layla Hudaib, Carolyn Brown, Sebastian Hagan, Tracey Samone Clark, Tina Mullen, Jacob Mattingly, Russell Homan, Megan Boynton, Juan Castillo, Sandra Brantly, Robert Herrington, Stefany Romani, Justin Mattingly, Patricia Barmeyer**, and **Ward Wight** ... to **Harrington Witherspoon** for designing a fantastic logo for Birds Georgia's Centennial Celebration and **Amy Beth Sparks** for leading this project on behalf of the Centennial Marketing and Communications Committee.

Thank You to our Georgia Bird Fest Patron Supporters

Anonymous (1), Laura Adams and Andrew Feiler, Mary Claire and Doug Allvine, Michael and Lori Ayling, Bill Bell and Sarah Tunkle, Sally and Greg Bergquist, Laura and Sam Breyfogle, Mary Ellen and Neil Brigham, Carolyn and Max Brown, Hope and Todd Burtner, Robert Cain and Molly Lay, Mike and Maxine Chriszt, Anne Clark, Jay Davis, Courtenay and George Dusenbury, Linda DiSantis and Bob Kerr, Ann Eggert, Joshua Gassman, Brynne and Marc Goncher, Diane Hawkins-Cox, Scott Hayes and Scott Porter, John and Jean Hess, Mary Campbell Jenkins, Susan Jones, Mary Kimberly and Gavin MacDonald, Mary Anne and James Lanier, Melinda Langston, Erin Kelly Masciotra and Anthony Masciotra, Ellen Miller, Sally and Jim Morgens, Jay Pakchar, Jeanne Riggall, Carla Roncoli and Tom Painter, Irena Rowe, Steve Phenicie and Lisa Slotznick, Sally Sears and Richard Belcher, Donna Shapiro, Jensy Shell, Melissa Sisson, Laura Stanford, Esther and Jim Stokes, Wayne and Jane Thorpe, Jared Teutsch and Angela Trethaway, Susan Utley, Melanie and Keith Vickers, Michael Weaver, Lynn and Winkler Weinberg, Diana Worthington-White

Thank You to our 2025 Georgia Bird Fest Sponsors

US Birds Populations Continue Alarming Decline

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"There are quite a few birds that spend time in Georgia on the list of Tipping Point species, including Chimney Swift, Red Knot, Ruddy Turnstone, Whimbrel, Field Sparrow, American Oystercatcher, Lesser Yellowlegs, and more," says Adam Betuel, senior director of programs for Birds Georgia. "This report indicates that the work we are doing across the state, both on our own and in collaboration with partner organizations, is more important now than ever before."

Proactively working to protect America's birds is not just about the birds. According to the report, supporting bird conservation can boost the U.S. economy. With nearly 100 million Americans engaged in birding activities, their contributions to local and state economies are substantial. The report highlights findings from the 2022 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, noting that the total economic output related to bird watching activities is $279 billion, and birding related activities support 1.4 million jobs.

According to the report, bird populations in almost every habitat are declining. Notably, duck populations, which have been a bright spot in past State of the Birds reports, have trended downward in recent years.

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Private Lands Program Updates

By Heather Levy, Conservation Program Manager

Birds Georgia recognizes that we cannot build places where people and birds thrive without input and engagement from private landowners. Collectively, Georgia is 93% privately owned, making landowners critical stakeholders in our state's conservation efforts. That's why, a few years ago, we decided to take a leap into the world of private lands conservation with a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) agreement focused on bird and pollinator habitat outreach. From there, as an offshoot of our Wildlife Sanctuary Program, we developed the Habitat Stewardship Program.

Although our NRCS agreement finishes at the end of this year, we will continue to grow our private lands program through the Habitat Stewardship Program and through our recently launched Private Lands Birding Trail. We are actively seeking funding and partnership opportunities to continue to work with private landowners and create bird-friendly habitat.

As our program grows, we are always looking for properties that would be interested in hosting educational field days and bird walks. If you would be interested in being a host for an event or have any questions about our private lands programs, please email our conservation program manager at heather.levy@birdsgeorgia.org.

Apply to Become a Habitat Steward

Whether you are a landowner who owns thousands of acres or a small homesteader who owns 15, you are supporting bird and wildlife habitat. The purpose of the Habitat Stewardship Program is to help both private landowners and managers of public lands learn how to make their properties better for wildlife, while also becoming engaged in community science and educational efforts.

This program is intended to help properties that are in any state of their conservation journey. Birds Georgia offers enrollees educational materials, technical assistance, and connections and help with finding additional technical service providers and cost-share programs. You can learn more about the program on our website.

Contribute to Our Educational Story Map

One of the most powerful ways we learn is by example, and there are so many amazing examples of how landowners are managing wildlife habitat throughout the state. To celebrate these efforts, Birds Georgia, through our NRCS agreement, is developing a Story Map that will feature privately owned properties and their story – that is, their management story. Each property will have information on how they are managing their lands, what the lands are used for in addition to habitat (e.g., farming, hunting, beekeeping), and what kinds of wildlife they are seeing as a result of their efforts. We hope this can serve as an educational tool for others who may just be getting started or who want to learn more about different management practices.

We are still actively seeking landowner participants who own at least 10 acres in Georgia. Please email Heather Levy if you are interested in contributing or have any questions.

The private lands birding trail connects private landowners and birders through their mutual love of birds. Photo courtesy Adam Betuel.

Private Lands Birding Trail in Flight

Georgia is rich in biodiversity from the coasts to the mountains, with amazing birdlife throughout the state. However, with Georgia being majority privately owned, birding opportunities may be limited, especially in certain regions where there are few publicly accessible recreational areas.

Georgia's private landowners are at the forefront of Georgia's conservation, and many are excellent stewards of their lands, actively working to restore and maintain wildlife habitat. It is no secret that some private lands boast to bridge the gap between birders and private landowners, through our NRCS agreement and in partnership with Georgia Forestry Foundation's Bird Bookings Program, Birds Georgia has developed a trail to connect both parties through a mutual love of birds. This trail is separate from our state-wide effort, although we expect to have some overlap with properties that are part of both trails.

Landowners who enroll in the trail can select access days and times that work best for their property needs. By opening up their property, they provide not only birders, but other wildlife enthusiasts, with the opportunity to explore new habitats, see new species, and experience a new part of the state. In return, landowners can learn more about the flora and fauna they have through apps like eBird and iNaturalist. These community science platforms provide critical data on population statuses and trends, and the addition of observation on private lands will become increasingly important as so many of our bird species are declining.

Currently enrolled properties are listed on our website, and we will continue to add properties as they enroll. Birders can easily view a map of properties and see the access dates, property maps, and other important information to know before they visit.

Evans Grassroots Grasslands Project Updates

By Heather Levy, Conservation Program Manager

A drone shot of Laverlea Preserve, showing the restoration field pre-treatment.

We are rapidly approaching the last few months of our restoration project at Laverlea Preserve in Evans, Georgia. This project, funded by the Cornell Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative, is restoring 14 acres of old pasture fields to native grassland habitat for pollinators and birds. Laverlea Preserve is a 345-acre tract of land in a rapidly urbanizing area. It sits along the Euchee Creek and contains a variety of habitats, including upland mixed pine-hardwood forests, mesic forests, bottomland hardwood forests, wetlands, and open fields.

Grasslands rival tropical forests in terms of biodiversity and endemic plant species. Grasslands are one of North America's most rapidly declining ecosystems, and that is especially true in the Southeast, where fire suppression and habitat conversion have resulted in a loss of more than 90% of this biodiverse ecosystem. With the loss of the ecosystem comes the loss of species that rely on these open, fire-maintained habitats, including birds, bats, pollinators, and many plants.

Through Cornell funding last summer, with the help of volunteers from local conservation organizations, we surveyed the bird, butterfly, and plant species within the treatment field. While there were some native species in the field, it mainly consisted of various species of non-native grasses grown for cattle forage. Thankfully, these native species will naturally return to the meadow in time. We did not find any butterflies directly in the field, and bird species were typical of open areas and the adjacent mixed pine/hardwood forests.

The Georgia Department of Natural Resources has been a critical partner, providing technical assistance and contacts for contractors to help with the restoration work. Last fall, we applied herbicide to the field to remove the non-native species and prepare for planting. Although the herbicide did its job, the remaining layer of organic matter, or thatch, was still quite thick. To efficiently remove the thatch layer and aid in the process of nutrient cycling, we conducted a public prescribed burn demonstration in January. Nearly 40 members of the community came out to watch and learn about the importance of prescribed fire for both habitat restoration and management.

In late April, we hosted a volunteer workday to hand broadcast native warm-season grass seeds, one of the final steps in our timeline. By the time this issue of *Wingbars* is published, we will have accomplished our grant goals. Through the year, we will continually monitor the progress of the grasses and will plant additional wildflowers this fall. Once the grasses and flowers have been established, we will conduct another round of bird and butterfly surveys to assess the effects of our efforts.

In the coming years, as we add species and manage the meadow through prescribed fire, we hope to see a return of grassland bird species such as Grasshopper Sparrow, American Kestrel, and Eastern Meadowlark. As we continue adding additional native grass, forb, and wildflower species, we also hope to see the pollinator population flourish, with a goal of documenting the rapidly declining Monarch butterfly in the meadow.

Thank you to our partners from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Augusta's River Region Chapter of the Georgia Native Plant Society, Augusta-Aiken Audubon Society, and the Butterfly Monarchy Club for their contributions.

Birds Georgia conservation program manager, Heather Levy, speaking with community members who came to watch the prescribed burn demonstration. Photo by Heather Levy.

Prescribed fire burning along the hills of the field. Photo by Heather Levy.

Species Profile: The Summer *(usually)* Tanager

By Steve Phenicie

Normally in the winter the Summer Tanager is as scarce in Atlanta as pancakes at Waffle House. Not this year. Two turned up during the January 4 Christmas Bird Count, one at a private residence in northwest Atlanta and the other in Tapestry Ormewood Park.

In the summer this bird can be found from New Jersey to California, with the bulk of its range in the Southeast, but in the winter it customarily takes off for Mexico, Cuba, and Central and South America. So why were at least two still hanging around? Gabe Andrle, Birds Georgia's habitat program manager and head of one of the CBC teams that saw one, says: "It's a mystery to me. It does seem like they may be starting to be more common as overwintering birds, as just in the past five or six years there have been several records on eBird and before then only a couple, from what I could tell. Climate change? Changes in their overall populations? I don't know."

The male Summer Tanagers are maraschino cherry red – the only completely red bird found in the United States. (Both Northern Cardinal and Scarlet Tanager males have some black.) Female Summer Tanagers, although not of a uniform color, tend toward a Dijon mustard yellow.

Male Summer Tanager. Photo by Jessica Moore, Audubon Photography Awards.

These birds, which are bigger than sparrows but smaller than robins, breed in gaps and edges of open deciduous or pine-oak forests across the southern and mid-Atlantic U.S. Often you won't see them because they forage for insects, the bulk of their diet, in the canopy. They are noted for going after bees and wasps – beating them against a branch to kill them. Before swallowing a bee, they will rub it on the branch to remove the stinger.

Female Summer Tanager. Photo by Melissa Zieschang, Audubon Photography Awards.

They also eat beetles, cicadas, caterpillars, grasshoppers, flies, and spiders. They move rather deliberately as they do this, pausing to peer around. Also, they will break into wasp nests to eat the larvae inside, go for berries, and may visit backyard feeders for jam and suet.

When it comes time to nest, the male will sing to defend nesting territory. In the early stages of courtship, he frequently chases the female. The nest site is in a tree, often an oak, pine, or cottonwood and placed on a horizontal branch, usually well out from the trunk and from 10 to 35 feet above the ground. The female will lay three or four eggs and incubate them for 11 or 12 days in a loose, shallow cup made of grass, weed stems, bark strips, leaves, spiderwebs, or Spanish moss (where available), lined with fine grass. Apparently she does all the building, although the male stays close to watch.

Summer Tanagers are fairly common, and despite fluctuations in local populations, their overall numbers increased slightly between 1966 and 2019, according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Some of the numerous places you might see them are at Kennesaw Mountain, at the Dawson Wildlife Management Area near Dawsonville, and at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge near Savannah.

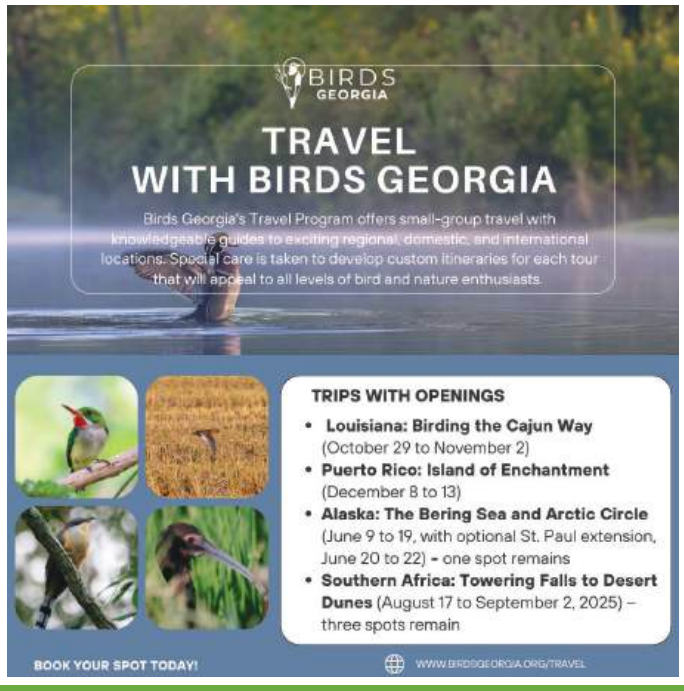
Travel with Birds Georgia in 2025: New Trips Announced

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.

New trips and trips with openings:

- Louisiana: Birding the Cajun Way (October 29 to November 2)
- Puerto Rico: Island of Enchantment (December 8 to 13)
- Alaska: The Bering Sea and Arctic Circle (June 9 to 19, with an optional St. Paul extension, June 20 to 22) – one spot remains
- Southern Africa: Towering Falls to Desert Dunes (August 17 to September 2, 2025) – three spots remain

For full itineraries, please visit our website at www.birdsgeorgia.org/travel. Look for more information on 2026 trips to be released this summer.



US Birds Populations Continue Alarming Decline *(Continued from Page 6)*

"The primary factors causing these birds declines are habitat loss, environmental degradation, and climate change, which disrupts historic migration patterns and reduces the amount of suitable habitat available for birds," says Betuel. "And what's bad for birds is bad for people, as well."

The good news is that we have a proven blueprint for success using science-based planning and collaborative investment in habitat conservation. Birds Georgia is working across the state to help bring birds back. We're working with partners like the Trust for Public Land, Chattahoochee National Park Conservancy, and Jekyll Island Authority to restore bird-friendly habitat across the state. Through our Project Safe Flight Georgia program, we're studying bird-building collisions and working to educate the public about how they can be part of the solution by turning out the lights for birds during peak migratory periods. Our coastal biologist is working with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources to monitor shorebird populations on Cumberland Island and in other locations. And we're working with the Rushing Ecology Lab at UGA to monitor Nightjar populations to learn more about the habits and requirements of these secretive nocturnal nesters.

In addition, Birds Georgia's education and community engagement teams are out in communities across the state, educating teachers and students about birds and why they are important indicators of our ecosystem health and introducing people, both young and old, to the joys of birding and birdwatching.

But there is so much more that needs to be done!

"We have clear evidence that conservation works, and we can help bring birds back," says Betuel. "However, doing so will require that we continue to seek out new, innovative programs and partnerships as well as additional funding to match the scale of these great challenges that are facing our bird populations. The science is solid on how to reverse the damage to bird populations, but it will take a full-court effort by conservation organizations, government organizations, and the public to succeed."

Download the complete report at www.stateofthebirds.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY

Georgia Bird Fest: Talladega National Forest - Pinhoti Trailhead Coleman Lake | Leader: Jack Bruce
Friday, May 2, at 7:00 AM | Cost: $40
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Georgia Bird Fest: Birding at Cooper's Furnace | Leader: Shannon Fair
Saturday, May 3, at 7:30 AM | Cost $40
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Georgia Bird Fest: Phinizy Swamp Nature Park | Leader: Peter Stangel and Kathy Harte
Saturday, May 3, at 8:00 AM | Cost $40
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Field Trip: Birding with GAGGLE at Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park | Leader: Jay Davis
Saturday, May 3, at 7:30 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips

Georgia Bird Fest: Birding by Bicycle | Leader: Jonah McDonald, Joy Carter, Ken Boff
Saturday, May 3, at 9:00 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Georgia Bird Fest: Chattahoochee Riverkeeper at Lake Lanier | Leader: Becca Riser
Sunday, May 4,at 8:00 AM | Cost $50
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Field Trip: Legacy Park (Beginner-focused) | Leader: Josh Jackson
Sunday, May 4, at 8:00 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Wood-Duck, photo by Laura-Lenci.

Georgia Bird Fest: Birding the Hike Inn Trail and Overnight at the Hike Inn | Leader: Jay Davis
Saturday and Sunday, May 4 and 5 | Cost varies based on room needs
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Georgia Bird Fest: Heggie's Rock: Georgia's Natural National Landmark | Leaders: Sebastian Hagan and Heather Levy
Wednesday, May 7, at 8:00 AM | Cost $40
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY *(Continued from Page 9)*

Georgia Bird Fest: Intermediate to Advanced Bird Photography (webinar and field session) | Leader: Eric Bowles
Webinar: Wednesday, May 7, at 7:00 P
Field Session: Saturday, May 10, at 8:00 AM at Blue Heron Nature Preserve | Cost $50
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Georgia Bird Fest: Picturesque Northeast Georgia Valley and Hike to Rabun Bald | Leader: Jay Davis and Bryan Shelby
Saturday, May 10, at 7:30 AM | Cost $50
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Georgia Bird Fest: Standing Boy Trail | Leader: Adam Betuel and Mason Jarrett
Saturday, May 10, at 8:00 AM | Cost $40
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Georgia Bird Fest: Cochran Shoals Bio Blitz | Leader: Sebastian Hagan and Logan Jones
Saturday, May 10, at 9:00 AM | Cost: Free
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Georgia Bird Fest: Blue Heron Nature Preserve | Leader: Rob McDonough
Sunday, May 11, at 8:00 AM | Cost: Free
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Georgia Bird Fest: Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge | Leader: Chad Posick and Sam Holcomb
Sunday, May 11, at 8:00 AM | Cost: $40
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Webinar: Georgia's Private Land Birding Trail: Connecting Landowners and Birders
Tuesday, May 13, at 7:00 PM via Zoom | Free to attend, but registration is required at www.birdsgeorgia.org/upcoming-events
Birds Georgia is excited to announce the launch of the Georgia Private Lands Birding Trail. This trail will connect private landowners with birders across the state, offering educational opportunities for both parties. Landowners can learn more about the flora and fauna on their landscapes ,and landowners can showcase their stewardship efforts and the importance of private land conservation. Tune in to the webinar with Heather Levy, conservation program manager, to learn more about the program and how you can enroll your property or bird on private lands.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker Banding at Fort Eisenhower (Augusta, GA)
Fort Eisenhower, Visitor Control Gate 6 | Limited to 15 attendees
Thursday, May 15, from 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM
Free to attend, but registration is required at www.birdsgeorgia.org/upcoming-events
Join Birds Georgia for a morning of Red-cockaded Woodpecker banding with JP Moss, a wildlife biologist at Fort Eisenhower and a superb birder. We will meet at 8 AM at the Visitor Control Gate 6 and carpool to Red-cockaded Woodpecker nest sites, where JP will demonstrate how they get the nestlings safely down from the trees and band them to monitor their movements and social activities throughout their life. Please bring water, sunscreen, snacks, sturdy shoes, and binoculars to bird along the way. Please email Heather Levy with any questions.

Field Trip: Reynolds Nature Preserve | Leader: Anne McCallum
Wednesday, May 14, at 8:00 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips

Georgia Bird Fest: Brickyard Ponds and Birds and Brews Outing | Leader: Heather Levy
Friday, May 16, at 6:30 PM | Cost: Free
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/birdfestevents

Georgia Bird Fest: Warbler Weekend in the North Georgia Mountains | Leader: Melanie Furr
Saturday, May 17 and Sunday, May 18
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Webinar: Birding by Ear, with Georgann Schmalz
Monday, May 19, at 7:00 PM via Zoom
Learn more or register at www.birdsgeorgia.org/upcoming-events
This program with ornithologist Georgann Schmalz is for anyone who is interested in learning to identify birds by songs and call notes. Participants will learn the characteristics of bird songs and techniques of birding by ear. Information will include examples of components of bird songs such as tempo, rhythm, pitch, and quality. Handouts will include a list of mnemonics and phonetics for use in the field. We will not play dozens of songs and show dozens of bird photos. Instead, the course emphasizes how to listen and what to listen for so that even new songs from birds you have not encountered before can be learned and memorized.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MAY *(Continued from Page 10)*

Optional Field Trip for Birding by Ear Course
Saturday, May 24, at 8:00 AM
As part of the Birding by Ear series, there will be an optional field trip to put into practice the skills and techniques learned during the webinar. The field trip will take place at a location TBD in the metro Atlanta area. You can also participate in the webinar only by registering separately.

Field Trip: Fernbank Forest | Leader: Jennifer Cummings
Saturday, May 24, at 9:00 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

JUNE

Field Trip: Legacy Park (Beginner-focused) | Leader: Josh Jackson
Sunday, June 1, at 8:00 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Webinar: Community Science Series: iNaturalist and Nightjars
Wednesday, June 4, at 7:00 PM | via Zoom
Free to attend, but registration is required at www.birdsgeorgia.org/upcoming-events

Are you ready to explore the world of community science and make a meaningful impact on bird conservation? Join Sarah Manning, Birds Georgia's coastal conservation coordinator, for the Community Science Series: iNaturalist and Nightjars Webinar. This session is perfect for anyone eager to support bird research and conservation. No prior experience required, just a passion for birds.

In this webinar, we'll cover:
- How to get started with iNaturalist
- A brief overview of our Nightjar monitoring efforts
- How to participate in the Georgia Nightjar BioBlitz

Field Trip: Dunwoody Nature Center | Leader: Shannon Fair
Saturday, June 7, at 8:00 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips

Field Trip: Nightjar Hike (St. Marys, GA) | Leader: Sarah Manning
Monday, June 9, at 8:00 PM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips

Field Trip: Nightjar Hike (St. Marys, GA) | Leader: Sarah Manning
Tuesday, June 10, at 8:00 PM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips

Field Trip: Reynolds Nature Preserve | Leader: Anne McCallum
Wednesday, June 11, at 8:00 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips

Field Trip: Chattahoochee Nature Center) | Leader: Dottie Head and Abby Back
Sunday, June 29, at 8:00 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips

Eastern Towhee by Davey Walters,Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Macaulay Library.

JULY

Field Trip: Reynolds Nature Preserve | Leader: Anne McCallum
Wednesday, July 9, 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 19, at 8:00 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Field Trip: Chattahoochee Nature Center) | Leader: Dottie Head and Abby Back
Sunday, July 2, at 8:00 AM
To learn more or sign up, visit www.birdsgeorgia.org/field-trips.

Northern Pintail by Matthew Dolkart, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Macaulay Library.

Wingbars

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825 Warner St. SW, Ste. B · Atlanta, GA 30310
678.973.2437

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Birds Georgia at Manuel's Tavern
In Defense of the Bird Brain, with Jack Bruce
Sunday, June 22, at 3:30 PM
Manuel's Tavern, 602 North Highland Avenue NE, Atlanta, GA 30307
Free to attend, but registration is requested at www.birdsgeorgia.org/upcoming-events

Just in case you need another reason to bird or to defend your passion for birding, this presentation will provide it. Building off decades of research on brain health and successful cognitive aging, Jack will demonstrate how the art of birding uniquely aids the birder in maintaining and enhancing brain health. He will showcase the complexity of birding, and birders will be motivated to continue the upward journey in becoming better birders – for brain health.

About the presenter: Since 2016, Jack Bruce has been with IMA Financial Group where he is the director of population health & wellbeing in the Atlanta office, working with employers to enhance the wellbeing of their employees. An avid birder, Jack combined his work in employee well-being with his love for birding to found WellBirds to showcase the well-being benefits of birding and nature. Jack is a certified instructor for Mental Health First Aid, a member of the Nature as Medicine committee for the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, a member of the Nature and Health Alliance, and one of our very own Birds Georgia Master Birders.