



## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Media Note:** Photos to accompany this article and a MS Word version of this press release are available for download [here](#)

### **BIRDS GEORGIA RECEIVES TWO GOS GRANTS FOR COASTAL BIRD CONSERVATION**

**(ATLANTA, GA) Feb. 19, 2026** – Birds Georgia has been awarded two Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grants from the Georgia Ornithological Society (GOS) to protect critical habitats and threatened species along Georgia’s coast.

The grants will fund dune stabilization and grassland restoration on Jekyll Island and support implementation of Georgia’s newly updated Bird Island Rule in collaboration with Manomet Conservation Sciences and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

"Coastal Georgia is home to some of the most important bird habitats in the state," said Adam Betuel, executive director of Birds Georgia. "These generous grants from the GOS will help ensure a thriving future for ecosystems that support everything from nesting plovers to migrating shorebirds."

#### **Jekyll Island Restoration**

On Jekyll Island, Birds Georgia will restore and manage 15 acres of globally imperiled southern coastal plain dune and maritime grassland habitat. These coastal dune ecosystems are rapidly eroding due to sea level rise, storms, invasive species, and human impacts.

The project will stabilize dunes, strengthen ecosystem function, and increase climate resilience by planting 10,000 native grass and perennial plugs – featuring culturally significant species like *Muhlenbergia sericea* (sweetgrass) – to support wildlife and honor the heritage of the Gullah-Geechee community. Species that will benefit from this project include Wilson’s and Piping Plover, Least Tern, American Oystercatcher, Painted Bunting, and other coastal wildlife.

More than 75 volunteers and over 1,000 Camp Jekyll students will participate in planting events, educational programming, and hands-on stewardship activities. Interpretive signage, curriculum enhancements, and a public educational event in Brunswick will connect residents and visitors to the ecological and cultural importance of maritime grasslands.

"We're creating a resilient, living system that both protects cultural heritage and fosters biodiversity," said Gabe Andrie, director of conservation for Birds Georgia. "This project offers a model for restoration that can be replicated throughout coastal Georgia."

### **Bird Island Rule Implementation**

The second grant will strengthen habitat protection for shorebirds and seabirds at critical offshore bars and islands that provide essential nesting, feeding, and roosting habitat throughout the annual cycle.

Originally established in 1998, Georgia's Bird Island Rule protected five key offshore sites from human disturbance. The Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) recently updated the rule to include Brunswick Bird Island, Cumberland Dividings, and Ogeechee Bar, sites that have become increasingly important as dynamic coastal processes create new bird habitats. The amended rule enables seasonal closures using in-water buoys and signage, prohibits dogs year-round, and improves enforcement capacity through DNR's Law Enforcement Division.

The project addresses two critical threats to beach-nesting birds: human disturbance and predation. Clearly marked closures, cell-enabled trail cameras, and trained beach steward volunteers will reduce disturbance and enable real-time reporting to law enforcement. Monitoring data will evaluate the effectiveness of seasonal protections.

To address predation – particularly owl predation at Cumberland Dividings – trained wildlife professionals will humanely trap, band, and relocate owls away from nesting colonies, with adaptive management measures in place if needed. These combined efforts will enhance nesting success for Georgia's priority coastal bird species.

"After successful monitoring in 2025, we're now ready to take action," said Betuel. "The updated Bird Island Rule gives us the tools we need to protect critical nesting sites and reduce threats from disturbance and predation."

As Birds Georgia celebrates its Centennial year, these coastal conservation efforts reflect a century-long commitment to protecting birds and habitats across our state.

**About Birds Georgia:** *Birds Georgia is building places where birds and people thrive. We create bird-friendly communities through conservation, education, and community engagement. Founded in 1926 as the Atlanta Bird Club, the organization became a chapter of the National Audubon Society in 1973 and continues today as an independent Audubon chapter. Learn more at <https://www.birdsgeorgia.org/>.*

**About Georgia Ornithological Society:** *The Georgia Ornithological Society's (GOS) mission is to encourage the scientific study of birds by gathering and disseminating information on Georgia bird life. GOS actively promotes bird conservation by encouraging the preservation of habitats that are vital to the survival of resident and migratory birds. The GOS also gives scholarships, produces scientific publications, and provides fellowship among those interested in nature. Learn more at <https://www.gos.org/home>.*

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