



Birds Georgia Centennial Celebration

FLIGHT OF THE CENTURY: FROM BACKYARD
FEEDERS TO A STATEWIDE MOVEMENT



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Birds Georgia wishes to thank all of its members for helping to shape this organization and our community throughout the last century.

With special thanks to:

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BIRDS GEORGIA CENTENNIAL: THE FLIGHT OF THE CENTURY

Birds Georgia celebrates its 100th anniversary as one of the oldest bird-focused conservation groups in Georgia. Since 1926, we've stopped seeing birding as just a recreational activity and have instead come to recognize that birding is a powerful driver of engagement and conservation. Today, Birds Georgia stands as a major voice in conservation in the state, shaping a more sustainable future for all Georgians. "At Birds Georgia, we are uniquely positioned to connect the conservation community, experienced wildlife watchers, and those new to the joys of birds. In the past decade, our staff, board, volunteers, and partners have allowed us to make a measurable positive impact on the conservation of birds and their habitats across our state, while growing the flock of bird enthusiasts. We are tackling the challenges facing our birds and will make an effort to fulfill our mission of building places where birds and people thrive," says Adam Betuel, Executive Director. Our journey has been long, and here we hope to preserve and celebrate our past, so we can look forward to continuing to grow as we work toward a better future.



School garden installation

BIRDING AND CONSERVATION: THE BIG PICTURE

Birding has, for quite a long time, fed into conservation; birdwatching has connected generations of people with nature and the environment. The practice, as we know it today, gained popularity in the late 19th century, following British ornithologist Edmund Selous's advocacy for observing birds rather than killing them for specimen collection.¹ The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, advocated by bird lovers across the country, became an important step toward regulation and environmental policy by the U.S. government.² It is in part this legacy of birding as a gateway to conservation that propels us today to continue to see it as inherently linked with conservation.

Early members of what was the Atlanta Bird Club reflected this in their own small ways. However, the efforts of environmentalists in the early 20th century were unable to keep pace with rapid degradation of the environment due to industrialization and urbanization. By the 1960s and '70s, the situation had become so dire that it sparked a national movement. This led to the inception of new conservation groups, the growth of existing ones, and the establishment of institutions like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and legislation at the state and federal levels.^{2,3} The devastation of our forests, watersheds, and other ecosystems, both within and outside of Georgia, was extensive. It was only through the efforts of citizens involved in grassroots movements and the advocacy of conservation-minded organizations across the country that things began to improve. Federal and state legislation began to be implemented to better protect ecosystems in Georgia and across the nation throughout the 20th century, and, though the work is far from over, those accomplishments are worth exploring and celebrating, which you can do by viewing our curated ArcGIS storymaps at www.birdsgeorgia.org/centennial. It is a result of the synergy of efforts by many people and organizations that we have achieved all we have, and will continue to achieve more for bird and wildlife conservation. At Birds Georgia, we are proud of all we have achieved and excited for all the things we've yet to do.



THE ATLANTA BIRD CLUB

FOR THE STUDY AND APPRECIATION OF BIRDS

ATLANTA BIRD CLUB

Birds Georgia began as the Atlanta Bird Club in 1926 under Club President Carter Whitaker. The club was started by ornithologists and hobbyists and quickly amassed a dedicated membership. Initially, the club was primarily focused on social and educational pursuits and, as Birds Georgia does today, attempted, in the words of Senior Director of Operations Dottie Head, to attract more people to involvement with nature through club activities.

Education

This approachability was due in part to the Atlanta Bird Club's efforts to facilitate education for learners at all levels. For club members, leadership organized annual meetings with high-profile expert speakers who delivered speeches on hot topics like "The Lure of Water Fowl."⁴ From their inception, these speeches drew crowds of bird lovers from across the state and included members of other organizations.

For novice members, other educational avenues were provided by the club. Berma Jarrard, the club's third president and first female president, wrote the National Audubon Society in 1933 to request help in establishing a Junior Audubon Society after success in other youth educational endeavors.⁵ Maureen Abercrombie and other early members were concerned with educating the public on topics such as the diversity of hawk species to dissuade Georgians from hunting these beautiful birds solely out of fear that they might harm livestock.⁶ This concern for educating the public and continuing the education of club members continued into 1965, when the Atlanta Bird Club's Wildlife Film Program began screenings to entertain and inform the public and quickly gained popularity.



FUN FACT:

Despite the Atlanta Bird Club being primarily focused on education, our early members were already contributing to a blooming conservation ethic. These efforts include inquiries sent to Gov. Eugene Talmadge by our second president, Norman Giles, pushing him to designate all park lands in Georgia as wildlife and bird sanctuaries.

Brown Thrasher, Susan Berthelot,
Birds Georgia's Photographers Network

Early Conservation Efforts

As a part of these efforts, the club intermittently participated in efforts to designate areas around Atlanta as wildlife sanctuaries, even at one point maintaining a sanctuary in Piedmont Park.⁷ Additionally, educational pursuits were undertaken in part to encourage the protection of birds, which, though incomplete in its extent as conservation work, represents an important first step in the evolution toward Birds Georgia's current work and mission.

ATLANTA BIRD CLUB THROUGH THE YEARS

1918

Passage of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act after concerted efforts by ornithologists and hobbyists in New York and across the country.²

1928

Atlanta Bird Club is chosen to pick the state bird but, unable to agree, nominated three choices: the Purple Martin, the Red-headed Woodpecker, and the Brown Thrasher. The choices were sent to the Atlanta Federation of Clubs, which put the choice to a vote among schoolchildren. The Brown Thrasher ultimately won and was named Georgia's state bird.⁸

1926

Official beginnings of the Atlanta Bird Club.

1936

Georgia Ornithological Society is founded by members of the Atlanta Bird Club.⁹

Atlanta Bird Club celebrates its 10-year anniversary with members of the Georgia Ornithological Society. Former Club President Berma Jarrard delivers an oral history of the Club.¹⁰

1956

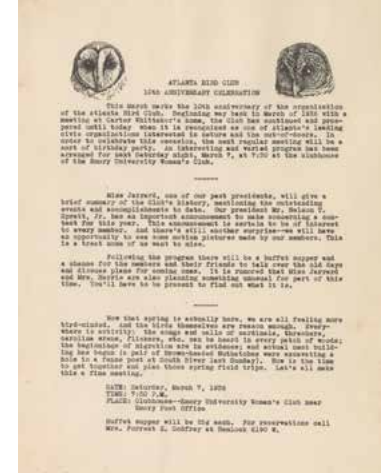
All of Atlanta is declared a bird sanctuary by Mayor William Hartsfield, who also named Athos Menaboni, a famous Atlanta artist and bird enthusiast, the "honorary bird guardian."¹¹ Though the declaration was more of a symbolic gesture, it became a source of pride for the club and the achievement was referenced often.



Brown Thrasher Article: Bell, Glenn W. "Georgia's State Bird" *Atlanta Journal* Article. April 20, 1940. Scrapbook, Item 1. Box 2. Official Organizational Records Series. Georgia Ornithological Society Records, MS 1219. Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.



Berma Jarrard: Wallace Rogers. "Miss Berma Jarrard and Young Screech Owl". 1933. Atlanta Bird Club Correspondence, 1933-1935, Folder 8. Box 47. Clubs, Organizations, Etc. Series. Georgia Ornithological Society records, MS 1219 Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries.



10th Anniversary: Atlanta Bird Club. 10th Anniversary Celebration Invitation. 1936. Atlanta Bird Club Correspondence, 1933-1935, Folder 8. Box 2. Education and Early Birding Activities Series. Norman Giles Papers, UA07-021. University Archives, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, The University of Georgia Libraries.



ATLANTA AUDUBON SOCIETY

In 1968, the Atlanta Bird Club voted to become a chapter of the National Audubon Society. In 1972, another vote led to the club rebranding as the Atlanta Audubon Society, a name it would retain until 2020. Following this rebranding, according to journalist Harold Martin, the club's focus shifted to "everything that ha[d] to do with the environment."¹² This shift was contemporaneous with a broader expansion of the conservation movement. During this time, the Atlanta Audubon Society began a number of efforts to promote stewardship and the protection of birds and their habitats.

New Initiatives

One of the most notable endeavors of the organization during this period was the establishment of the Wildlife Sanctuary Program in 1977, which remains operational to this day. Through this program and others like it, Atlantans and Georgians were better equipped to take direct action in their own backyards. Organizations across the state worked to offer mutual support for similar conservation efforts.

Throughout this time and continuing today, the club worked with other organizations to keep members and the public informed and engaged in governmental protection of the environment.¹³ This civil engagement is in large part responsible for the successful passage of important legislation for the protection of ecosystems in Georgia on a state and federal level.

Programs of the Atlanta Audubon Society also increased the club and its members' engagement with direct conservation efforts in the state. Master Birder was started in 2002. From its inception, it not only educated the public and instilled an enthusiasm for birding and conservation, but also provided the organization with an expanded pool of willing and capable volunteers to help with conservation efforts.¹⁴ Later the inception of citizen science initiatives such as Climate Watch and Project Safe Flight represented



"Our habitat restoration, our collision work, and our community outreach; that's the future of our organization"

—Dottie Head
Sr. Director of Operations, Birds Georgia

Great Blue Heron, Steve Rushing, Birds Georgia's Photographers Network

an important turning point in the organization's trajectory as we became increasingly focused on becoming a legitimate conservation organization.^{14, 15}

Staffing and Increased Capacity

This change in trajectory and the establishment of so many programs would have been impossible without the addition of staff. Staffing the organization allowed leadership to increase its focus on the organization's operations and permitted the board to function as an oversight committee. This in turn allowed the organization to increase its efficacy. In 2006, Catharine Kuchar was hired as the club's first executive director. After that initial hire and the boost in focus at the leadership level, the organization expanded further and hired other key people for critical positions that allowed the club to develop into all we are today.^{16, 17} Building on this foundation, Nikki Belmonte served as Executive Director for nearly a decade, leading a period of significant organizational growth that included the expansion of staff and partnerships, strengthening conservation, education, and advocacy efforts. Thanks to the dedication of our staff and members, the organization grew stronger, with new ideas and opportunities that supported responsible and sustainable growth.

ATLANTA AUDUBON SOCIETY THROUGH THE YEARS

1972

The Atlanta Bird Club officially rebrands as the Atlanta Audubon Society.

1979

The Atlanta Audubon and Upper Flint River Audubon societies merge, expanding the club's reach within metropolitan Atlanta to the south and increasing the club's membership.

2002

The Master Birder program starts offering bird education to cohorts in Atlanta under that official name.

2011

Through collaboration with Café Campesino in Americus, Atlanta Audubon begins to offer shade-grown and bird-friendly coffee. Since the late '90s, club members had grown increasingly concerned about the impact of coffee harvesting on the health of migratory bird species wintering in coffee-growing areas. This led to the initiative to collaborate with farmers to produce a responsibly cultivated coffee line.

2015

Project Safe Flight begins as a volunteer-run program, followed by the launch of Lights Out Atlanta, an initiative designed to reduce outdoor lighting and provide safer passage for migrating birds.¹⁵

1978

The Wildlife Sanctuary Program begins certifying properties around Atlanta as such, encouraging landowners to steward their property and opening the doors to educational opportunities for the public.

1997

Atlanta Audubon Society, alongside others, opposes the opening of a DuPont mine near the Okefenokee Swamp, continuing a tradition of advocating for this unique ecological area. This advocacy was effective, and the mine never became a reality.¹⁸

2018

Xocolatl chocolate company collaboration with our organization starts, for many of the same reasons as the Cafe Campesino collaboration started. Agricultural practices impact species' health, and cacao farming is no exception. Just as in the case of our shade-grown coffee, Xocolatl and Birds Georgia partnered with farmers to make sure that responsible cultivation techniques are used to protect the habitats of migratory bird species.



LEFT: 1978 Christmas Bird Count

RIGHT: Bird Watching: Birds Georgia scrapbook, Unattributed, Year Unknown



GEORGIA AUDUBON & BIRDS GEORGIA

Over the past five years, Birds Georgia has undergone two significant name changes that both highlight our commitment to serving the state and all Georgians. This means honoring our past as the Atlanta Audubon Society and later as Georgia Audubon, while building a conservation-minded and fully-engaged Georgia where birds prosper, habitats flourish, and understanding grows. Our recent name changes reflect our commitment to continuing that history and our efforts to further educate and engage the next generation of birders in order to attract even more people into our growing community fighting against conservation challenges.

Conservation Action

Late in our tenure as the Atlanta Audubon Society, Birds Georgia began to evolve into a broader conservation organization. Under the leadership of Executive Director Jared Teutsch, the organization expanded its statewide reach and laid the foundation for Birds Georgia to grow into a larger, more visible, and more impactful conservation organization serving communities across Georgia. Our habitat restoration work, coastal conservation program, and the launch of our Morgens Educational Gateway have all contributed to our expansion across the state.

Under Jared, our conservation efforts have seen substantial increases in size and effectiveness during the past five years of our history. Notably, in 2020, Birds Georgia's Habitat Restoration Team was formed to bring earlier intervention efforts in house. That team has since grown in size and is actively working on projects across Georgia's various ecosystems. We work across the state to restore and manage habitats, remove invasive species that imperil bird habitats, and preserve important ecosystems as part of a host of organizations all working toward conserving Georgia's bird and

wildlife habitats.¹⁵ We have also expanded our programs in private lands by expanding our Wildlife Sanctuary Program and introducing our Habitat Stewardship Program, which allows us to engage in conservation efforts on privately owned lands that comprise a majority of the real estate in Georgia.¹⁵

Looking Ahead

Birds Georgia has proudly spent the past 100 years educating tens of thousands of students and building a community of dedicated bird lovers across the state. From our 1926 members' small-scale efforts to preserve lands around Atlanta for birds, all the way to today's initiatives by our excellent volunteers and Habitat Team, we are proud of our work and excited for all the work we have left to do. As part of Birds Georgia's Centennial Celebration in 2026, we are excited to launch the Georgia Birding Trail that will showcase Georgia's incredible birdlife and help make birdwatching accessible to all Georgians. This trail will showcase our mission in a concrete way and demonstrate the value that birds and conservation can have in communities to foster a conservation ethos across Georgia as we embark on the next 100 years of our journey. We are proud of the commitment to birds and conservation that our members have demonstrated for the past century of our history, and we are excited to continue bringing people together as we work to create places where birds and people thrive.



Red-headed Woodpecker, Don Kopanoff,
Birds Georgia's Photographers Network

BIRDS GEORGIA THROUGH THE YEARS

2020

Covid-19 causes Wildlife Sanctuary Tours to be offered online, along with Master Birder and other programs.

2022

Habitat Steward Program begins, allowing owners of properties of more than 10 acres to participate in habitat restoration efforts on their own property.

2023

Georgia Audubon officially changes its name to Birds Georgia in November 2023 to create a more welcoming environment and reach new generations of birders.

Morgens Environmental Education Gateway launches, allowing Birds Georgia to share its expanded educational programs online with more Georgians.



2025

Planning for the centennial celebration and the Georgia Birding Trail begins.

2021

A Georgia Audubon staff member participates in the organization's first prescribed burn. This allows Birds Georgia to expand habitat restoration efforts with other state institutions.

Wildlife Sanctuary Program goes statewide, giving more people a framework for small-scale conservation efforts on their own property as well as expanding Birds Georgia programming into more parts of the state.

2024

Birds Georgia Habitat Team begins work at Chattahoochee RiverLands Showcase Site in a partnership with the Trust for Public Land to build a 100-mile corridor of contiguous greenway and trail systems.



Field Trip on Path 400 with Livable Buckhead



Volunteers at a habitat restoration workday

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FRONT COVER PHOTOS, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:

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Birds Georgia scrapbook, Unattributed, 1978

Susan Berthelot, Birds Georgia's Photographers Network, 2025

Birds Georgia scrapbook, Unattributed, ca. Winter 1970s–1980s.

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Over A Century of Conservation in Georgia
ArcGIS StoryMap by Eva Carlton



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