



The Chattanooga Chat

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2018: Vol. 43, No 1

A Newsletter of the Chattanooga Chapter
Tennessee Ornithological Society

Meeting

Ascension Lutheran Church
720 S Germantown Rd
Thursday, November 8
5:30 p.m. Executive Board
7:00 p.m. Monthly Meeting

Program:

After a great program last month by O.J. Morgan on his trip to South Africa, for the November 8 meeting we have more about birds of South Africa. Our speaker is Braam Oberholster from Southern University. He will present a program on the birds of Kruger National Park in South Africa. Braam was born in South Africa and did a program for us on Florida birds in 2017. As O.J. and Braam both said, there are so many birds in South Africa he could do several programs. I know this will be another great presentation.

Thanks

Thanks to O.J. Morgan who gave a presentation on birding in South Africa at our October meeting.

Field Trip

Chester Frost Park, November 10th
Meet at 8:30 AM at the boat launch parking area on Saturday. We will check all our favorite spots for ducks, winter resident birds and maybe some late Fall migrants. Bring a scope if you have one. If you have any questions, contact: Pixie Lanham at 423-886-4321 or planham@epbfi.com



Ellen Robinson releases a Broad-winged Hawk at McCoy Farm
Photo by Gary Lanham

In Memory

We say a sad Farewell to an Eagle Watcher
Bill Haley/Jimmy Wilkerson

Yesterday I attended the funeral of Milburn Varner, of Soddy-Daisy, Tennessee. Milburn lived down at the base of the mountain we drive up to get to the Soddy Mountain Hawk Watch. Milburn was best known as a fantastic mechanic, guru of anything MOPAR, and a drag racer in the 1960's and 1970's. He worked on several of my cars over the years.

In his garage sits a 1970 Plymouth Barracuda painted Plum Crazy Purple (an actual color Plymouth used....do you remember it?). It has "Drag Addict"

professionally painted on the sides and is a beautiful thing to see. It has less than 500 miles on it. The miles were added a quarter mile at a time. I can well remember seeing that purple Barracuda scream down the quarter mile at Optimist Drag Strip in the early '70's.

Roi Shannon and I went down there several times to see him and the other drag racers battle it out. I know for a fact that he was once offered \$125,000 for that car and turned it down. I'd say 99% of the people there yesterday knew him from this part of his life.

Milburn was not known to the birdwatching community, and he was not really a bird watcher. I'd wager that not a single birder in this area knew of him or had ever heard his name. Even Jimmy and Cynthia have probably forgotten it, even though they've heard me tell his story several times over the years. You see, Milburn, a non-birder, but a good observer, was responsible for one of the most surprising and interesting discoveries about the lives of Bald Eagles in our area.

He was an early riser. A good number of years back, he called me one day and told me Bald Eagles were flying out of the Big Soddy Creek gorge every morning at first light. He invited me to come up to his place to see this. To be honest, I thought he didn't know what he was talking about, figuring maybe he was seeing vultures, so I didn't immediately take him up on his offer. A couple of weeks later, Milburn called again, saying "Are you going to come up here to see the eagles fly or not?" Well, when he put it that way, I decided I'd better go up there, so I promised I'd be there the next morning. He told me I'd better get there early, because they flew out at daybreak.

The next morning, a cold, clear day, I got there when Milburn specified. He

came out from his house, shook my hand and pointed up at the ridge over his house to two pine trees that stuck up above the other trees. "They always fly out from right there. Watch and you'll see them in a little bit." No sooner had he said that, then five Bald Eagles flew out past those pine trees! To say I was surprised was an understatement. Milburn was the first person to observe that Bald Eagles spend the nights in creek gorges in our area, flying out to the river at first light, then returning to the gorges each night. Before then this was a behavior unknown to any birdwatcher in Chattanooga!

I went back up a few days later and was astonished to see 16 eagles fly out of the gorge over Milburn's house that morning over a fifteen to twenty-minute period. The next weekend, I had people stationed at first light where they had a good view of 4 creek gorges, the area stretched all the way from North Chickamauga Creek in the south to Rock Creek in Sale Creek, to the north. Lo and behold, in the space of less than 15 minutes, they saw a total of 50 Bald Eagles leave those creek gorges!

So, Milburn, goodbye my friend, and thank you for adding to our ornithological knowledge. I will long remember you and know now that your spirit is flying with those eagles; that is when you are not blasting down a drag strip somewhere up in heaven.



Great Egret Photographed by Mark McKnight at Reflection Riding

What Have You Seen

September 17

Rain cut banding at Greenway Farm short (only 90 minutes) yesterday, but I still managed to catch 2 Carolina Wrens, 1 Tufted Titmouse, 1 Northern Cardinal, 1 Hooded Warbler, 1 Magnolia Warbler, and 1 Gray Catbird.

David Aborn
Chattanooga, TN

September 19

I haven't updated sightings in a few weeks due to computer-related issues. For those who might be keeping state or county sighting records, the following notable birds were observed. All birds were seen in Birchwood – at my property (Hamilton County), or on Blythe Ferry Lane, or nearby Blythe Ferry, or from the Cherokee Removal Memorial Park (Meigs County).

Golden-winged Warbler – 9-3-2018 – on my property

Magnolia Warbler – 9-7-2018 – Blythe Ferry (FOY)

Prothonotary Warbler – 9-13-2018 – Blythe Ferry (I've never seen one there before.)

Rose-breasted Grosbeak – 9-17-2018 – on my property (FOS)

Black-throated Green Warbler – 9-18-2018 – Blythe Ferry Lane beside the Cherokee Removal Memorial Park (FOY)

American White Pelicans – 9-18-2018 – approximately 40 in the Tennessee River in Rhea County southwest of Hiwassee Island. They were seen from the CRMP. (last seen in May)

Charles Murray

September 28

I found two adult Herring Gulls flying around Chickamauga Lake this afternoon. They did land briefly on the water before flying upriver.

Bruce Dralle

October 14

This morning there was a Lincoln Sparrow seen at 8:30 feeding on the ground behind the Point Park visitor center parking area. The Lincoln Sparrow then moved into a private hedge.

The exact location of the sighting was at the corner of the white fence near the one-way sign.

I tried to relocate the Lincoln Sparrow at 10:30 am with no luck.

The hedge that runs from the corner of the white fence runs onto private property.

Bruce Dralle

October 14

The CTOS banding demo that was postponed until today was very successful, with a nice variety of both long-distance migrants still moving through and wintering birds just arriving. The totals were:

Magnolia Warbler = 6

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (FOS) = 2

Tennessee Warbler (FOS) = 1

Yellow-rumped Warbler (FOS) = 1

Hooded Warbler = 1

White-eyed Vireo = 1

Eastern Phoebe = 1

Indigo Bunting = 1

Ovenbird = 1

White-throated Sparrow (FOS) = 1

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (I heard one a couple of weeks ago, but this was the first one I have banded this season)

Wood Thrush = 1

Blue Jay = 1

Carolina Wren = 1 recapture

I thank everyone who came out and endured the mosquitoes, which have gone from apocalyptic to unbearable, so at least it is an improvement!

David Aborn

October 14

Gus Mealor and I saw an adult female Golden-winged Warbler moving along the West Brow late this morning.

It's been a great Fall for Golden-winged Warblers moving through Point Park. This is the fourteenth Golden-winged Warbler for the 2018 Fall Season. Today's sighting is a new Fall late day. The old Fall late date for Point Park was October 10, 2015. Golden-winged Warblers have outnumbered Blue-winged Warblers this Fall - fourteen to nine. The old Fall high count was twelve set back in 2015. The Fall of 2017 there was only one Golden-winged Warbler seen.
Bruce Dralle

October 12

After yesterday's cold front passed through East Tennessee, birds were a great deal more active than in the past several weeks. Some FOY and FOS species were noted at my home in Birchwood (Hamilton County), at Hiwassee Wildlife Refuge (Meigs County) at Cottonport Wildlife Management Area (Rhea County), and at a few other sites in Meigs and Rhea counties. I noted 47 species, which may be a one-day record for me when no waterfowl (except Canada geese) were observed. Some highlight species included:
Osprey (very late?) – near Frazier Community Park (Rhea Co.)
Ruby-throated Hummingbird (somewhat late?) – (home)
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker – FOS (home)
Tree Swallows – (HWR)
Ovenbird – FOY (home)
Tennessee Warbler (home)
Magnolia Warblers (home and Cottonport WMA)
Bay-breasted Warblers – FOY
Armstrong Ferry Rd. ((Meigs Co.) and Cottonport WMA)). I think I saw them earlier in the fall at home, but I couldn't identify them then!
Chestnut-sided Warbler (home)

Palm Warbler – FOS (HWR)
Pine Warbler (HWR)
Yellow-rumped Warblers – FOS (numerous at home, HWR, and Cottonport WMA)
Swainson's Thrushes (home)
Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (home)
Charles Murray

October 2

There were 2 Northern Harriers flying around the UTC campus this morning, and I also heard a Golden-crowned Kinglet.
I also applaud Steve and everyone else in TOS who helped establish the TOS Facebook page. We need new and creative ways recruiting and engaging new members, and social media will help. In these days of Nature Deficit Disorder, we must demonstrate the power of birding as a way of connecting people with the environment, its importance, and how we can protect and improve it.
David Aborn

Join TOS

Membership dues:

\$28- individual \$32- Family
\$15- student \$40- sustaining
\$460- Life (Life members must pay \$10 local chapter dues each year.)

Send checks payable to "TOS" to:

Gary Lanham, TOS Treasurer
21 Cool Springs Road
Signal Mountain, TN 37377
chattanoogatos@outlook.com

If you are a new member, please include your address, phone number, and an email address for Chat delivery and bird walk information.

All dues, donations, gifts, and bequests are tax deductible under Sec. 501 (c)(3), the Internal Revenue Code.