

OCONEE RIVER LAND TRUST

news

Preserving natural areas in our region since 1993

Fall 2019

Kathy and Al Parker – Protecting Wild Havens

By Caroline Johnson-Hall

Kathy and Al Parker fell in love with the vibrant forest and stream of their 11 acre Clarke County property before they even purchased it. Formerly the site of an abandoned 1930s farm, the now forested land protects a tributary to the Oconee River and provides exceptional habitat for a variety of birds and other wildlife. Relocating from a busy residential neighborhood, Kathy and Al have felt a deep sense of relief and peace since moving onto this property. In short, it is as much a sanctuary for them as it is for local wildlife.

When Kathy and Al moved to Georgia from Wisconsin, they immediately noticed a difference in the kinds of lands that were being protected by the state. “State parks in Georgia don’t necessarily contain the best, most biodiverse, or prettiest habitats,” Al says. “Many of our current parks were created when the Great Depression hit and people were forced to foreclose on their farmland and timberland.” When this land became owned by the state, much of it was turned into state park property by convenience and allowed to grow back to a more natural state despite it not necessarily being prime habitat. Both he and Kathy noticed that in Georgia, many of the best and most crucial habitats for Georgia flora and fauna are privately owned.

Prioritizing conservation easements in Georgia made particular sense to them for this reason, and with Athens-Clarke County’s rapid development, they wanted to ensure that the biodiverse forested haven surrounding their home would be forever protected. “I’ve counted one hundred bird species here, many of them neotropical migrant species,” Kathy notes as we look at the creek from a large rock overhang. “Especially since we’re so close to the Oconee River, this land is part of an important wildlife corridor.”

With a large collection of bird baths and feeders, the Parkers are able to see many of these feathered friends from their large kitchen window, including Hooded warblers (*Setophaga citrina*), Scarlet tanagers (*Piranga olivacea*), Pileated woodpeckers (*Dryocopus pileatus*), Great blue herons (*Ardea herodius*), and a curious Barred



Kathy and Al Parker

Laura Hall



Kathy Parker

◀ Hooded warbler (*Setophaga citrina*). These neotropical migrant species breed in Canada and the U.S. and migrate to the Bahamas and Greater Antilles for the winter.

owl (*Strix varia*) that occasionally peers back at them, among many others.

Kathy and Al’s proximity to the Oconee River makes the conservation of their land especially important in safeguarding riparian habitat and water quality. Al gestures down the slope of the forest to the small stream that flows directly into the Oconee River. “The more these tributaries can be protected,” he notes, “the better wildlife habitat and drinking water quality will be on the Oconee River.”

Fortunately, Kathy says, their neighbors are also conservation-minded. “It’s great to be able to walk through these woods and not be able to see where one property starts and another ends,” Kathy remarks. “Our neighbors here have the same mindset as us when it comes to letting the forest stay wild.”

Kathy and Al have plans to continue restoring habitat on their property by removing damaging invasive plant species like Elaeagnes so that native plants can thrive. Many native plants are already flourishing in the hickory-oak-pine forest, including mayapples, bloodroot, and trillium.

Al observes that since the original forest was cut down for farmland, the present one will always be different than it was before.

... continued on page 6

DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

On our October hike in Oconee County at one of ORLT's earliest conservation easements, landowners Jane and Nick Bath led our group of ORLT members along a creek to the Apalachee River. I enjoyed the scenery and company, but I especially enjoyed hearing Jane's words of wisdom, gained from years of professionally designing landscapes and almost four decades of stewarding the Bath's own special land.



As we walked along the stream bank past the longest stretch of native azaleas ORLT's staff had ever seen, she reminded us that forests are not supposed to be "tidy"— fallen trees provide valuable habitat until they disappear into the forest floor. She also explained how planting native species requires a keen understanding of microclimate requirements such as sun exposure, slope, soil ph, and moisture, and that removing invasive species requires ongoing vigilance. Theory becomes much more meaningful and real when you hear it from the very people who cleared all the kudzu from the very field you're now standing in, with the native forest at your back.

Fall is a time of intense work at the land trust, albeit a little less physical than removing kudzu. Land trust staff are working to complete over twenty new conservation projects, conducting the last little bit of annual easement monitoring, educating the public about the Tallahassee Forest Park SPLOST project (it passed!), and planning for the return of next spring's Oconee River Belles concert. But we're not complaining, not when all this work means more chances in the future to walk through beautiful forests with generous people who love land, too. ■

—Steffney Thompson
Executive Director

Orange Twin Conservation Community

By Laura Hall

Thank you to UGA's Caribbean Student Association for partnering again with ORLT to remove invasive species from another easement—On Saturday November 2nd, CaribSA helped remove privet at the 100-acre Orange Twin Conservation Community property.

Noketchee Creek, a major tributary of the North Oconee River flows through the middle of the easement. A trail, which follows the stream, winds its way between large beech and poplar trees, through fern glades, and around groves of mountain laurel, native azalea and buckeye. Our work focused on restoring habitat along the creek, clearing invasive privet to make more room for species like the mountain laurel and native trees like the Carolina silverbell.

The land, only 5 miles north of downtown Athens, contains several Georgia priority habitats, which include: pine-hardwood forest, mesic sloped forest, bottomland hardwood forest and stream habitats. ■



Laura Hall

Green and gold (*Chrysogonum virginianum*)

Thank you to our amazing interns of 2019!



Zoe Andrews
Fall Music Business Intern



Hannah Mone
Summer Stewardship Outreach Intern



Meagan Sullivan
Summer Conservation Outreach Intern

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How Your ORLT Membership Protects Wildlife Biodiversity

By Caroline Johnson-Hall

Your support of the Oconee River Land Trust helps us protect many things: greenspace in a rapidly developing state, cleaner air and water quality, rare and priority habitats, and a biodiverse array of native plant and animal species.

The importance of wildlife biodiversity is increasingly well-studied – from its impact on ecological systems, to how it positively shapes our food and water systems. In Georgia, of our 4,000 species of native plants and vertebrate animals, an alarming 10% are at risk of extinction (GA Encyclopedia), primarily due to habitat loss.

Given that over 90% of Georgia is privately owned, every conservation easement

ORLT places is crucial to native species flourishing. ORLT is fortunate to work with a group of fantastic landowners that recognize the importance of promoting biodiversity on their properties. To highlight some of the incredible and varied species we've protected, we've asked landowners to send us photos of wildlife they've observed on their properties. Some of those photos, along with photos captured on easements by our stewardship staff, are highlighted on this page.

Thank you for your support of ORLT and Georgia's biodiverse wildlife! ■

Red-shouldered Hawk: Deforestation is the biggest threat to these birds, who can live up to twenty years, but rarely make it to ten.



Kathy Parker



Kathy Parker



Dr. Waldo Floyd III



Hadrien Turner



Dan Crescenzo

Black throated blue warbler: These neo-tropical migrants breed in North American forests and fly to the Caribbean and Central America for the winter, depending on forested corridors for their journey.

White tailed deer: While the number of points on a deer's antlers don't precisely tell age, more points do indicate better health and diet of the animal.

Eastern Box turtle: These turtles are threatened by habitat loss, illegal capture for the pet trade, and vehicle deaths. Their presence is a strong sign of habitat health.

Rough Green snake: These small non-venomous snakes are primarily insectivores. Female rough green snakes will often share a communal nest for breeding.



Participants harvest greenbriar to create a wild iced tea.

wildflower and wild greens salad, a wild greens pesto pasta, and a blackberry and hawthorne berry crumble. Iced tea made from pine, beautyberry leaves, and greenbriar helped participants cool off, along with craft beer provided by Akademia and fine wine provided by Shiraz. Both the workshop and dinner were hosted at Five Arrow Farms' open-air pavilion, with field, forest, and lake providing a beautiful backdrop.

Thank you to Five Arrow Farms, Marc, and all of our attendees and partners for making this a wonderful event! ■

Forage and Feast

On June 29th, ORLT hosted our first Forage and Feast dinner and workshop. 20 attendees, led by Asheville-based ethnobotanist Marc Williams, foraged and created a multi-course dinner.

Board member Madeline Van Dyck with the colorful wild flower and greens salad.



Forage and Feast was hosted at Five Arrow Farms in Social Circle, GA.



Two Moths and a Butterfly

by Daniel Crescenzo

The deciduous forests and woodlands of Georgia provide excellent habitat for many native moth and butterfly species (*Lepidoptera*).

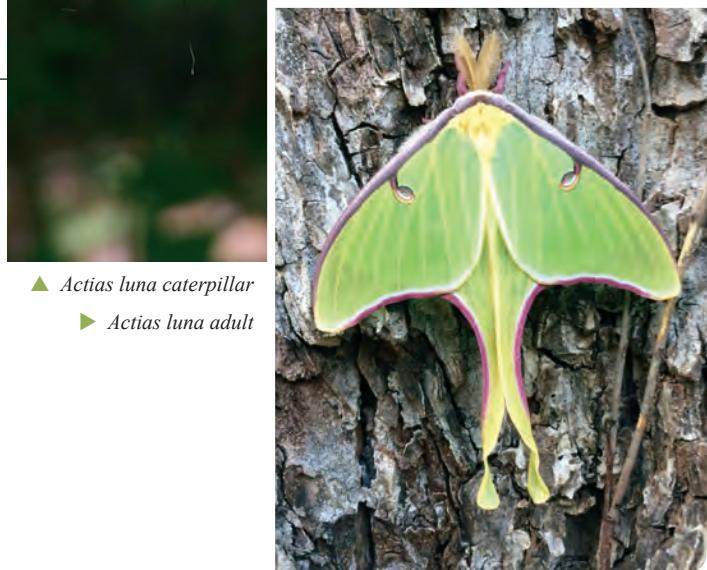
Over the years I have observed a number of these species on ORLT-protected lands. Here are three of my favorites:

► **Luna Moth (*Actias luna*):** This native of the Eastern United States and southern Canada is one of the most instantly recognizable of our native moths. It is the only native species to exhibit striking green coloration as an adult. The adult does not feed during its one-week lifespan, but the caterpillars feed on a variety of trees, including sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*), river birch (*Betula nigra*), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), hickories (*Carya spp.*), and sumac (*Rhus spp.*).



Photos by Dan Crescenzo unless otherwise noted

▼ **Regal Moth (*Citheronia regalis*):** The Regal moth – a.k.a. ‘Hickory-horned devil’, a.k.a. ‘Royal walnut moth’ – is another large moth native to the southeastern United States. It is, in fact, the largest moth by weight native to the United States and Canada, with a wingspan of up to 6 ¼”. Like the Luna moth, the adult Regal moth does not feed. As its common names suggest, the caterpillar often feeds on black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) and hickory (*Carya spp.*), but can also be found munching on sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*) and persimmon (*Diospyros virginiana*).



▲ *Actias luna* caterpillar

► *Actias luna* adult



Citheronia regalis caterpillar



Citheronia regalis adult

The Garden Roof Coop



► **Spicebush Swallowtail (*Papilio trolius*):** This species is common in the Eastern United States and adjacent Canada. Adult butterflies feed on the nectar of flowers and are often found on moist soil and rocks along streams where they congregate to drink the mineral-rich waters. The caterpillars, which feed on spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) and sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*), have two distinctive spots near the head. Thinking that these spots are the eyes of some larger creature, predators often think twice before attacking. The caterpillars also roll leaves up around their bodies with silk in order to hide when they aren’t eating. ■



▲ *Papilio trolius* caterpillar

► *Papilio trolius* adult

NC Department of Parks and Recreation

Tallassee Forest Nature Preserve Update

By Caroline Johnson-Hall

In our last newsletter, we highlighted a SPLOST 2020 project sponsored by ORLT, that would create the Tallassee Forest Nature Preserve on 310 acres located in western Clarke County along the Middle Oconee River. This special property is already owned by Athens-Clarke County and permanently protected by a conservation easement held by ORLT. The proposal is part of the final Clarke County SPLOST 2020 package, and will officially be funded now that SPLOST has passed!

We are excited to create opportunities for the public to experience this incredible forest, and provide an opportunity for hands-on environmental education for local students, including Burney-Harris Lyons students, who attend middle school directly across the street from the prospective park.

ORLT has hosted volunteer groups at Tallassee Forest to restore habitat by removing trash and invasive species. This semester, ORLT partnered with the UGA Caribbean Student Association and the Stello Initiative to remove invasive species like Chinese privet and Elaeagnus. Removing these species allows native plants to thrive, encourages biodiversity and provides crucial habitat for Tallassee Forest's rare species like the Gemmed Satyr Butterfly.

"The Caribbean Student Association had a blast helping out the Oconee River and Land Trust," says De-Ambra Burroughs, Community Service Co-chair for CaribSA. "We really enjoyed getting outdoors and making a true impact on the community. It would be amazing to see them accomplish their goal of turning Tallassee forest into a nature park. We hope that one day the students at Burney Harris Lyons Middle School will be able to expand their learning experiences outside the classroom and actually see the plants they learn about in their science classes." The Stello Initiative team returned with 30 additional volunteers on October 26th, restoring more habitat by clearing invasive plant species.

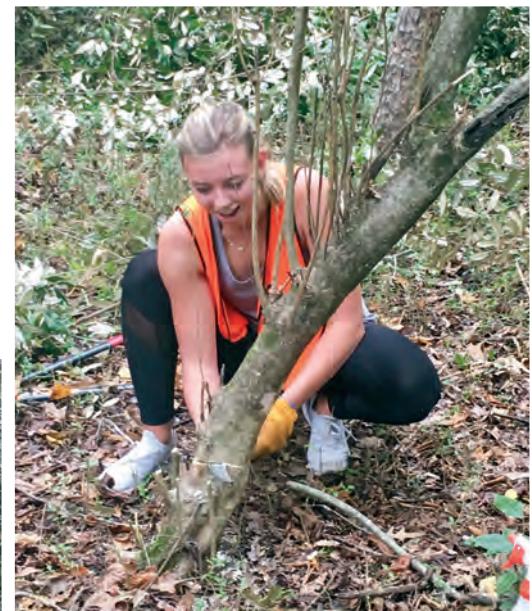
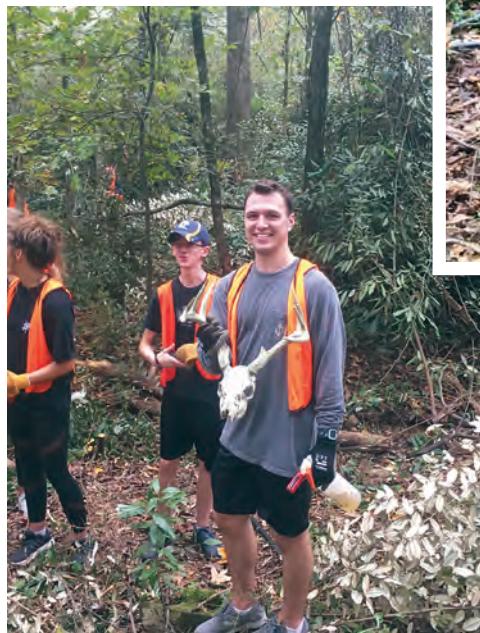
ORLT will continue to work with volunteer groups to protect native vegetation and restore habitat for Tallassee Forest's many rare species. A huge thanks to ACC for hosting us and our volunteers at the Caribbean Student Association and the Stello Initiative for all their hard work in habitat restoration to date, and to everyone who voted YES on SPLOST 2020 for making this park a reality. ■

One of our student volunteers found an intact deer skull while clearing out Elaeagnus.



CaribSA volunteers helping us clear invasive plants in October.

Hadrien Turner



A student from the Stello Initiative conference saws down a large Chinese privet tree.

Kathy & Al continued from page 1

"We can't restore it to exactly what it once was," he says. "But we can give it the space to grow and develop in new ways."

Small signs of the land's history remain among the trees- namely an old gravesite with a series of unmarked graves and one legible headstone reading 'M.J. Adams.' A friend of the Parkers tried to dig into UGA's newspaper archives for an obituary, but the newspaper for March 1st, 1920 was missing. This leaves the gravesite's inhabitants a mystery.

As they speak about what makes them passionate about conservation, both Kathy and Al speak fondly of long unchaperoned summer days they spent outside as children, exploring forests and building forts. When I ask them what they think the future of conservation is, Kathy alludes back to this idea. "Children have to have the opportunity to spend time outside if they're going to care about protecting green spaces," she says. "So few kids have the chance to do what we did in our generation and explore nature unsupervised."

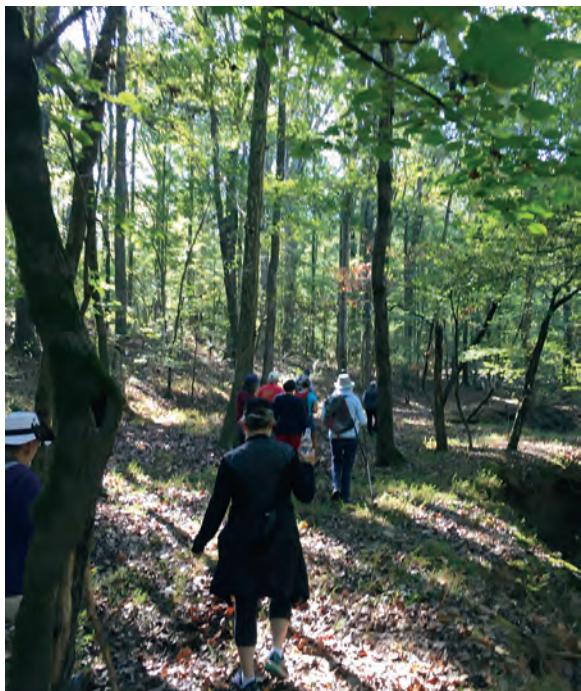
However, Kathy and Al's young niece and nephew have certainly been able to do so on this protected land. They've spent many a trip catching salamanders, meeting Eastern box turtles, and exploring the woods. To the Parkers, there's no question that they'll grow up with a love of the outdoors and a passion for protecting it. ■

Timber rattler (*Crotalus horridus*)



Kathy Parker

Barred owl (*Strix varia*)



Thank you to Jane and Nick Bath for hosting a hike on their easement on October 12th!

Upcoming Events

Membership celebration!

Saturday, November 16th, 2-4pm: Please join us at Smith Wilson and Dianne Penny's Clarke County farm for live music, hors d'oeuvres, a custom cocktail courtesy of the National, and other drinks as we celebrate 26 years of conservation in Georgia. Please RSVP to caroline@oconeeriverlandtrust.org.



Oconee River Belles Benefit Concert

Thursday, March 26th: We are excited to announce our third Oconee River Belles Benefit concert at the Foundry in Athens, with the Alison Brown Quartet returning as our headliner!



Thank you to our members!

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Tom and Carolyn Adams	Mack and Julie Duncan	Jeremy and Cardee Kilpatrick	Marc Ragin	Nina and Patrick Hellerstein
Shirley Andrews	Katherine Edison	Douglas Kleiber	Mark Ralston	Ann and Robert Wyatt
Chris Aubrey and Mary Lopez	Leslie Edwards	Scott and Heather Kleiner	Michael Ransom	Patricia Yager
Jack and Jane Armistead	Sarah Ellis	Steven Kozlosky	Carly and Lawson	Michael Phantja
Christy Baker Jenkins	Todd Emily	Susan Kreher	Thomas Rodgers	Khushbu Patu
June Ball	Dick and Susan Field	Linda Kundell	Margo and Art Rosenbaum	Kamie Amos
Martha and Wally Barton	Kathy and Waldo Floyd	Stephanie Leathers	Gene and Laura Ruffin	Dylan Lawson
Nicholas and Jane Bath	Laurie Fowler	Nancy Lindblom	Garth and Natalie Russo	Morli Amin
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Nancy Carter	Susie Haggard	Dorothy Macaulay	Margaret Spalding	Jessica Black
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Thank you for your support!

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“The mission of the Oconee River Land Trust is to conserve natural lands, protect water quality, preserve wildlife habitat, and enhance the quality of our lives and those of future generations.”

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