



PRESS 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 at <https://ow.ly/T8yj50Qhmcb>

BIRDS GEORGIA RECEIVES GOS GRANT FOR HABITAT RESTORATION ALONG CHATTAHOOCHEE RIVER

(ATLANTA, GA.) April 29, 2024 – Birds Georgia was recently awarded a Bill Terrell Avian Conservation Grant from the Georgia Ornithological Society (GOS) for a habitat restoration project that will restore riparian meadows and wildlife corridors along the Chattahoochee River. The restoration project will focus on restoring early successional habitat at the Cochran Shoals Unit of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area (CRNRA).

“We’re excited to receive this generous grant from GOS to restore bird-friendly habitat at Cochran Shoals CRNRA,” says Adam Betuel, director of conservation for Birds Georgia. “The Cochran Shoals Unit is a popular birding spot because it includes a mix of microhabitats, including riparian meadow, riparian woodland, and beaver-maintained wetland making it possible to see a wide array of birds throughout the year, but particularly during spring and fall migratory periods.”

Part of the project will focus on restoring the “sparrow field,” a roughly seven-acre portion of the area that is known to host an array of sparrows, including notable species such as Grasshopper Sparrow, Henslow’s Sparrow, Clay-colored sparrow, and LeConte’s Sparrow, among the more regular suite of species like Song Sparrows and Chipping Sparrows. Henslow’s and Grasshopper Sparrow are both listed as High Priority Species on Georgia’s State Wildlife Action Plan.

“As part of the grant-funded work, Birds Georgia will not only restore some of the sparrow field, but also improve its ecological value by removing non-native species and introducing a greater diversity of native

plants that would help beneficial pollinating insects including species like the endangered monarch butterfly,” says Adam Betuel, director of conservation for Birds Georgia.

In recent decades, many birds that rely on open and early-successional habitats have seen a decline in population due to habitat loss, pesticide use, and a variety of other factors. Grassland birds in particular have seen a decrease in population by about 53% since 1970 according to a 2019 study (<https://www.3billionbirds.org/findings>) conducted by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society, and other partners.

In collaboration with the National Parks Service at CRNRA and the Chattahoochee National Park Conservancy, Birds Georgia will improve and restore a minimum of 16.5 acres of bird-friendly habitat at the Cochran Shoals Unit of CRNRA, including the “sparrow field.” The remaining acreage will be treated for invasive plant species and opened up where possible to support early successional habitat acting as a buffer to protect the meadow space from problematic plant species. Birds Georgia’s Habitat Team and volunteers will remove non-native invasive plant species and knock back undesirable woody species, install new native vegetation, and promote the spread of currently existing native vegetation.

In the future, Birds Georgia will be seeking grant funding to create a wildlife corridor connecting the historic “sparrow field” to a site that is being opened up and restored into more grassland habitat for the introduction of a federally endangered plant species. This will be done in partnership with the National Park Service, Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Georgia Power, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other organizations.

“The work that Birds Georgia will be doing at Cochran Shoals CRNRA is part of the greater Chattahoochee RiverLands effort,” says Betuel. “In partnership with the Trust for Public Land and other partners, Birds Georgia is working to improve the ecological health of the Chattahoochee River basin to restore bird-friendly habitat that will benefit birds and people, too.”

Birds that will benefit from this improved habitat include Indigo Bunting, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and overwintering sparrows, as well as other resident and migratory birds who utilize riparian meadow and woodland habitat.

“In addition to the on-the-ground conservation work, Birds Georgia will engage, activate, and educate the public to understand Chattahoochee watershed concerns through community conservation work days, community science initiatives, and seasonal field trips,” says Betuel. “The Cochran Shoals Unit is one of the most birded locations in metro Atlanta (as evidenced by the more than 200 bird species and more than 4,500 check lists submitted via eBird at this location) and is an ideal candidate for additional education and engagement.”

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 National Audubon in 1973, and continues as an independent chapter of National Audubon Society. 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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