

BirdWalk Newsletter

11.20.2016 Thanksgiving Week Edition

Walk Conducted by Perry Nugent

Written by Jayne J Matney



Above photo by Cary McDonald

The Wild Turkey (North American Turkey): [Meleagris gallopavo](#)

The plantation's Wild Turkey is in the pheasant and grouse family and is one of two species of turkeys. The other is the Ocellated Turkey in Central America. The numbers of North American Turkey decreased considerably early in the 20th century, but due to conservation measures, they are starting to make a comeback. Now they are found in all states except Alaska. They were once up for the national symbol by Benjamin Franklin, but the Bald Eagle won out. For those that truly know wild turkey and their habits, unlike the domesticated turkeys, the wild turkey is considered to be very crafty, smart, magnificent animals.

They are omnivores, eating both plant and animal sources of food, but diet mostly on plant such as grains, seeds, acorn, buds, and grass. The animals that they feed on are the insects, spiders, snail and slugs, and sometimes frogs, salamanders, and lizards. Therefore, they are generally found in forested areas of a mixture of tree types with open clearings nearby. Especially fond of oaks, the Wild Turkeys' favorite food is the acorn! They are usually early morning or evening feeders on the ground, sorting through leaf litter on the surface. On occasion, they may eat berries out of the shrubbery as well.



Photo by Chris Smith

Even though they are apt fliers, they don't usually fly. One time, I came upon a Wild Turkey on the Waddell Mariculture Center road in Bluffton as I was driving out to speak with some of the biologist there. The turkey flew up right next to my car as I went by! It continued that flight at window height right along my passenger window for a few

hundred feet! The bird seemed to be content on staying low in flight. Their preferred mobility mode is walking or running. They are not migratory birds, yet they may “wander” from time to time especially in the fall. Like our peacocks here on the plantation, they roost in tall trees in the evening. Their sparse, shallow nests are usually placed on the ground at the base of trees, shrubs, or tall grasses.

Courtship behavior is very similar to the peacocks we have on Magnolia Plantation. The males’ wattles on their face swell (not in peacocks), their wings droop, they puff up their feathers, raise and spread their tails, strut, and shake their bodies to fibrilate their feathers while humming to its potential mate. Sound familiar? But Wild Turkey also gobble- instead of calling out like our peacocks. Once the courtship is over, there is no partnership with incubating eggs or tending the young. The eggs are laid, usually 10-15 light colored eggs with reddish, brown specks, and the female has the responsibility to incubate and tend the young. The young, however, leave the nest almost immediately, but are not fully grown until several months have passed.

Photo below by Ann Truesdale



Recently in the news, you may have heard about a woman bringing her pet turkey on a plane as her therapy pet. Although much different from the usual furry animals that we think of as therapy pets, many believe that these smart birds and other birds such as chickens are great therapy animals. If you are curious enough, the article by Xander Zellner on this very thing, can be found on the Audubon site: www.audubon.org/news/why-turkeys-and-other-birds-make-greattherapy-animals. The information of the above article was taken from the Audubon Society website, www.audubon.org.

**“Be Kind
Be Thoughtful
Be Genuine
But most of all
Be Thankful”**

Gratitude Habitat.com



The bird walkers identified 54 species this Sunday on a cold and breezy, but sunny day.

Highlights of the day:

- * **Golden-crowned Kinglet**
(first one sighted this year located in the oak grove woods)
- * **Black-throated Blue Warbler**
(winter plumage of drab body and diagnostic white square spot on bend of wing)
- * **American Goldfinch**
(4 of them today)
- * **Blue-headed Vireo**
(4 of these migrating birds)
- * **Northern Harrier**
(2 were near the cross dike)
- * **Bald Eagle**
(1 adult and 1 second year)
- * **Swallow-tailed Kite**

Boat-tailed Grackle Photo by Marina Coppedge



Male Bluebird (at left) female or immature bluebird (at right) Both Photos by Marina Coppedge

As the birders started out on their walk this the morning, they observed from near the parking lot area over 200 American Robin coming through in search of the holly berries and black gum fruits. The mockingbird, that usually stakes her claim there, was not pleased with their arrival. She was displaying a fussy behavior true to the strong-minded mockingbird temperament. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker were seen, mostly males, as common attractions on the property-numbering 10. The other woodpecker family members on the plantation seen that day were Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers, Pileated Woodpeckers, and Northern Flicker. An Osprey was viewed near the large rice field and 3 Red-shouldered Hawks were being harassed by crows near the Ravenswood and Audubon Swamp areas. Also located in these areas were the bluebirds. The Ruby-crowned Kinglet were commonly found along the walk, as were the Yellow-rumped Warbler and the Carolina Wren. Red-winged Blackbird, Black and Turkey Vultures, and Fish Crow were observed in reasonable numbers. 6 Tree Swallow were flying high on the river/house side of the property. Rounding out the passerine numbers were the Eastern Phoebe, Mourning Dove, Blue Jay, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Pine and Palm Warbler, Common

Yellow-throat, Song and Swamp Sparrows, Northern Cardinal, and Common Grackle. Found in the oak grove with the Golden-crowned Kinglet, were Black-and-white Warbler. 6 Hermit Thrush were investigating the low branches of the brush throughout the property.

Approximately 50 Common Moorhen were out on the rice pond and low-and-behold.....2 American Coot! (In case you are wondering, we have only had one in view for many weeks now, so both bird watchers and eagles have been watching intently for more.) Now we are up by one!

At the cross dike, many of our water birds were there: Pied-billed Grebe, Anhinga, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron, Tri-colored Heron, and White Ibis.

The ducks are coming in! 80 Gadwall, 80 Blue-winged Teal, 60 Green-winged Teal, but only 1 Ring-necked Duck made their appearances.



Photo by Cary McDonald

**“I’m thankful
for every
moment.”**

Al Green