



# No Wake Zone

St. Catherines Island — Research, Conservation, Education

Volume 8, Issue 5

May 2013



Special thanks to (L to R) top row: James Flynn, Jr., Earl Horn, Steve Holzman, Jeff Sewell, Dave Hedeem, Joel McNeal  
Bottom Row: Rachel Cass, Choctaw, Carol Lambert, Meg Hedeem, & Mark Freeman

## St. Catherines Island 6th Annual Spring Migration Count By Jenifer Hilburn

Spring comes and the birders arrive prepared to find itty-bitty little migrating warblers and other passerines for the St. Catherines Island Spring Migration Count. Arriving on Friday night, checking the beaches in the evening (for shorebirds), getting a little bit of sleep, and then Saturday morning the count starts. Counters get up before dawn (generally around 4am), to go count owls in their assigned sections, and if they are close to the houses they can return for a little breakfast before a very long day of scouring the island for migrating feathered friends (although all birds are counted). A total of 148 species were recorded, and 8,153 individuals.

This year birders were pleased to see 4 Common Ground-doves in North Pasture, one of the only places these birds are seen on the island. Although called Common, and listed as a species of low concern nationally, it is known to be declining in many areas of Georgia, particularly on the barrier islands (Beaton, 2003). Royce Hayes, Jr. has been keeping an eye on them over the last few decades and has never seen more than a group of four, and usually only a pair.

Common Ground-Doves are the smallest of the North American doves, and one of the smallest in the world. They live in arid, open woodlands in the early stages of forest development, including pine woods, hammocks, forest edges, coastal dunes, river bottom woodlands, deserts, oak scrublands, and savannas. They make their living by gleaning small seeds from wild grasses and weeds. It's estimated that a Common Ground-Dove has to eat more than 2,500 seeds every day to meet its energetic demands and it can store hundreds of seeds in its two-lobed crop, an enlarged pocket of the esophagus (Cornell Lab of Ornithology). Ground-doves also feed on small berries and insects. In spring and summer they may eat snail shells, possibly to replenish the calcium devoted to eggs and crop-milk during nesting. Most species in the dove/pigeon family produce crop-milk. Both male and female use a secretion from the esophagus, known as crop milk, to feed nestlings, known for being extremely nutritious (much more so the mammalian milk). Since they do not have to rely on specific food items for their chicks, ground-doves can have a long breeding season with multiple broods. As this dove nests and feeds on the ground, it lives in constant danger of predation from terrestrial animals like bobcats, opossums, raccoons, pigs, and snakes. Birds will hunt it too, including crows, jays, blackbirds, owls, hawks, falcons, and shrikes. The ground dove's main weapon against predators is concealment: hiding in vegetation or simply blending into the dusty ground. This of course, conceals them to birders as well.... Good eye team!



Editor-in-Chief Jenifer Hilburn

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# The First International Shorebird Survey on St. Catherines Island

By Meghan Hedeem



On April 19, 2013, SCI joined one of the most significant shorebird monitoring programs in North America. The Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences started the International Shorebird Survey in 1974 and has logged data from approximately 80,000 surveys at more than 2,000 sites across the country (<http://www.manomet.org/programs/shorebird-conservation/international-shorebird-survey-iss>). The Georgia Department of Natural Resources recently joined Manomet in its effort to improve the data collected by systematically identifying locations to be added to the survey. St. Catherines Island was one of the locations on the Georgia coast to be surveyed for the first time this year.



Dave Hedeem working the birds on S. Beach

These surveys, which monitor shorebird populations and the habitats used during migration, are conducted three times in the spring and three times in the fall in Georgia. Each survey is conducted within 2 hours of high tide, as the water level limits the habitats available to the shorebirds. As a result, the shorebirds congregate in areas with exposed sand or mudflats. The SCI count consisted of two survey teams; one team (Jim Flynn and Bud Horn) surveyed the area known as “The Rakes” (along the Intracoastal Waterway) while my team (Dave Hedeem, Laney White and myself) surveyed the South Beach.

Shortly after being dropped off at the South Beach by Island Ornithologist and Boat Captain extraordinaire, Jen Hilburn, we turned our attention to the mixed species flock of shorebirds across the beach. Laney White, the American Oystercatcher Field Technician and survey team member, quickly re-found an American Oystercatcher nest known to be nearby and erected signs to alert any potential beach visitors of the sensitive area. As we worked to tease out the number and species of shorebirds in the first flock we encountered, a Wilson’s Plover near our feet caught our attention by dragging its wing in the sand. Immediately identifying this as nest protection behavior, we walked farther down the beach and away from the Plover and its presumed nest site. (Laney returned a few days later and found the Plover nest.) And the counting continued. There were hundreds



Laney White placing signs in front of an Oystercatcher nest.



Wilson's Plover

of shorebirds in a single flock, including Dunlin, Semi-palmated Plovers, Short-billed Dowitchers, Black-bellied Plovers, Sanderling, Ruddy Turnstones, American Oystercatchers and Wilson’s Plovers.

After counting every last bird in the flock, our three person survey crew continued down the beach. In the distance, we could see a log lying across the beach. But, as we approached, it became clear that the log was an American Alligator, sunning itself on the beach,

directly in our path. We carefully maneuvered between the Alligator and the tide, keeping one eye on the Alligator, and continued down the beach. After surveying all of the locations at South Beach where shorebird concentrations are expected, we rendezvoused once more with Captain Jen.

We left South Beach with a tally of 3,009 shorebirds representing 14 different species. The dapper Dunlin was the most numerous species, with 1,969 individuals! The survey was a great success and is one more contribution that St. Catherines Island has made to support research and conservation.

