

Birdsong Nature Center

July-August 2022

**TRAILS OPEN WEDNESDAYS, FRIDAYS, SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS;
HOUSE AND BIRD WINDOW REMAIN CLOSED.**

*Hours: Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays 9 to 5
Sundays 1 to 5*

July

Trails open Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays
Free Family Day on July 2nd

August

Trails open Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays
Free Family Day on August 6th

Please, no pets on Nature Center property.

Admission: members, free; non-member adults, \$5.00; children 4-12, \$2.50

Please see our website at www.birdsongnaturecenter.org in advance of your visit for our Covid safety protocols.

Dear Friends,

We're pleased to note that over the last couple of months several important land management objectives have been achieved on the property. As you're aware, prescribed burning is an important yearly undertaking, and it can be a challenging one given the variables involved – weather (rain, humidity, temperature, wind, etc.), the prescription for targeted burn site, considerations for other events occurring on the property, etc. This year the weather was particularly challenging. But we are very happy to have achieved burning 70% of the property, very close to our burn goal (80%) and an important accomplishment. Special thanks to our exceptional volunteer burn crew and Birdsong staff for their perseverance!

Other important land management objectives completed are the filling and grading of the roadway into Birdsong, mowing of brush along both sides of the dams at Big Bay Swamp and the Farm Pond (which requires some interesting mowing equipment), repair of the Upper Pond spillway, and replacing culverts near the planted longleaf site and the Wild Azalea Garden. We very much appreciate the kind comments visitors have made regarding the newly graded road into Birdsong. Our excellent volunteer construction crew has made significant progress repairing the porch bathroom of the House. The Butterfly Garden is in wonderful shape, attracting wide varieties of butterflies, bees, and other insects, thanks to our very dedicated Butterfly Garden volunteers. Work also continues in earnest on the GOSP grant project which we hope to have completed by early 2023. Per this grant we will be placing Birdsong's property into a conservation easement administered by Tall Timbers. We are in the process of reviewing all the associated legal documents.

We want to thank all of you, our members, donors, and visitors for your very kind support of Birdsong Nature Center. We hope you will visit one day soon to enjoy the 12 miles of trails winding throughout the property. The warm, humid mid-summer season is upon us, the foliage is lush and green, and wildlife activities are in full swing. Bring some cool water to drink and come enjoy what Mother Nature has to offer. As always, please let us know of interesting sightings along the way!

With warmest wishes,
Joe Peresich, Board Chair

BIRDSONG NATURE CENTER
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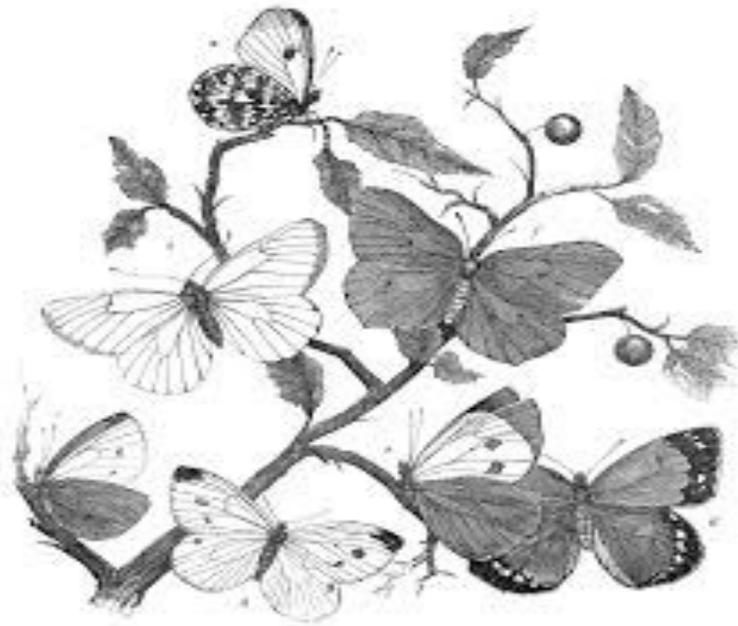
FALL PLANT SALES
Dates for your calendar!

This hot summer is not an inspiring season for gardening. But the Birdsong Old-Timey Plant Sale workers are already looking forward to Fall. We are rooting cuttings, making divisions, and potting up young trees. One donor has provided us with 30 bald cypress seedlings with an interesting history. We'll have two fall plant sales:

October 15th and November 5th
Saturdays from 9am to 1pm

We'll be selling woody plants, trees, and perennials that will benefit from fall planting. We hope to see you then!

- June White
Plant Sale Chair



BUTTERFLY GARDEN WORKDAY
Thursdays, July 7 and August 4
9:00AM to Noon

Birdsong's Butterfly Gardeners meet on the first Thursday of each month at 9am.

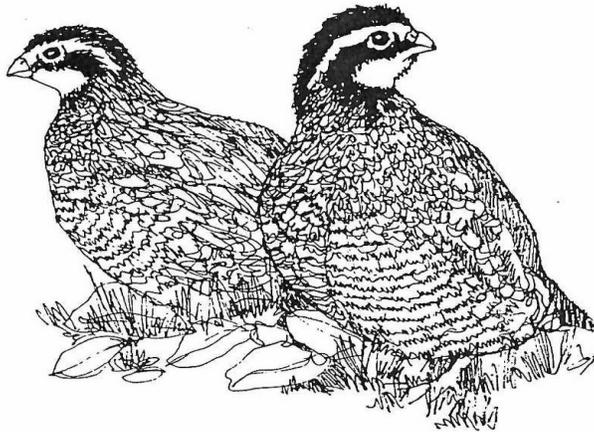
Please feel welcome to join this accomplished and active crew of volunteers to tend our beautiful Butterfly Garden! The team is also helping to remove invasives from the garden around the House. Bring gardening gloves, knee pads, clippers, and lunch if you wish to stay afterwards.

For more information call Donna Legare at (850)386-1148 or Birdsong at (229)377-4408.

RECENT SITE PROJECTS

We have recently completed several site improvements on the property. The first one you will notice is the restoration of the entrance driveway. This is something that we have to do periodically on our sloped earthen driveway – heavy rains and traffic over time cause erosion of the gravel and clay surface. We also had the sides of the Farm Pond dams and Big Bay Swamp dams mowed. Our dams were built in the 1940's, designed with very steep sides, and we do not have the equipment necessary to mow them, so it doesn't take long for the brush to get head-high. Now you can walk the dams and see out into the swamp and across the pond! Another improvement at the Farm Pond is the repair work done on the Upper Pond Spillway. It had eroded and become rutted, limiting vehicle access. It was also very muddy and impassable when we had a heavy rain. The spillway was leveled and a layer of military cloth, a type of permeable webbing, was laid down and then covered with a heavy layer of limerock. We also replaced one culvert that had collapsed out near the longleaf pines and re-designed the road over the culvert by the Wild Azalea Gardens.

We are extremely pleased with these repairs. The projects have improved access and water flow on the property. We worked with a Cairo company, B & E Land Development, and can recommend them. The owners, Doc Bellingflower and Paul Edenfield, understood the basic problems, corrected them, and were attentive to our aesthetic concerns. We hope you like the results too!



AUGUST BREAK

Birdsong will be closed for the August break from Sunday, August 21st through Tuesday, September 6th and will re-open on Wednesday, September 7th. We will resume our current schedule and the trails will be open on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays from 9 to 5 and Sundays from 1 to 5. The Bird Window and Gift Shop will remain closed for now.

FREE FAMILY DAYS

First Saturdays: July 2nd and August 6th

On first Saturdays admission is free and we will offer a \$5-off membership special. If you know of any families who have never been to Birdsong, please let them know about this opportunity. This is a nice chance for first-time visitors to enjoy the trails and get to know the property.

Admission: free

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT NOTES

June 15, 2022

Weather As far as we are concerned it is officially summer. We are in a pattern of sweltering temperatures, high humidity and daily afternoon showers. It rained a lot in April (7.44 inches) and there was no typical May drought this year, but we had enough dry days to get a lot of burning done. We had 3.31 inches of rain in May and 1.05 so far in June.

Spring was beautiful and lengthy and we enjoyed a lot of lovely cool mornings and low humidity/blue sky days throughout April and May. Our winter burns have greened up and the entire property is now flourishing. The weather was ideal for migrants passing through and for our busy courting residents and we still hear lots of singing throughout the day, all across the property. One call we particularly enjoy is that of the Bobwhite Quail. We don't see them often, but they make their presence known.

Land Management Our focus here at the Center over the past three months has been on our land and site stewardship, with most of our attention on prescribed burning. Please see the article on page 3 regarding our recent site improvements. We had gotten behind on our burning at a number of sites these past two years, primarily due to Covid, and we made a commitment this spring to get caught up, whatever it took. Thanks to the dedication of our volunteer burn crew, we made major inroads into our top problem areas. Our team was willing to work in very challenging conditions, high heat and humidity, and we did some intense burning. The weather was unexpectedly rainy off and on, so we had to work around that, but we were able to get 11 good warm-season burns in before these recent daily afternoon thundershowers started (we had already done 4 burns this winter). We still have a few additional areas we want to burn hot, so we will wait for ideal conditions to complete our plan for this year.

If you can come out soon to Birdsong and go for a walk you will see evidence of the burning everywhere you go. We are particularly pleased with our results at three sites you may be familiar with: the Gin House Field, the planted longleaf pines, and the Wildlife Woods.

We use Birdsong's trails as firelanes, which complicates our burning. We do not want to harrow firelanes around every site or habitat we burn, so harrowing is used on our periphery and on a few special spurs. Otherwise, we burn from our mowed grass trails, which increases risk of the fire crossing that line, especially in very low humidities. Alan has devised an excellent way to prep our trails to reduce risk – he mows the edge we'll burn from and then may also use a leaf blower to reduce flammable duff. It works real-

ly well, along with the water line he runs from the tank on the tractor in advance of laying a line of fire. So we go into our burns with well-prepared firelanes, but they are still grassy and flammable. We burn very strategically and this includes patiently burning the areas surrounding a risky site in advance so that these areas are blackened with all fuel used up before we burn the main target site.

This is how we approach burning the Gin House Field: we first burned the block to its east, later the edge of Big Bay Swamp to its south. Once those areas are burned, with a northerly wind we can safely set a very hot fire heading south. This year we did the Gin House in two sections, first setting a head fire across the southern half, then we did the same from the north perimeter towards the central trail.

We also had an additional complication this year – we burned in May, much later than usual, and well into Eastern Bluebird nesting season. This meant that any boxes with babies or eggs had to be protected. Alan always mows and weed-whacks a protective circle around each box in this field, but this year more was needed. We got our Bluebird Monitors' nesting information and right before setting the fire in the field, Carolyn Cohen and I rode around the field in the mule to each box that had babies or eggs in it, took it off the pole, put it in a box with the others, and took them all to the Listening Place where they'd be safe for the duration of the burn. As soon as the fire went through, we went back and replaced the boxes on their correct pole. Sandra Sallee helped with this same effort when we burned the adjacent Lewis Field a few days later. All our protected birds fledged!

The Gin House burned really hot. It was impressive and very smoky and was exactly what was needed. The field is currently greening up beautifully.

We also conducted a nice hot burn through the Wildlife Woods and Mill Field. I won't explain our entire strategy here, but this place really needed the burn and conditions were intense around the entire line. This too was exactly what we wanted and we're looking forward to seeing how this affects the woods within the next year.

The other area we've wanted to burn for some time is the planted longleaf stand. These pines had not been burned since they were planted, and the understory was extremely thick with herbaceous vegetation. It wasn't passable. So Alan prepped this area with a series of meandering walkable trails within the pine stand. Our plan was to keep the fire from getting too hot by dropping matches at intervals all through the stand, rather than lighting one big line that would carry through all at once. We wanted to burn this early in the season to avoid scorching the growing tips later in the spring but had trouble getting a permit because of smoke dispersion issues. Here, too, we burned three sections surrounding the pines before finally getting

the ideal conditions we wanted on May 20th. It was hot work, but our crew did a great job and it burned perfectly. The growing tips of the branches were not scorched, but the underbrush got cooked. We could not be more pleased.

These are just several special areas we are thrilled to have burned so effectively. Many other sites also burned exactly as intended and we are extremely pleased with the results. Please come out for a walk soon and see what we are talking about. Our intent is to get completely caught up with our burning this year and conduct one more season of remedial burning in 2023. Then we'll be up to date with our annual burning and be able to be even more strategic at specific sites.

I can never thank our intrepid crew enough. These folks worked under very difficult conditions to make this all happen. They are each amazing in their own way and bring specific skills to each burn, but as a team they are courageous and unstoppable. They make a hard job a lot of fun. Thank you: Carolyn Cohen, Sandra Sallee, Karen Berkley, Bill Carroll, Ken Kuhl, Scott Ball, Russ Barrett, and Alan Parker. Well done! (Pun intended.)

Purple Martins As of today, we are pleased to let you know that three of our four martin families have fledged their broods. Apparently most fledging events take place very early in the mornings before we get to the property. We are aware when this happens because the excitement level and accompanying martin noise goes way up and lasts all day. Once the babies have made their first flight, sometimes to the nearest tree, parents loudly urge the fledglings to keep flying, so there is a lot of commotion. These early families then appear to take the young and move around with them for a few days - baby martins in training. They do come back and hang out at the pole from time to time, but right now we are counting 13 adults and new flyers, not the expected numbers for all adults and babies fledged. There are also just two males present lately, which indicates that the remaining two couples are still here feeding or training their rapidly growing offspring.

There is now one remaining gourd containing two babies. They are sleek and fully feathered and today could be the day. The parents refrain from feeding when the time is close, to get those babies out and flying, so both birds are hungry and jostling for position in hopes of another dragonfly. There is a lot of racket down there today!

Even though we only had four couples raise babies this year, the martins never cease to cheer us up. We really enjoy their presence – they are charming, entertaining, and very musical. They are phenomenal flyers and devoted parents that work very hard looking

after their broods. We've seen them go into attack mode on two occasions when a Crow showed interest and when a Cooper's Hawk made a foray toward the pole. Each time there was a full-on and loud frontal attack by the entire colony and the marauders were summarily run off. Lynn tells me that today a Kingbird made the mistake of attacking a bird off by itself. Almost instantly all 13 birds flew in and raucously kicked that Kingbird out of the House Pasture. When we get this close to fledging time and the parents are in heightened protection mode, they fear nothing and will buzz and scold us sometimes when we walk past.

We are looking forward to this imminent fledging and expect a few more days of cheerful martin activity. Then our martins will leave, another successful breeding season accomplished, and their colony will head for the coast to prep for the long trip back to Brasil. We wish them well on the journey and hope that next year we have a full house at the martin pole.

Swallow-tailed Kites One of our most elegant birds, the Swallow-tailed Kite is an extraordinary flyer and dramatic in appearance: black and white with long slim wings and scissored tail. Historically it has been rare to see a Swallow-tailed Kite at Birdsong; even one sighting a year is something we get excited about. The closest place these beautiful birds have been seen at all frequently is over on the Ochlockonee River floodplain to our west. So, we have been very surprised over the past three or so months to have had many sightings of these stunning Kites. Alan Parker has reported seeing them numerous times circling over the south edge of the Lewis Field. Lynn has taken some wonderful photos of them out on several birding walks; one has even posed for her perched high on the top of a snag. We have also seen them flying right over the House, Pecan Grove and Barn. Just last Wednesday when we were burning south of the House Pasture Alan spotted one soaring through our column of smoke, probably hunting for insects. We are not sure what is going on but are wondering if they have nested nearby. These kites are fond of nesting in tall trees near open lowland woods and fields, and our Gin House Field and swamp and Gentian Slough meet those criteria, so we are now all on the lookout for kites! Please let us know if you spot any, anywhere at Birdsong. We are very curious about what is going on, plus we love any opportunity to see them – there is nothing like watching a Swallow-tailed Kite on the wing, graceful and exquisite.

- KDB

NEW FRIENDS OF BIRDSONG

Tallahassee

Samantha Smith-Jones
Kurt and Beth Hodges

BIRDSONG NATURE CENTER WISHES TO THANK:

In Memory of Alfred B. Devereaux Jr.:

Melissa Devereaux

In Memory of Katherine Chamberlin:

Charlene Powell

Special Financial Gifts:

John and Dede Yow
Ed and Marylyn Feaver
Timothy Lehman



Birdsong Nature Center Board of Directors 2020-2021

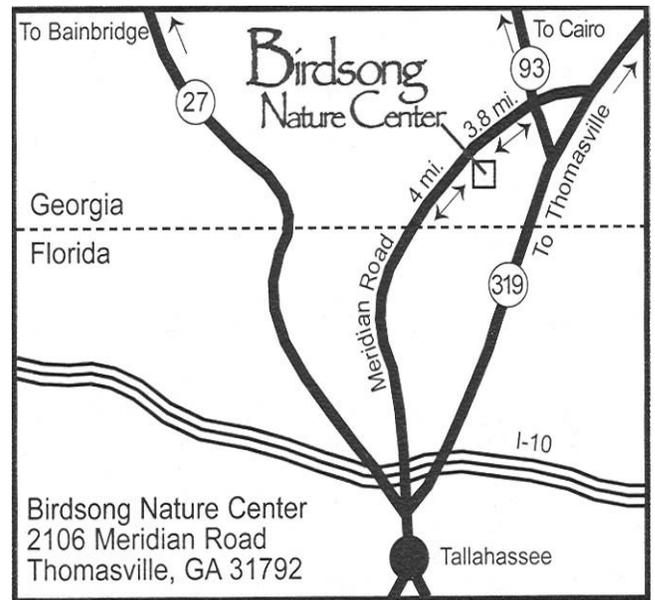
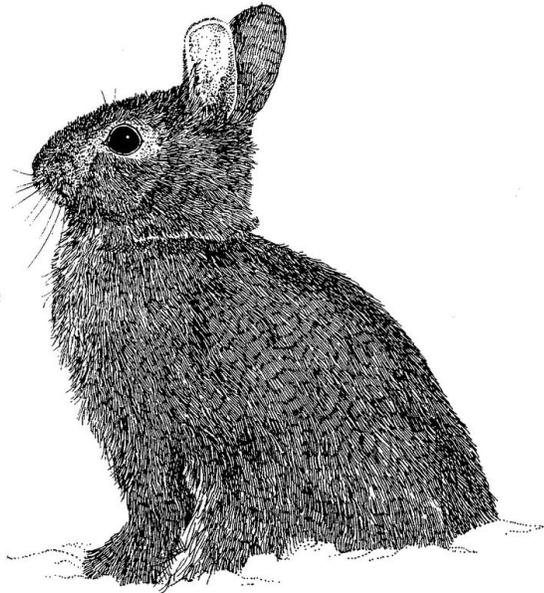
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DIRECTIONS:

From Tallahassee: Meridian Road north, 4 miles past FL/ GA border (marked by a blue sign that reads Grady Co.), on right side of road. OR 319 north, turn left onto Rt. 93, then turn left onto Meridian Road, 3.8 miles on left side of road.

From Thomasville: 319 south, turn right at Marathon gas station onto Meridian Road, approximately 5 miles from Marathon or 3.8 miles from stop sign at Rt. 93, on left side of road.

Watch for small sign that reads "Birdsong".

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*Birdsong Nature Center
2106 Meridian Road
Thomasville, GA 31792
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