

TERN TRACKS

Newsletter of The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (TERN) ~ www.tern.homestead.com

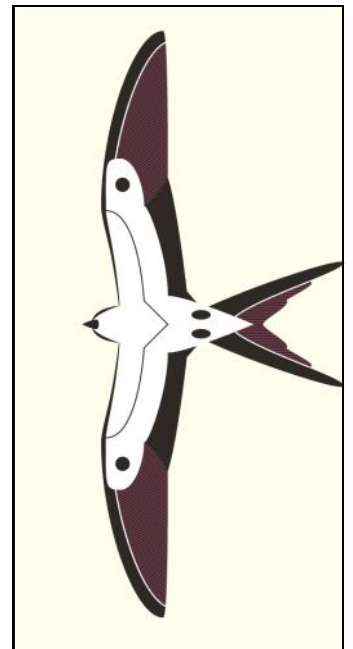
Holiday Issue 2014

Help Support Georgia's Nongame Wildlife At the 27th Annual Weekend for Wildlife Benefit

Join hosts Governor and Mrs. Deal and fellow TERN members at the 2015 Weekend for Wildlife benefit on February 6-7 at The Cloister on Sea Island, Georgia. For more than 25 years the has brought together corporate and legislative leaders with conservation minded citizens to raise funds for nongame wildlife conservation in Georgia. Many thanks to the Georgia Natural Resources Foundation for lending its enthusiastic support to TERN's long standing collaboration with this event.

Wildlife benefit on
Weekend for Wildlife

Each year, TERN sells gift items to over 400 guests at the MarketPlace booth and solicits donations like handmade jewelry, fishing expeditions, autographed collectables and original artwork for the silent and verbal auctions. *Please support TERN by donating items for the booth or auction* (visit www.weekendforwildlife.com for auction donation forms and additional auction details). Or, if you prefer, *a monetary donation would also be helpful*. Donations are 100% tax deductible. All of the proceeds are used to fund various Nongame Conservation Section projects that will be voted on by TERN members at the summer membership meeting in May 2015.



For more information on the 27th annual Weekend for Wildlife and how to register to attend the 2015 event, contact the Wildlife Resources Division headquarters office (706-557-3325) or visit www.weekendforwildlife.com for an electronic copy of the brochure. To donate a gift item or volunteer at the event, contact Wanda Granitz at wandagranitz@windstream.net. We hope to see you in February!

2015 Weekend for Wildlife Theme

The variety of neotropical migrants is almost as amazing as the journeys some of these birds make.

Neotropical migrant denotes “new world” birds (“neo” refers to the Americas) that breed in North America and winter in the tropics—the Caribbean, Central America, and most of Mexico and South America. The phrase describes more than 300 species. They vary in size and color from gaudy painted buntings to sooty black vultures and from secretive cerulean warblers to soaring swallow-tailed kites.

Many neotropical migrants either nest in Georgia or migrate through our state. Some cross the Gulf of Mexico. Some hug the coast and island-hop. Others veer westward, staying over land for their entire spring and fall migrations. These twice-a-year treks can test the imagination. Whimbrels outfitted with transmitters in Georgia have been tracked flying 4,500 miles nonstop, from Canada's Hudson Bay to Suriname!

Georgians have rich opportunities to not only watch and enjoy neotropical migrants, but also to help conserve them and the habitats they need. This effort is vital for these birds. The National Audubon Society estimates that populations of some species have declined as much as 80 percent. Others have shrunk by half.

Why? The number one reason is habitat loss. Land-use changes are destroying key breeding and foraging areas.

But the Georgia DNR's Nongame Conservation Section is working hard in many ways to (continued on page 10)

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T.E.R.N.

The Environmental Resources Network

Friends of Georgia's Nongame Conservation Section

The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (TERN) is the official friends group of the Nongame Conservation Section of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. Contributions made to TERN go directly to help fund important nongame plant and animal projects conducted in Georgia. To become a member or donate to TERN, visit:

www.tern.homestead.com

Give the Gift of TERN for the Holidays

Special Occasion Gifts

TERN would like to help you celebrate life's many joyful moments. Consider honoring a friend or family member on the occasion of a birthday, anniversary, engagement, graduation or Seasonal Holiday with a gift to TERN. You and the person being honored will be making an important contribution to the conservation of Georgia's vital nongame and endangered wildlife.

In response to your gift, an attractive acknowledgement card will be promptly sent to the person being honored. You will receive a charitable tax receipt along with our thanks. TERN is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and is 100% tax deductible.

Memorial Gifts

A memorial donation to The Environmental Resources Network, Inc. (TERN) is a meaningful way to remember a loved one.

Your gift can help address Georgia's nongame and endangered wildlife's greatest current need. In response to your gift, an attractive acknowledgment card will be sent to the family informing them of your thoughtfulness. You will receive a charitable tax receipt along with our thanks.

Your gift in honor or memory of a loved one will help to ensure that our mission of protection, conservation and education of Georgia's nongame wildlife is met. Thank you.

Merry Christmas and
Happy New Year!

TO OUR TERN
Family and
Friends!



Ambrose Chosen to Lead Nongame Conservation Section

Rick Lavender, NCS communications/outreach specialist

Ecologist and longtime conservation leader Dr. Jon Ambrose has been named chief of the Georgia Wildlife Resources Division's Nongame Conservation Section.

Ambrose, a 27-year employee of the Department of Natural Resources agency, fills the position left vacant by Mike Harris, who recently began work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Ambrose had served as the Nongame Conservation Section's first and only assistant chief since 2004.

Wildlife Resources Division Director Dan Forster emphasized that record in his recent announcement.

"Jon's strong education and experience, coupled with his commitment and familiarity with the section and division missions, will serve him and our efforts well leading this critical unit forward," Forster said.

As chief, Ambrose supervises an agency charged with conserving Georgia's rare and other nongame wildlife – those not legally fished for or hunted – plus native plants and the natural habitats these species need. The Nongame Conservation Section conducts research, surveys, education, land acquisition and habitat management, often partnering with other agencies and organizations.

About 95 percent of Georgia wildlife species are nongame, from bald eagles to big-eared bats. In 2011, wildlife-watching focused largely on nongame involved an estimated 2.4 million people and more than \$1.8 billion in expenditures statewide. Yet, Nongame Conservation receives no state appropriations for its work, depending instead on grants, contributions and fundraisers, such as sales and renewals of the eagle and hummingbird license plates.

Ambrose said Harris helped lay a solid foundation for the section. His goal is to build on it.

"There's a tremendous amount to do," he said. "But we have an excellent staff and great conservation partners. We'll continue down that road, taking a science-based strategic approach to address high-priority nongame conservation issues."

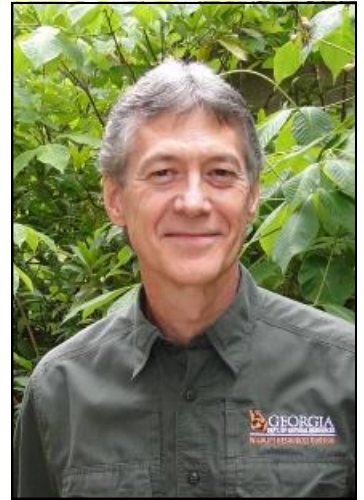
The effort will be guided by Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan, a comprehensive conservation strategy that is being revised this year. Ambrose is leading the revision and implementation of the plan.

Ambrose began his career as an ecologist with DNR in 1986, the same year he completed a doctorate in ecology at the University of Georgia. He later managed the Georgia Natural Heritage Program, coordinating biological research, conservation, surveys and a vital database that now tracks nearly 1,200 rare plant and animal species and more than 180 natural communities in the state.

As assistant chief, he helped oversee Nongame Conservation Section projects statewide. Ambrose also served as State Wildlife Action Plan coordinator, guiding the creation with partner organizations of Georgia's first plan in the early 2000s.

He is a 2011 graduate of the National Conservation Leadership Institute and serves as chair of the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' Wildlife Action Plans Committee. Ambrose co-authored *The Natural Communities of Georgia*, published by University of Georgia Press in 2013, a comprehensive overview of the state's natural landscapes, providing an ecological context to enhance understanding of this region's natural history.

He and his wife, Dana, live in Watkinsville. They have an adult daughter and son.



TERN—A Conservation Success Story

One Woman + Generous Volunteers X 23 Years = \$1 million

Terry W. Johnson, TERN Executive Director

During the dedication of the office of the fledgling Nongame-Endangered Wildlife Program (NGEWP), on a hot summer day in 1990, I overheard a dignitary in the audience say to the person standing beside him, "I give the Program three years before it folds."

Jump forward to 2014. The dire prediction proved to be wrong. The NGEWP has been renamed the Nongame Conservation Section (NCS). What began as one biologist, now employs dozens of women and men and better meets the conservation needs of Georgia's nongame wildlife and plants than at any other time in our history.

There are many reasons for the remarkable success and growth of the NCS. However, it is due in large part, to its friends group --- The Environmental Resources Network (TERN).

Historically one of the biggest obstacles facing nongame programs across the land has been the lack of a dedicated, dependable source of funding. Georgia was no different. When I was selected to head up the fledgling NGEWP in 1988, the plan was for the Program to operate solely off donations and federal grants.



A voluntary Income Tax Checkoff was signed into law. However, since the law would not come into effect for three years, Governor Zell Miller established a Blue Ribbon Committee to raise operating funds for Nongame. The Committee was charged with the responsibility of raising \$100,000. If the amount was raised, the Governor's office would match it with another \$100,000. These funds were to support the Program until the income tax checkoff kicked in. Fortunately the Committee was successful in its efforts.

As has been the case in all states where checkoffs have been used to fund nongame wildlife conservation, the success of checkoffs quickly attracted the attention of other worthy causes. Such was the case in Georgia, once competing checkoffs took their place on the Georgia Income Tax Form, donations to the Program plummeted.

Consequently it became abundantly clear that other dedicated funding sources were needed before Georgia's Nongame Program could effectively address the conservation needs of 95% of the state's wildlife resources.

With this in mind, in early 1991, I conceived the idea of forming a friends group. The group would serve as an advocate for the Nongame Program and raise funds for its conservation efforts. Since the monies were raised by a private entity they would be immune to the vagaries of Legislature appropriations.

I knew that the key to the success of this venture was selecting the right person willing to take on this formidable task.

Topping my short list of people possessing the unique set of skills needed to handle the job was Eva Persons. I was very familiar with Eva's qualifications. At the time she was the first and only NGEWP volunteer. She possessed a wealth of experience as a volunteer having served for organizations such as Ocmulgee Mounds National Monument and the Jarrell Plantation State Historic Site. She had a great personality, was an avid sportswomen and passionate supporter of wildlife conservation.

On a pleasant afternoon later that year, I met with Eva, her husband Robert and Robin Russell (a public affairs officer assigned to promote the NGEWP by the DNR Commissioner's Office) on the front porch to Eva's home. With my heart pounding I asked her if she would be willing to spearhead the formation of a friends group I tentatively named Georgians for Wildlife. My spirits soared when she agreed to take on this monumental task.

It is easy to envision a friends group, and far more difficult to make it happen. Eva quickly



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demonstrated that she was up to the task.

She immediately went to work. One of the first things she asked me to do was come up with a more suitable name for the organization. She wanted the name simple but descriptive. After much thought, I finally settled on the acronym TERN which stands for The Environmental Resources Network.

She then embarked on the complex task of developing the organization's by-laws, preparing the Articles of Incorporation, and filing for tax-exempt status with the State of Georgia and Internal Revenue Service. Eva retained the services of local attorney Ashley Hawkins to help with the process. Ashley performed his duties for a fraction of what it would normally cost (this is one of many selfless acts people have performed to help TERN).

While all of this was taking place Eva selected a distinguished, hard working group of men and women to serve with her as TERN's first Board of Directors. These individuals were Jaydee Ager, Tricia Allen, Peter Apt, Herb Cawthorne, Maurice Crenshaw, Jackson Daniel, Pat Edwards, Larry Hodges, Moses McCall III, Emmy Minor, Jerry Payne, Rose Payne, Lenetta Root and Kaye Wansley.

TERN's first organizational meeting was convened at 3:00 pm on May 19, 1992 at the new Nongame Program Office in Forsyth. In addition to the TERN Board those attending this meeting were David Waller (representing the Wildlife Resources Division), Moses McCall, Robin Russell (representing the Department of Natural Resources Commissioner's office) and me.

By the time of the first annual Membership Meeting on May 15, 1993, TERN had 108 members and a balance of \$8,142.75. At this meeting, Eva announced that the Board has designated \$5,000 (70% of TERN's income) for funding the Nongame-Endangered Wildlife Program projects selected by the membership. I then presented a list of the first 10 projects nominated for funding. The membership selected the following projects for funding: Bald Eagle Display (\$2,500), Bald Eagle Captive Breeding (\$500), Earth Day Nature Trail (\$300 - partial funding) and a publication entitled Georgia Wildlife Watch, Native Food Plants (\$700 - partial funding).

An important milestone in TERN's history was reached on March 27, 1996 when Wanda Granitz became TERN's Executive Secretary.

As anyone that had been associated with TERN can attest, this was one of the best decisions that TERN has ever made. In the years since Wanda was hired she has become invaluable to the organization. She handles everything and anything associated with TERN. Whether it is preparation and distribution of the newsletter, tracking expenses, answering correspondence, maintaining membership rolls, paying the bills, setting up meetings, coordinating Weekend for Wildlife duties, Wanda handles them with aplomb.

This year TERN reached another significant milestone in its history. It can now boast of funding more than \$1,000,000 in projects for nongame wildlife conservation. That is an amazing accomplishment, especially since it took place during some of the country's worst economic times.

It would be a mistake to assess TERN's value to NCS solely on its success on this \$1,000,000 milestone; the members of TERN have accomplished so much more. For example, a TERN member, Emmy Minor, founded the Weekend for Wildlife benefit at The Cloister on Sea Island and was the driving force behind the establishment of a Nongame Wildlife license plate. Together they generate most of the operating funds for the NCS. When the Legislature slashed the amount of money that the Section derived from the sale of the tags, another long-time member, Brooks Schoen, led the fight for the passage of legislation that has restored the lion's share of the funds generated through the sale the Nongame license plates. In addition, every time the NCS has asked TERN for help with nongame wildlife-related issues, TERN has enthusiastically provided support.

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Outdoor Wildlife Leadership School (OWLS): TERN Funded Project Update

Rusty Garrison, CEWC program manager

“What I liked most about the workshop was the experience to explore wildlife throughout Georgia in locations I never knew existed. Now I can share and teach what I have been blessed to experience. This trip far outweighed any of my dreams of what I thought it would be like. Totally unbelievable in an awesome way. It was one of the greatest workshops I’ve ever attended.”

That is just one comment from an educator who attended the Outdoor Wildlife Leadership School (OWLS) at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center (CEWC) this past July. OWLS is a very popular Advanced Project WILD program sponsored by The Environmental Resource Network (TERN). In fact it has been so popular, that staff diversified the offerings and now offers an OWLS 1 and an OWLS 2 workshop, rotating each year and providing different speakers and field trip destinations during their respective weeks.



OWLS is not your typical educator workshop; the teachers are busy all week long and sleep is a rare commodity. For example, on one evening the participants are out until 11:00 pm in the Oconee National Forest trapping bats with Nongame Conservation Section (NCS) biologist Trina Morris and up at 5:00 am the next morning headed to Panola Mountain State Parks’ Power of Flight Area where they assisted in bird research with Charlie Muise, Georgia’s Important Bird Areas program coordinator.

Twenty-one OWLS 2 participants also received instruction in archery and bow hunting from Shooting Sports coordinator Caleb Griner. They were taught navigation skills using a GPS by CEWC program manager Rusty Garrison and they learned about Conservation of Rare Species from NCS program manager, Jim Ozier. Early the next morning they were all travelling to the GO Fish Center in Perry. After exploring the Center and getting a tour from Center staff Clare Thorne and others, participants learned about black bear research from Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) wildlife biologist Bobby Bond and a UGA graduate student. Then it was back to CEWC for instruction on bat conservation before heading out to mist net bats. After a short six hours of sleep, the educators received a quick orientation on Panola Mountain State Park and they were off to hike up the mountain with NCS botanist Mincy Moffit and hike leader Jody Rice. Mincy, called the “Botany King” by one participant, provided a detailed interpretive hike on the geology and botany of the area. On returning to CEWC, fisheries technician Jamie Dowd taught pond management and they assisted with an electrofishing survey. The evening was spent learning Project WILD activities that the teachers could use back in their classroom.

The fourth day found the participants up early again and travelling to Crockford-Pigeon Mountain Wildlife Management Area. NCS biologist John Jensen took them into a cave and taught them about cave salamanders and the rare Pigeon Mountain salamander. After lunch the group split; one group hiked to Rocktown to learn about this geologic formation and the other searched for endemic and rare salamanders and amphibians. After the long drive back to CEWC, the Charlie Elliott Astronomy Club taught the group about stars and planets. One participant stated that *“seeing the rings of Saturn was awesome”* though telescopes. After another late night, they arose to learn about wildlife exhibition permits from Lt. Wayne Hubbard of the WRD Law Enforcement Section. Finally, the entire week was wrapped up by giving the educators instruction on taking it all back to the classroom and receiving their Project WILD Facilitator notebooks. The last day TERN also gave away two Go Wild License plates as a door prize.



It was a full week of instruction with very few breaks and little sleep but one participant stated: *“Why waste time sleeping? There is plenty of night life to observe.”* All were excited about what they had learned. One summed up the week: *“I had a great time and learned so much that I can use in my classroom.”*

During this season of giving, consider giving to conserve Georgia wildlife.

Here are three easy ways:

~ Buy or renew an eagle or hummingbird license plate. Many Georgians don't know that sales and annual renewals of these attractive tags are the No. 1 fundraiser for the Georgia Nongame Wildlife Conservation Fund, which was created to conserve rare and other nongame animals, plants and habitats. Many also don't know that a law change this year reduced the price of DNR wildlife tags to only \$25 more than a standard plate and increased the amount dedicated to wildlife. Since the law change, \$19 of each purchase and \$20 of each renewal goes to help wildlife. That's as much as 80 percent of the license plate fees dedicated to the Wildlife Resources Division programs that depend on them. Upgrade to a wildlife tag for only \$25 and show your support!



~ When preparing your taxes, give to the Wildlife Conservation Fund state income tax checkoff. The Give Wildlife a Chance checkoff made up 10 percent of contributions to the fund this year.

~ Contribute directly to the Nongame Wildlife Fund. Donations are deductible to the extent allowed by law. Explore donation options at www.georgiawildlife.com/conservation/support. Or call the Nongame Conservation Section at (770) 761-3035 or (478) 994-1438.



TERN—A Conservation Success Story (continued from page 5)

No organization can be this successful unless it has great leadership. Since its inception, TERN has been blessed with great officers and Board Members. Each and every one of them has worked tirelessly to raise money and nurture support for the NCS. One would be hard pressed to find a case where so few have given so much.

Last but not least, The Georgia Power Company has proven to be a great corporate friend of TERN. By so doing, they have contributed immeasurably to the success of TERN and the NCS.

It is hard to believe that it all started with one woman willing to try to make a difference. Recently when I presented Eva with a list of all that TERN has accomplished, she responded, "I am amazed. It sounds like a tremendous amount of work but all I remember was a lot of fun and great companionship. We met some wonderful, helpful people during those years and I have some great memories."

Indeed it is difficult to imagine what the nongame wildlife conservation landscape would be like without TERN.





Friends of Georgia's Nongame Conservation Section

TERN is a 501 (C)(3) corporation. All donations to TERN are 100% tax-deductible.



2015 Weekend for Wildlife Theme (continued from page 1)

counter that loss and better understand and conserve neotropical migrants.

Among Nongame Conservation Section projects for neotropical migrants:

- Regional surveys of swallow-tailed kite roosts along coastal rivers have given scientists a better gauge of the health of populations.
- Habitat research plots on the Chattahoochee National Forest near Blairsville have shown us what works in attracting cerulean warblers, the continent's fastest-declining warbler.
- Restoration of grasslands at Piedmont public lands such as Joe Kurz Wildlife Management Area is benefiting grass-loving migrants, from bobolinks to blue grosbeaks.



Dan Saudia

- Satellite tracking has revealed whimbrels' mind-bending migrations and their crucial feeding and roosting sites, including many along our coast.
- Painted bunting surveys have provided distribution and habitat details.

NCS teams with volunteers and organizations across the hemisphere. Their focus is on effective, full life-cycle conservation of neotropicals.

As part of Weekend for Wildlife, donors and participants make this work possible—work that means a brighter future for the colorful lineup of long-distance migrants that brighten everyone's life.