

STEWARDS OF THE GEORGIA COAST
COASTAL CONSERVATION PROJECT LIST

MARCH

2024



STEWARDS
OF THE GEORGIA COAST



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PHOTO BY MICHAEL STEARNS
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BACK COVER PHOTO BY PHILLIP MURDACO

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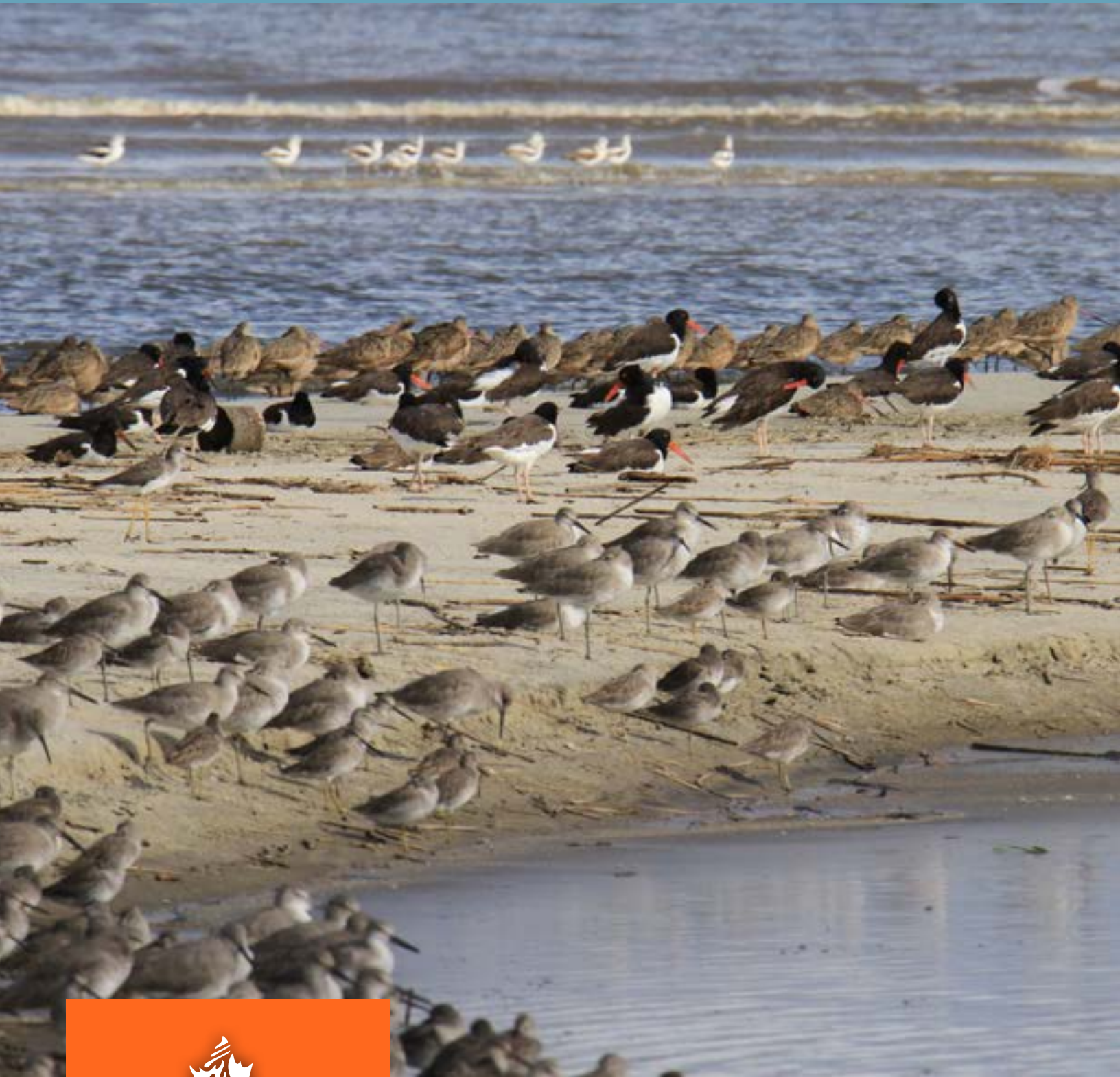
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STEWARDS
OF THE GEORGIA COAST

Stewards of the Georgia Coast Coastal Conservation Project List



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Stewards of the Georgia Coast is an informal network of 250+ donors committed to advancing philanthropy for coastal conservation. Our core objective is to increase private donors' investment of time, influence, and resources for stewarding Georgia's coast. We seek to build relationships, share experiences, cultivate learning, communicate philanthropic needs, and facilitate giving for impact.

We are pleased to present the seventh edition of the Coastal Conservation Project List. Originally published in 2018 and updated annually, the list features high priority projects in need of private philanthropy and is curated with help from respected conservation leaders across the region. Projects were selected based on Stewards' working knowledge of coastal conservation priorities and confidence in the leadership and organizations involved. Nevertheless, donors are encouraged to engage in their own due diligence when making contributions.

We hope you will review the list and share it with others. Look for projects that resonate with your particular interests, and join us as we invest in the long-term future of Georgia's coastal resources. If you support a project from the list, please let the Stewards' leadership know as it will help us to assess the value and impact of this effort.

Via the ***Stewards of the Georgia Coast Fund of the Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation***, the following tax deductible giving options also are available:

- Undesignated coastal conservation grantmaking: Stewards has a volunteer advisory committee that will do the research and allocate your funding to the nonprofit conservation organization(s) whose needs most closely align with your interests.
- The Sustainers program: Through this fund, Stewards can accept gifts to support our operating budget, offsetting the costs of programming, increasing our outreach, amplifying our mission, and ensuring the network's long-term sustainability. Sustainer gifts are intended to complement (and not to replace) direct support of non-profit conservation organizations.

Should you have questions or need assistance with any aspect of the 2024 Project List or Stewards of the Georgia Coast, please contact Burch Barger (stewardsofgacoast@gmail.com or 205-643-8121), Scott Coleman (scott@littlessi.com or 229-724- 9202), or David Weitnauer (dweitnauer@rhdobbs.net or 404-574-2970). Your input and suggestions are welcomed and appreciated. Thank you for your interest in and support for coastal conservation in Georgia.

More information about the *Stewards of the Georgia Coast Fund at the Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation* and online giving instructions are available here:





ADVOCACY

Youth Environmental Leadership Program • \$20,000 for 2023-24 school year

Now in its fifth year, the Youth Environmental Leadership Program (YELP) is an intensive environmental education program for high school students across coastal Georgia. YELP is designed to develop the next generation of leaders by deepening their environmental knowledge and cultivating their leadership skills. Students participate in a variety of leadership workshops, field trips, and are empowered to act as conservation ambassadors within their communities. To ensure that YELP is accessible to all deserving students, we are intentional about selecting an economically and racially diverse cohort and offering the program at no cost to participants. For more information or to make a donation, contact Kate Grinalds at 404-395-7423 or kate@onehundredmiles.org. Kate serves as VP of Philanthropy for One Hundred Miles.

Strategic Planning and Advocacy for a Thriving St. Marys River • \$10,000

Founded in 2016, St. Marys Riverkeeper is the chief advocate and the public's voice for the St. Marys River. We are dedicated to improving water quality in areas that are designated as swimmable and/or fishable; ensuring the river thrives for future generations with our work on resiliency projects and community partnerships; promoting low impact development in a fast-growing area; finding solutions for water related issues in the watershed; and advocating against industrial threats in our underserved communities.

St. Marys Riverkeeper is currently updating our strategic plan to advocate for the St. Marys River more effectively. Over a five-month period, St. Marys Riverkeeper's strategic planner will facilitate a discussion at the board level and engage with key stakeholders through a survey, listening sessions, and one-on-one meetings. The information gathering plan will foster a thorough understanding of where the organization is, identify core priorities to be better river stewards, and develop new mission, vision, and values that better align with the advocacy needs of the watershed community. Our expected deliverable will be a comprehensive strategic plan that will guide action and lay the groundwork for meaningful change. A contribution of \$10,000 to St. Marys Riverkeeper will help us enhance the organization's culture and language and focus on what is really important to protect the St. Marys River.

For more information or to donate, please contact Emily Floore at emily@stmarysriverkeeper.org or 843-906-6548.

Outreach to the Folkston Community • \$500 to \$5,000

We are at a tipping point in our fight to protect the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge from the proposed 8,000-acre Twin Pines surface mine. Whether we defeat the mine or not will depend largely on whether the residents of the “gateway community,” Folkston, reconnect with the iconic natural resource. While Folkston’s old guard share a tremendous pride in the Swamp, it seems the younger generations feel the Swamp has little to offer to them. By working hand in hand with those in the community who recognize the value in living on the doorstep of such a treasure, the Okefenokee Protection Alliance is reaching out to help the younger community members appreciate why the Swamp needs to be protected.

To spark their curiosity, we have given red Okefenokee backpacks to every child in Folkston; to encourage families to appreciate nature, we have taken twenty families camping in the Refuge. To get the community chatter going, we have taken over 200 Folkston pastors, schoolteachers, high school students, businesspeople, and neighbors on free guided Okefenokee boat rides. All of these efforts have been wildly successful.

Nonetheless, unless we reach more Folkston residents, our newfound allies in the community will not be willing to speak out against the mine. That is where you come in! Much of the money we have raised to date to fund these events has come in the form of private donations ranging from \$500 to \$5,000. Please donate what you can. When you do, imagine the smile you have helped paint across the face of a Folkston child sitting around a campfire roasting a marshmallow in the Refuge. Contact Bill Sapp, chair of the Okefenokee Protection Alliance, at bsapp@selcga.org if you have any questions about supporting the Alliance.





ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Shorebird Ambassador Internship and Volunteer Engagement • \$28,000

During the spring and summer, Wilson's plover chicks – which look like little cotton balls on toothpicks -- zip around the beach struggling to survive in places where people, dogs, and boaters spend time. The narrow ribbon of coast, where the ocean meets land, is the only place where several species of Georgia birds will nest and raise their young. Our local nesting species, like American Oystercatchers and Wilson's Plovers, need protected beach, dune, and marsh habitats to hatch, find food and grow up.

Recent research has highlighted that one of the best ways to protect habitat is through a well-trained volunteer program of stewards or ambassadors. Education and outreach through signage and posting alone is often insufficient to protect the birds. Shorebird Ambassadors, through human-to-human contact, can create positive experiences for beach goers as they learn to recognize the value of their favorite recreational location as important habitat for shorebirds. Ambassadors can often speak to enough people to shift recreational behavior of the public.

This spring, Manomet will continue our education and outreach efforts on public beaches, at marinas and boat ramps, and a Shorebird Ambassador Intern will help provide on-the-ground coverage of these key sites while supporting and growing our volunteer base. Your contribution of \$28,000 (for staff time, travel, an intern stipend, and outreach materials) to Manomet's education and outreach campaign will help us connect with more people, build our volunteer network, and build pride for protecting coastal wildlife. For more information or to donate, you can reach Abby Sterling at (585) 339-8885 or asterling@manomet.org.

Open-Air Classroom Heaters and Acoustic Panels • \$450 - \$28,200

Sidewalk to the Sea is a hands-on marine science-based program for kindergarten through fifth grade students in Savannah-Chatham County Title I elementary schools.

We believe providing students access to the beach and marsh will create a connection to Savannah's coastal and offshore environment, inspiring future stewards for the coast and its resources. We have shared many first-time ocean experiences with students who may not have otherwise had the opportunity.

Each year, students participate in a two-hour program on the beach, in the marsh, in the classroom, and our Coastal Galleries. The program's components each have a stewardship stand, are grade-specific, and align with the Georgia Stands of Excellence in Science (GSE) and local school system's science curriculum map.

Savannah-Chatham County Public School System incurs the costs for bus transportation and student lunches. Tybee Island Marine Science Center (TIMSC) waives program delivery fees.

Since 2011, Tybee Island Marine Science Center has served 43,728 *Sidewalk to the Sea* students. We currently have nine schools scheduled for the current 2023-2024 school year with an estimated 4,300 students and 360 adults participating. TIMSC also provides each student with a free *Student-Family Pass* to encourage students' continued interest in marine science and broaden the programs' reach. Our students become the educators!

Our newly built science center provides students with a home for scientific investigation in our Open-Air Classroom through squid dissection and dock lab modules. We plan that this increase in square footage will give us the opportunity to serve more *Sidewalk to the Sea* students. Our new Open-Air Classroom is in need of 12 infrared heaters (\$850 each or \$10,200 total) and 40 acoustic panels (\$450 each or \$18,000 total) to provide year-round comfort to our students.

To support this project, please contact Chantal Audran, Executive Director of Tybee Island Marine Science Center, at (912) 786-5917 or chantal@tybeemarinescience.org.





Cay Creek Wetlands Revitalization and Local Educator Workshop • \$6500

Often referred to as a hidden gem in Liberty County, Cay Creek Wetlands Interpretive Center in Midway is a community park with a boardwalk that winds through freshwater swamps and saltwater creeks. Coastal WildScapes is an organization dedicated to educating the community about native habitats and fostering an appreciation for nature. We are seeking funds for revitalization of the park and to host a wetland workshop for local educators at Cay Creek Wetlands.

The revitalization will include replacing worn out or damaged educational interpretive signage along the boardwalk to maintain these valuable educational resources for the community. The workshop will engage local educators in creating useful lesson plans and materials related to wetland habitats for their students. It will include an indoor session with lectures on topics related to natural communities associated with coastal ecosystems and an outdoor session with an ecosystem trail walk.

The timeline for this project is two years and the cost is estimated to be \$6,500. A total of 75 educators are expected to attend to the workshop. A total of 8,000 visitors per year are expected to be reached with the educational interpretive signs at Cay Creek Wetlands.

For more information, to arrange a tour of Cay Creek Wetlands, or to make a donation, contact Amy Schuler, Education Outreach Coordinator at admin@coastalwildscapes.org or (912) 289-7736.

Workshop: \$1,000 (office supplies, printing, advertising, and programs)

Staff: \$500 (hours & mileage)

Educational Interpretive Signage: \$5,000 (replacement of signs)

Total Project Cost: \$6,500

Education and Community Outreach • \$5,000 - \$25,000

Coastal WildScapes is an organization dedicated to connecting residents to the habitats of coastal Georgia and empowering them to be stewards of their natural environment. To accomplish our mission, we are seeking funds for education and outreach assistance for the development and delivery of education initiatives to increase knowledge about the importance of Georgia's coastal ecosystems. This project will help to support a wide variety of environmental education programs across the coast and help increase our presence at community outreach events. This project will provide funds for staff time and gas mileage associated with community outreach events such as the Savannah River Fire Festival, Skidaway Marine Science Day, Picnic on the Farm, and Earth Day celebrations. For more information or to make a donation, contact Amy Schuler, Education Outreach Coordinator, at admin@coastalwildscapes.org or (912) 289-7736.

The timeline for this project is 3-5 years and the cost is estimated to be \$5,000 per year. A total of 5,000 people per year are expected to be reached at the community outreach events.

Staff Hours: \$3,000

Mileage Reimbursement: \$2,000

Total Project Cost: \$5,000 per year for 3-5 years

Increasing Student Access to Coastal Research Methods Class at College of Coastal Georgia • \$6,480

Enable college students to take Coastal Research Methods, a transformative summer course offered by the Environmental Sciences Program at the College of Coastal Georgia. Here, students conduct hands-on environmental research, mastering field, laboratory, and statistical methods with a specialized focus on coastal and barrier island environments. The course is more than a learning experience; it's a simulation of real-world research teams, complete with a one-week expedition to the UGA Marine Institute on Sapelo Island. Among many other practices, students test water quality in coastal marshes and conduct fish identification surveys on trawls, which provides them with a diverse skill set and prepares them for impactful careers in environmental stewardship and coastal conservation.



The success stories of our alumni speak volumes, with graduates now actively contributing to local environmental preservation and working for prestigious organizations like the Jekyll Island Authority, DNR Coastal Resources Division, UGA Marine Extension, Army Corps of Engineers, and United States Geological Survey. Your support for this project can make a difference by eliminating the \$360 course fee, ensuring that every student, regardless of financial constraints, can partake in this invaluable training and contribute to the coastal conservation workforce in Georgia. For more information or to make a donation, contact James Deemy at jdeemyccga.edu or (912) 279-5934 or Robin McLachlan at rmclachlan@ccga.edu or (912) 280-7781.

Total cost for entire class (18 students): \$6,480

Cost per student: \$360

Sea Turtle Education Program • \$7500 - \$27,500

The St. Simons Island (SSI) Sea Turtle Project is dedicated to protecting Georgia's sea turtles and monitoring St. Simons Island's beach for nests, hatchlings, and strandings. Project volunteers lead community outreach and education to educate beachgoers and coastal residents about the steps they can take to protect threatened sea turtles, as well as other coastal wildlife such as shorebirds, diamondback terrapins, and right whales.

We will continue that ongoing work throughout 2024, and as Glynn County moves to finalize a new beachfront lighting ordinance, will use funding to print and distribute materials for home and business owners about turtle-safe lighting and requirements. Additionally, SSI Sea Turtle Project and One Hundred Miles will work together to produce and distribute public service announcements (PSAs) to help residents, beachgoers, and community leaders across our coast better protect sea turtles and other wildlife, and to garner community support for stronger wildlife protections.

For more information or to make a donation, contact Catherine Ridley at 912-222-3140 or catherine@onehundredmiles.org. Catherine serves as Vice President of Education and Communications for One Hundred Miles and as project leader for the St. Simons Island Sea Turtle Project.

Project costs:

\$7,500 for materials and programming during 2024 nesting season

\$20,000 for video and radio PSA production

University of Georgia Aquarium Expansion • \$25,000 - \$50,000

The University of Georgia (UGA) Marine Education Center and Aquarium, which is part of UGA Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant, is located on Skidaway Island. It opened in 1970 as a public facility for people to explore and learn about Georgia's unique 100-mile coastline. More than 25,000 people visit the facility annually and leave with memories lasting a lifetime.

Marine educators at the aquarium provide programs to the public, teachers, and school groups that are designed to inspire appreciation of Georgia's coastal ecosystems. The aquarium also serves as a learning environment for college students who participate in internships and fellowships that offer hands-on teaching experiences and research opportunities.

Aquarium visitation and education programs have grown dramatically in recent years, which is why an ambitious campaign is underway to add 2,100 square feet of new exhibit space to the facility. The expansion will enhance teaching spaces, make exhibits more accessible to diverse audiences, and allow the facility to accommodate more visitors.

The expansion will nearly double the aquarium's footprint, extending the building toward the Skidaway River with floor-to-ceiling windows connecting visitors to the world outside. Donations of \$25,000 or more will fund new, interactive exhibits, including a freshwater wetland exhibit, a multi-sensory 3D live oak tree, and a forest floor crawl. These exhibits will introduce students, families, and visitors to the maritime forest ecosystem and deepen their understanding of this complex coastal environment.

The \$2.8 million aquarium expansion project presents the first chance in the facility's 50-year history in which individuals will have the opportunity to transform this incredible learning space through private charitable support. To make a contribution, contact Anne Moser, Senior Director of Development, at 706.202.9928 or amoser@uga.edu.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL STEARNS

North Atlantic Right Whale Boater Education and Outreach • \$1500 - \$3000

Warm Georgia winters attract many migratory animals to our state, including the world's most endangered large whale species, the North Atlantic Right Whale (Right Whale). These majestic females travel to Georgia from Canada and New England to calve and nurse their young. This treacherous journey causes Right Whales to be very vulnerable to ship strikes, a leading cause of death in this species. With foundational funding from The Temper of the Times Foundation, Georgia Conservancy partnered with local grass-roots organizations and marinas to implement a North Atlantic Right Whale public awareness campaign along Georgia's coast. We produced and installed educational signage intended to compel compliance with NOAA's boat speed rule through the following components:

- Poignant Images: Signage highlights unique designs from local artists and stakeholders of Right Whale mothers and calves.
- Compelling Information: Georgia Conservancy and partners develop conservation messaging highlighting potential damage to a boater's life and property from Right Whale strikes.
- Significant Action: Signage promotes adherence to the NOAA speed rule among boaters to help save this critically endangered animal.

Georgia Conservancy seeks funding to expand our initial success and to install 5-10 additional signs along the coast. Donations will support sign manufacturing and installation, as well as marina owner outreach and education. Costs range from \$1500 (for five signs) to \$3000 (for ten signs.) To support this project, please contact Courtney Reich, Coastal Director, at (912) 656-1316 or creich@georgiaconservancy.org.

Expanding Access to Georgia's Coast • \$500 - \$10,000

Intentional outdoor experiences cultivate environmental stewards. Access to the outdoors is an effective tool to promote the well-being of individuals and the community and to increase the number of individuals engaged in conservation work. Increasing the economic and demographic diversity of outdoor recreation will help connect more individuals to Georgia's precious places, increase understanding of Georgia's changing climate, and build better solutions to protecting our natural resources.

Georgia Conservancy is partnering with community-based organizations to lower barriers to outdoor recreation and stewardship along Georgia's coast through scholarships to our Stewardship Trips. We seek to match a \$20,000 memorial gift and support opportunities for underserved populations to join our one-of-a-kind Coastal Adventures. Scholarships will provide transportation, gear rentals, meals, and education featuring local partners and naturalists at each location.

To support this project, please contact Courtney Reich, Coastal Director, at (912) 656-1316 or creich@georgiaconservancy.org.

\$500 - Sponsor an individual

\$1,000 - Sponsor a family

\$10,000 - Launch a new partnership

LAND CONSERVATION, STEWARDSHIP AND RESTORATION

Effects of Long-term Longleaf Pine Management on a Protected Gopher Tortoise Population • \$12,000

Over the last ten years, there has been a movement of significant management designed to restore Longleaf Pine forests and promote natural communities. This includes planting Longleaf Pine seedlings, applying prescribed fire on a regular rotation (especially during the growing season), and planting native groundcover. These activities have focused on promoting high quality habitat for wildlife, including rare and declining species of reptiles and amphibians, such as the Gopher Tortoise.

The Orianne Society is working to assess the long-term effects of Longleaf Pine management, especially groundcover restoration, on properties that currently hold protected populations of Gopher Tortoise. These will be baseline surveys to which we can compare future survey numbers. Orianne is seeking \$12,000 to complete one baseline Gopher Tortoise survey. For more information or to make a donation, contact Chris Jenkins at 208-241-9124 or cljenkins@oriannesociety.org.





Restoring Globally Imperiled Muhly Grass Meadows on Jekyll Island • \$12,000 - \$48,000

The Jekyll Island Conservation Department is seeking funds necessary to restore native Muhly Grass Meadows in natural dune habitats on the island. Muhly Grass Meadows are a rare and declining habitat type that is threatened by habitat destruction, coastal flooding, and human-caused interruptions in the coastal sand-sharing system. They grow in dunes on the youngest land deposited by the movement of sand on the Georgia coast; however, damned rivers, dredging, and the removal of sand typically deposited on barrier islands have caused less sand to be deposited, resulting in smaller patches of Muhly Grass Meadows.

Natural Muhly Grass Meadows on Jekyll Island total approximately 0.97 acres in two locations frequently inundated by marsh flooding. We have identified an area next to Camp Jekyll 4-H center's boardwalk that has some key features that make habitat rescue appealing, including higher ground and its accretional nature, which would protect the habitat from inundation and establish to follow the island's growth as the southern portion of the island continues to accrete, offering sustainability.

This opportunity allows for signage and environmental education programs, with its proximity to Camp Jekyll, that further our mission of education about imperiled habitats and wildlife. Wildlife species that could be supported include grassland-dependent bird species, predatory species of birds, snakes, and extremely high densities of native small mammals. Successfully bringing forgotten Georgia barrier island landscapes back to life while creating newly diverse habitats that support rare, threatened, or keystone species has tremendous potential to be a high-profile conservation success story. The total area that has restoration potential is four acres, but we would be grateful for financial support for one-acre increments. For more information or to donate contact Yank Moore, JIA Director of Conservation, at y_moore@jekyllisland.com or 912-635-9384.

Cost per acre (Seed starting, head-starting, maintenance for one year, and out-planting): \$12,000
Total project (Four acres): \$48,000

ESTUARY CONSERVATION AND RESTORATION

Harris Neck Living Shoreline and Community Conservation Resilience Project • \$500 - \$32,000

The Harris Neck Living Shoreline and Community Conservation Resilience Project includes the planning, construction, and monitoring of a living shoreline project at Harris Neck National Wildlife Refuge in the Harris Neck Community in McIntosh County and the inclusive engagement of stakeholders to protect the oysters, salt marshes and lands of the Sapelo Sound. Located along Barbour River, a tributary of Sapelo Sound, this location is a community hub. The erosion of the shoreline is threatening the infrastructure on the upland as well as along the shoreline. Stabilizing the site with a living shoreline will protect the infrastructure upon which the local community, coastal residents, and visitors depend by providing public access, restoring essential fish habitat, creating a more resilient coastline, and helping sustain a traditional fishery that is striving to survive and expand.

The living shoreline will deflect currents, reduce wave action, stabilize the Refuge property on Barbour River, reduce erosion, create a more gently sloping bank, and manage upland stormwater. Over 15,000 vehicles per year use the boat ramp for commercial, recreational, and residential access purposes. Local commercial shell fishers use the Crabber's Dock and boat ramp to access the extensive waterways. If the bank continues to erode, their businesses may need to move and the direct access to the creeks and estuaries that they have used for over 100 years will be threatened. The scale and intensity of development practices in the watersheds connected to the Sapelo Sound waterways are increasing. Potential cumulative impacts threaten the future health of the marshes, rivers, estuaries, ecosystem, and local quality of life.

The Harris Neck Living Shoreline will be the largest living shoreline on the mainland in Georgia and the only living shoreline on the mainland accessible to the public in McIntosh County. Located in the middle of the Georgia coast, it will provide convenient road access and serve as a learning demonstration. Lessons learned will be transferred on the Georgia coast and the southeast through workshops, tours, presentations, events, and publications.

The project depends on inclusive engagement of stakeholders in the Harris Neck, Barbour River, and Sapelo Sound watershed. Fishers, landowners and managers, residents, community members, local, state, and federal governments, local school, colleges and organizations will contribute during all phases of the project. Stakeholder workshops, volunteer events for living shoreline creation, and meetings for targeted audiences will be held to develop educational tools and materials, and to transfer the results of the project to promote living shorelines, oysters and land protection for future conservation of salt marshes, to transfer knowledge to other sites and to increase local work force expertise. These activities will ensure stakeholder engagement and leadership beyond the project duration. College fellowships will provide support and leadership throughout the program. The time for collaborative action is now and partners are committed to this priority living shoreline and community-centered conservation resilience project.

For more information or to make a donation, please contact Christi Lambert at clambert@tnc.org or 912-617-0143.

- College Fellowship - \$32,000 per fellow/year
- Stakeholder Engagement Workshops - \$3,000 per workshop
- Living Shoreline Children's Book - \$700 per workshop
- Volunteer Events - \$500 per event for supplies
- Stakeholder Work Group Facilitated Sessions - \$6,000 per session

CONSERVATION INFRASTRUCTURE

John Gilbert Nature Trail Renovations and Repairs • \$15,000 - \$250,000

One of the most visited properties owned and stewarded by St. Simons Land Trust is the John Gilbert Nature Trail, a publicly accessible path that extends from the highly trafficked Frederica Road eastward to the serenity of the marsh. The undeveloped 40-acre tract of land was donated to the Land Trust in 2002. During these past 20+ years, the trail has become one of the island's most beloved and visited protected spaces on the island. It features boardwalks and bridges that cross wetlands and lead to viewing platforms looking to the north across the marsh and east toward Sea Island.

Unfortunately, because of its proximity to the marsh and damage from tropical storms, the trail's raised boardwalks, observation decks, seating, bridge, kiosk, and other features have deteriorated greatly. For safety reasons, the trail was closed in 2023. Since that time, the Land Trust has worked closely with federal, state and county entities to acquire necessary permissions to replace existing structures and make much-needed upgrades to the property. Funds to cover the renovation and extensive repairs will enable the Land Trust to complete this important stewardship project in 2024. Primary goals include making the trail safe, inviting, durable and to serve as a platform for education. Below is a breakdown of projects costs. Grants to help fund any part of the work are greatly appreciated. The total project cost is \$250,000. To make a contribution, please contact Emily Ellison, Executive Director of the St. Simons Land Trust, at (912) 638-9109 or emellison@sst.org.

Trail Entrance Improvements: \$35,000

Interpretive Signage: \$15,000

Boardwalk, Bridges, Viewing Platform Replacements: \$200,000

Lodging at the Longleaf Stewardship Center • \$30,000

As part of The Orianne Society's conservation efforts over the last decade, we have acquired the 2,500-acre Orianne Indigo Snake Preserve in Telfair County, Georgia. To date, the Preserve has served as a base for our land management team and is a landscape where we have conducted extensive restoration efforts and rare species inventory, monitoring, and research.

We are in the process of transitioning the Preserve into the Longleaf Stewardship Center, which will be a nexus that brings together Orianne staff, volunteers, and partners to learn about and implement Gopher Tortoise and habitat conservation. This will allow us to expand our restoration efforts. We plan to enhance our conservation footprint by continuing a strong focus on prescribed fire while expanding our native groundcover restoration, Longleaf Pine planting, and Gopher Tortoise stewardship and monitoring efforts through training and volunteers.

To implement the Longleaf Stewardship Center, we are currently raising \$30,000 to remodel existing structures to house additional staff, volunteers, and partners. Donors interested in funding this infrastructure are eligible for naming opportunities to show recognition for their dedication to conservation. For more information or to make a donation, contact Chris Jenkins at 208-241-9124 or cljenkins@oriantnesociety.org.



PHOTO BY CASSIE WRIGHT

WATERSHED PROTECTION

Expanding Veterans for Clean Water Program • \$45,000

Every day, local rivers, streams and beaches are used for fishing, swimming, and other recreation. But is the water clean and safe? Without adequate testing, that question is sometimes hard to answer. Pollution can cause illness in people, contamination in fish and wildlife, harmful algae blooms and other problems. Meanwhile, there are an estimated 300,000 veterans who live in the Savannah River Basin. Veterans for Clean Water (VFCW) offers the opportunity for these veterans to serve as volunteers. VFCW volunteers use their unique skill sets to defend our waterways. We believe that those who have served our country have courage, leadership, sense of duty and teamwork that make them uniquely skilled to be stewards of our most precious resource.

Since 2019, a volunteer force of veteran and active duty military members has served as Savannah Riverkeeper's water quality and restoration muscle in the Central Savannah River area. It is time for the project to expand into the lower basin. The funds requested would cover half of the cost for a Savannah Riverkeeper staff member and would cover four summer swim guide data spots for testing water pollution levels. It also would enable us to increase awareness of water issues in the Savannah River at a critical time leading up to the next proposed harbor deepening project and its potential impacts to the drinking water supply for Chatham, Effingham, Bryan and Jasper Counties.

Access to good data is critical, as is involving as wide of a community as possible in water and resilience issues. With the concentration of military installations in the Savannah area, VFCW's water quality work is a critical piece to bridging human health risks and water quality issues. It can bring about systemic changes in the lower river basin and long-term community success for many years to come. For more information please contact: Tonya Bonitatibus at riverkeeper@savannahriverkeeper.org or (706)755-4839.

Atlantic Sturgeon: Addressing Threats and Protecting Habitat • \$20,000

The St. Marys River is the southernmost river on the eastern seaboard that provides critical habitat for Atlantic Sturgeon, a federally endangered anadromous fish that returns to its natal river to spawn. Sturgeon species are living fossils that date back to the time of the dinosaurs; however, their populations have declined due to historic overfishing and habitat loss or alteration.

Sturgeon were considered extirpated from the St. Marys River, until University of Georgia (UGA) researchers caught a genetically distinct age-1 Atlantic Sturgeon in 2014. This provided evidence that Atlantic Sturgeon were still spawning in the St. Marys River. Despite substantial sampling efforts over the last ten years by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and UGA, little is known about the local population, and it is believed that the number of St. Marys River sturgeon is critically low. The negative effects from high impact residential and industrial developments, water withdrawal resulting in hydrologic changes to water flow, water quality issues, and saltwater intrusion from sea level rise could put the future of the local sturgeon population at risk of extinction.

In collaboration with state regulatory and federal agencies, university researchers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local residents, St. Marys Riverkeeper is helping lead the effort to conduct a scientific study of the St. Marys River to map potential spawning grounds, develop a hydrodynamic water quality model, and use eDNA tracing to determine when sturgeon are spawning. This data is important to fill the information gap, assess the quality of the habitat, and develop conservation strategies locally and statewide to ensure the continuation of the St. Marys River Atlantic Sturgeon.

A contribution of \$20,000 to St. Marys Riverkeeper will help us begin developing a comprehensive threat assessment including next steps and deliverables that will be presented to elected officials for consideration as they discuss community growth and plan for resiliency. For more information or to donate, please contact Emily Floore at emily@stmarysriverkeeper.org or 843-906-6548.

Protect The Vernon • \$20,000 per year for 3 years

Ogeechee Riverkeeper (ORK)'s mission is to "Protect, Preserve, and Improve the Water Quality of the Ogeechee River Basin, and one of these waterways is the Vernon River in Chatham County. The Vernon River drains approximately 40% of the City of Savannah, via urban and suburban runoff, before reaching the Atlantic Ocean. This valuable area provides habitat for endangered sturgeon, diamondback terrapins, and sea turtles, as well as important commercial and recreational fishing opportunities.

The Protect the Vernon project is reducing environmental hazard impacts (pathogens and litter), and planning for long-term sustainability in the Vernon River, its tributaries, and the connected salt marsh. ORK collects consistent data from 60+ monitoring sites to create a real-time picture of the health of the Vernon.

This project is underway and has successfully engaged a diverse group of stakeholders, volunteers, and citizen scientists. ORK also submitted an updated Watershed Management Plan to the State of Georgia outlining the necessary steps to further clean up the Vernon River.

For more information or to make a donation, contact Damon Mullis at damon@ogeecheeriverkeeper.org or 866-942-6222.



ST. SIMONS ISLAND SEA TURTLE PROJECT

WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

Loggerhead Sea Turtle Genetics Project • \$40,000

The loggerhead sea turtle is a threatened species that serves as an indicator of coastal and ocean ecosystem health. The number of loggerheads in the southeastern United States declined dramatically from human-related activities such as commercial fishing and negative impacts to their nesting beaches. After decades of nest protection and the implementation of turtle excluder devices in shrimp trawl nets, the annual number of nests has increased from its lowest point in 2004. However, nest numbers are still below historic levels.

The purpose of this project is to assess the effects of human activities on loggerhead sea turtle population recovery through the continuation of the long-term genetic tagging research project.

In 2006, Dr. Brian Shamblin at the University of Georgia developed novel DNA markers that could be used to identify individual loggerhead turtles from egg samples. Since 2008, we have collected a single egg from every documented nest in Georgia to determine the identity of the nesting female. These data have allowed us to develop individual female nesting histories that have been critical to management and population recovery. One of the most important uses of the data was the development of a population projection model that estimates changes in population size under different management scenarios. Nesting histories also provide compelling stories of unique mother turtles that are shared with the general public via collaborator education programs to foster demonstrated public support for conservation.

This project represents one of the largest of its kind in the world and is an example of successful collaboration among academia, state agencies, beach managers, biologists, and community science volunteers.

Many important questions remain unanswered. Because loggerhead turtles take decades to mature, estimating female survival, new female recruitment, age of maturity, and how long they reproduce requires long-term data collection. At best, we have only recently laid the foundation and must continue collecting and analyzing samples to address important long-term questions. About 25% to 35% of the females identified each year are new females reaching maturity. Our goal is to continue the research until we can match a majority of these new females to a known mother in the genetics database. New aging techniques (called epigenetic aging) will make it possible to estimate the age of a loggerhead turtle from a genetics sample. It is critical that we keep collecting samples at the same sites, without any gaps in space or time, to ensure accurate estimates of age at sexual maturity and reproductive life span.

Additionally, supplemental sampling of dead hatchlings from nests will provide information about elusive male loggerheads. Rising temperatures have led to a complete lack of male production in some sea turtle populations, so baseline data for male loggerheads in our region are needed. Finally, data from continued sampling will be used to refine and improve our population projection model that will be used to safeguard the survival of the species.

To continue our sampling and answer critical questions for management, we are requesting funds to analyze genetic samples from Cumberland, Ossabaw, and Sapelo Islands. It costs approximately \$30 to collect, analyze, and archive each genetics sample or \$40,000 total for these three barrier islands.

To gather more information or to make a donation, please contact Brian Shamblin, UGA Associate Research Scientist for Conservation Genetics, at (423) 595-0289 or brianshm@uga.edu.

Sea Turtle Nesting Research on Wassaw Island • \$1800 - \$11,000

Caretta Research Project (CRP) is a hands-on research, conservation and education project that has been studying and protecting nesting sea turtles on Wassaw National Wildlife Refuge since 1973. It's the longest continuously-run saturation tagging project in the United States, amassing 51 years of data, which has proved invaluable to helping coastal managers establish necessary conservation practices. CRP also has a longstanding commitment to education and community involvement, inviting the public to work beside biologists in protecting these turtles.

Each night from May through August, CRP staff and volunteers patrol the seven miles of beach to monitor nesting activity. Biological data is collected from each turtle for multiple collaborative projects. All nests are protected from predators and spring tides, and then excavated after hatching to obtain hatching success from each nest. CRP is asking for funding for tagging supplies (\$1,800) and a Kawasaki Mule 600 for beach patrols (\$9,200).

For more information or to support either of these projects, please contact Kris W. Carroll at 912-704-9323 or wassawcrp@aol.com.

Addressing Threats to Shorebirds and Horseshoe Crabs • \$35,000

The Georgia Bight supports more than 400,000 shorebirds every year. Some of them nest here, while other species travel from South America and rest while on their way to the Arctic tundra for nesting. For these long-distance migrants, ensuring that their stop-over habitat is healthy and protected is critical for addressing population declines. Recent research highlights that shorebird declines are widespread and accelerating. Coordinated effort is needed now more than ever to reverse these trends and keep these amazing flyers from oblivion.

Manomet staff have been focusing on understanding and protecting the food resources for shorebirds on migration. A key food resource for shorebirds on the U.S. Atlantic Coast in the spring are the eggs of spawning horseshoe crabs. Georgia is one of the last states on the Atlantic coast without a horseshoe crab harvest; however, there is currently an active harvest of crabs for the biomedical industry in South Carolina. This past year there have been new harvest restrictions, and synthetic alternatives to horseshoe crab-derived biomedical products have the potential to protect populations in the southeast.

We are working with our partners at Georgia Department of Natural Resources, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources, and One Hundred Miles to raise awareness, plan for robust and secure data collection, and explore innovative research opportunities to fill information gaps that will help us collaboratively protect this incredible, ancient species.

For millennia, spawning horseshoe crabs have fueled shorebird migration along the Atlantic Coast. With support of \$35,000 (for staff time, travel in Georgia, and materials) we can increase our focus to ensure that this important relationship remains intact. For more information or to make a donation, you can reach out to Abby Sterling at (585) 339-8885 or asterling@manomet.org.



PHOTO BY BENJAMIN M. CLOCK

Loggerhead Sea Turtle Protection and Management • \$10,000 - \$31,144

The loggerhead turtle population in Georgia is showing signs of recovery due to 30 years of intensive management. Approximately ten years of additional surveys and management are necessary for loggerheads to reach recovery goals in the southeast. This project involves annual surveys on 13 barrier island beaches which include nest surveys, nest protection activities (nest relocation and screening and predator control), assessments of reproductive success and the monitoring of threats (strandings). We need to buy equipment (ATVs, bikes), hire seasonal personnel, and buy supplies (screens, stakes) to collect the data we need for management. This project provides the opportunity for donors to ride along with the researchers for the day on Sapelo Island to see how the money is spent.

- **Sapelo Island** is a nesting beach monitored by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Conservation Section. Daily surveys are conducted from May through September on Nanny Goat and Cabretta beaches and Little Blackbeard, a 1.5 km section of beach that split from Blackbeard proper during Hurricane Irma. The Sapelo intern will be required to survey and paddle a kayak across the inlet to Little Blackbeard each day and patrol the beach by bike. We are in need of \$10,672 to support a single intern for the summer and a bike.
- **Ossabaw Island** is one of Georgia's three main nesting beaches monitored by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Conservation Section. Monitoring sea turtle nesting and strandings on Ossabaw is difficult due to the remoteness of the island and rough terrain. We are in need of funds to support a single intern for the summer (\$10,472) and a Kawasaki Mule UTV for beach surveys (\$10,000).

To learn more or to make a donation, contact Mark Dodd with Georgia DNR at Mark.Dodd@dnr.ga.gov.

Tracking Red Knots to their Breeding Grounds from the Georgia Bight Stopover • \$2000 - \$20,000

The Georgia coast provides significant and critical habitat for non-breeding Red Knots, a federally threatened long-distance migratory shorebird. During the spring 2025 migration season, Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GA DNR) and partners (including SC DNR) propose to deploy 5 to 10 2.5-gram satellite transmitters during the spring season on Red Knots to determine the connectivity to the breeding grounds for the Southeastern population of Red Knots. Through long-term working partnerships, we currently understand the stopover population, diet, local movement ecology, and migration timing and flight paths. We also know through radio tracking that up to 70 percent of knots along the Southeast coast fly directly to the breeding grounds, but we don't have a good understanding of where they breed. This is an important information gap in the conservation of knots, and we are confident that along with our partners we can deploy up to 10 satellite transmitters and determine the connection.

GA DNR is seeking funding to deploy 5 satellite transmitters (priced at \$10,000) or 10 transmitters (priced at \$20,000) to determine breeding grounds connectivity to the spring stopover population. Each transmitter is priced at \$2000. Of note: through Stewards of the Georgia Coast donors, we secured two transmitters for the Spring 2024 season! Spring 2024 and 2025 are the proposed seasons for this project, with no funding or transmitters secured for the 2025 season.

For additional information or to make a donation, please contact Fletcher Smith, Wildlife Biologist, GA DNR, at fletcher.smith@dnr.ga.gov or Tim Keyes, Wildlife Biologist, GA DNR, at tim.keyes@dnr.ga.gov.

Spotting Scope for Birdwatching, Bird Counts, and Bird Research • \$6000

Ornithologists and seasoned birdwatchers have strongly recommended the purchase of a Swarovski OPTIK ATX Spotting Scope to be used for annual rookery monitoring surveys, Christmas bird counts, midwinter shorebird surveys and other St. Simons Land Trust (SSLT) monitoring activities. Dr. Robert Sattelmeyer, the Past President of the Coastal Georgia Audubon Society, a longtime member of the Land Trust's Stewardship Committee and a volunteer at Cannon's Point Preserve since its opening, frequently leads birding field trips on SSLT properties. Dr. Sattelmeyer and others believe that the Spotting Scope will greatly augment the birdwatching experience on Land Trust properties because there are instances where binoculars simply are not powerful enough.

The Swarovski OPTIK ATX, with its higher magnification, has an angled view that helps to seek out a subject and makes long-range observations significantly easier, especially when the subject is located in the sky, in a tree, or on a hill. This Spotting Scope is lightweight and compact making it ideal for long days in the field. It also has larger objective lenses, which allow for better light-gathering capability and a brighter image.

The St. Simons Land Trust would regularly use the Spotting Scope at Cannon's Point Preserve, a 644-acre undeveloped wilderness area on the north end of St. Simons Island. A peninsula with more than six miles of salt marsh, tidal creek and river shoreline, the Preserve contains some of the last intact maritime forest on the island. It is one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the world and provides an important habitat for coastal wildlife and plant species. Freshwater wetlands provide wildlife habitat for resident and migratory species, including numerous neo-tropical migratory birds. The marsh-upland interface area functions as a critical habitat for coastal species and provides important nesting grounds for osprey, wood storks, and diamond back terrapins. From monitoring activities to nature tours and classroom field trips, the Spotting Scope will enhance the user's experience and become an important tool in our commitment to conservation education and encouraging citizen science. To make a contribution, please contact Emily Ellison, Executive Director of the St. Simons Land Trust, at (912) 638-9109 or emellison@sslt.org.

Coastal Conservation Program Coordinator • \$50,000

Birds Georgia is the largest conservation organization in the state focused primarily on conserving and protecting our state's birds. As part of our commitment to expanding conservation and community engagement capacity along the Georgia coast, we seek an annual commitment of \$50,000 (or multiple commitments of smaller amounts) that will support our Coastal Conservation Program Coordinator staff position.



Birds Georgia's Coastal Conservation Coordinator is based out of Brunswick, GA, and provides support for Birds Georgia's work along the entire Georgia coast. This key staff member will help expand Birds Georgia's existing programs, such as habitat restoration and community science programming, in coastal counties. They will also develop our bird-window collision monitoring program on the coast and identify other opportunities where we can combine scientific knowledge and skill with the power of our membership and network. Additionally, the coordinator will assist and provide expertise to partner organizations on projects that involve management of wading bird colonies, conducting nightjar species surveys, as well as educating and engaging with the public.

For additional information, please contact Adam Betuel, Director of Conservation, at adam.betuel@birdsgeorgia.org.

Project Safe Flight Georgia: Coastal Expansion • \$50,000

Avian migration is one of the most amazing feats in the natural world. An estimated 900 million birds migrate over Georgia each spring and fall, with a large amount of this migration occurring over the Georgia coast due to its unique geography and relatively intact habitat. The journey is long and difficult, and a relatively new threat has emerged that may be the most dangerous of all: buildings.

Since 2015, Birds Georgia has been studying the issue of bird-building collisions throughout metro Atlanta, as well as retrofitting problematic buildings with window films and encouraging other preventative measures to reduce the likelihood of collisions. With an estimated 365 million to 1 billion birds dying each year in the U.S. due to building collisions, along with Georgia's pivotal placement along the Atlantic Flyway, we have a chance to lead in finding solutions that not only protect birds passing through Georgia, but that can also be replicated across the country.

Funding will support expansion of Project Safe Flight Georgia to the Georgia coast. Our goals are to understand how migratory songbirds use coastal hotspots, which locations are most vital and why they are attractive, how to lessen the threats birds face, influence local development and lighting ordinances, and educate and engage the local communities in bird conservation.

Birds Georgia seeks \$50,000 in support of this program expansion. For more information, including project components, please contact Adam Betuel, Director of Conservation, at adam.betuel@birdsgeorgia.org.

American Alligator Research in the Okefenokee Swamp • \$5,000 - \$10,000

University of Georgia (UGA) Marine Extension and Georgia Sea Grant is advancing the conservation and management of alligator populations at the Okefenokee Swamp through research, providing a better understanding of the species and enhancing wildlife education. Becoming a sponsor for alligator research is an opportunity to play a crucial role in preserving a unique and precious ecosystem for future generations. Donations support genetic lab testing, provide essential equipment, and cover costs to purchase and deploy satellite tags. The Okefenokee Swamp, perched along the Florida-Georgia border, is the largest blackwater swamp in North America. At the heart of this remarkable ecosystem are the American alligators, iconic and resilient creatures that serve as a testament to the success of wildlife research and management. These alligators were the first species to be listed as federally endangered and then recover, showcasing the positive impact of dedicated conservation efforts.

By sponsoring alligator research, you are ensuring that the Okefenokee Swamp and its inhabitants remain a source of wonder and inspiration for generations to come. To make a contribution, contact Anne Moser, Director of Development, at 706.202.9928 or amoser@uga.edu.



STEWARDS
OF
THE GEORGIA COAST