

Birdsong Nature

January-February 2026

TRAILS AND BIRD WINDOW OPEN WEDNESDAYS, FRIDAYS, SATURDAYS AND SUNDAYS

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

January

Sat	Jan	3	Center reopens
Sat	Jan	3	Free Family Day
Wed.	Jan	14	Land Management Workday
Sat	Jan	17	Holly Woods Restoration Work Group
Sat	Jan	24	Land Management Overview for Volunteers
Wed.	Jan	28	Land Management Workday
Sat.	Jan	31	Tall Timbers 2026 Red Hills Fire Festival

BIRDSONG NATURE CENTER
WEB SITE: www.birdsongnaturecenter.org
EMAIL: birdsong@birdsongnaturecenter.org
FACEBOOK: Birdsong Nature Center
YOUTUBE: Birdsong Nature Center
PHONE: 229-377-4408

February

Sat	Feb	7	Free Family Day
Sat	Feb	7	Take a Child Outside in the Wintertime!
Wed	Feb	11	Land Management Workday
Sat	Feb	14	Winter Tree Walk
Wed	Feb	25	Land Management Workday

Please, no pets on Nature Center property.

APPEAL PROJECTS UPDATE

Dear Friends,

We don't have a lot of news since our update in the 2025 Appeal Letter, but we do have one big item to share: the flooring project in the cabin is finished and it is beautiful! We are very pleased and know you will be, too. Now that it is completed, our volunteer construction crew can get back in the house and install baseboards, finish the remaining painting and other work in the kitchen, and then restore the porch. Tile will be installed in the bathroom and on the backsplash, and then we can do all the remaining plumbing improvements. Simultaneously, the crew has been getting the outdoor bathroom ready for the new counter and re-plumbing. So, we are back in motion and pleased with the results so far. Thank you again for your gifts that are making this happen, and we look forward to the opportunity to share it all with you in the coming year.

Happy Holidays to all of our Birdsong friends, and best wishes for a happy New Year in 2026!

TELL US YOUR OLD-TIMEY PLANT SALE STORIES!

Our fall Plant Sales marked the end of our 18th year of plant sales. Now and then we hear wonderful success (or sometimes failure) stories about how the plants have done in your yards and gardens. After 18 years, trees we sold at our first sales have had time to mature. Perennial plants have spread and been dug up and shared or relocated. Sometimes our shoppers donate extra plants to Birdsong that have multiplied for them and we sell them again, carrying on the tradition of pass-along plants.

We would love to hear about your gardening success with plants you've gotten from the Birdsong Plant Sales. We will start sharing them in our next newsletter. Your stories may well be an inspiration or helpful education for plant shoppers at our spring sales in March 2026. Thank you!

Put this date on your calendar: the first spring Plant Sale will be on *March 21st, 9am to 1pm*.

-June White
Plant Sale Chair

THANK YOU, FALL PLANT SALE CUSTOMERS AND VOLUNTEERS!

Thank you very much to all the loyal and first-time customers who joined us for Birdsong's Fall Plant Sales. We hope your new plants are happily thriving in their new homes. We also want to thank all our dedicated and talented workers who made the Fall Plant Sales so rewarding and so much fun. We truly appreciated so many of you being willing to come back out just two weeks later for the second sale at our Holiday Open House. Thank you, too, for our generous plant donors, who raised and cared for so many beautiful plants and gave them to the sale to benefit Birdsong and enhance others' gardens. We look forward to seeing you again

Carole Hayes
Scott Ball
Dan Miller
Julia Sawyer
Lynn Brown
Stanton Beazley
Gunilla Trull
Karen Berkley
Cheryl Burnett
Mike Weed
Connie Klineman
Ken Klineman
Sharon Kindred
Yvonne Stinson
Roland White

Buddy Holshouser
Alan Parker
Sharman Franklin
Beth Grant
Ute Schorn
Kristine Dougherty
Sherry Nichols
Ben White
Lisa Reeves
Brenda Coy
Jane Elder
Rick Cantrell
Carolyn Cohen
Melissa Rigsby
Lynette Joye Hitt

Albert Harrison
Brooklyn Miller
Betty Esco
Kris Travis
Carla Peterson
Sandra Sallee
Joe Peresich
Britt Martinez
Sue McFadden
Gail Sloane
Michael Carter
Stephen Strickland
Everett Jones
Paul Parker

A DATE FOR YOUR CALENDAR!

Birdsong's next Plant Sale will be held on our traditional third Saturday of March, from 9am to 1pm: March 21st, onsite at Birdsong Nature Center. Please put this date on your calendar and we'll be back in touch with more details in the March-April newsletter and on social media!

WINTER TREE WALK
With Charlie and Cindy Baisden
Saturday, February 14, 2026 8:30 – 10:30AM

Join us for an early winter morning tree walk at Birdsong Nature Center with volunteer leaders Charlie and Cindy Baisden. We will visit a variety of forest habitats, such as the Holly Woods, oldfield/pond edge by the Farm Pond, and mixed pine and hardwood forest along the north side of Big Bay Swamp. We will learn about some of the interesting trees you will find in each of these distinct forests. Forest habitats are unique plant communities that are defined by the dominant trees found within that plant community. We will also learn some of the characteristics in identifying these trees. *The program should run approximately 2 hours and we will probably walk about 1.5 to 2.0 miles.* If you are interested in learning about the trees in your environment that are common to South Georgia and North Florida, please join us on February 14th.

Dress for the weather, bring sun protection, and prepare for a walk through the woods and fields of Birdsong. You may want to bring water, field guides, and insect repellent with you.

\$8 Friends, \$10 nonmembers, children half-price. RESERVATIONS, PLEASE. Call by noon on Friday, February 13th to reserve your space.

TAKE A CHILD OUTSIDE
IN THE WINTERTIME!
February 7
9:30AM - Noon

Bring your favorite child to Birdsong and let them lead you on a natural adventure in the winter woods with Sandra Sallee and Carolyn Cohen. Give an ongoing gift to your child: an appreciation of nature, a better understanding of where they live, and use of all their senses. We will walk the trails to search for evidence of animal homes, sign, and winter behavior. Enjoy the fresh air, some movement, and time with your child in the great outdoors. We will collect natural materials along the way and create a craft upon returning to the Barn.

\$5 Friends, \$7 nonmembers, children half-price. RESERVATIONS, PLEASE. We ask that you register by phone or email by noon on Friday, February 6th, so we know how many to prepare for. Includes a handout and resource list for year-round outdoor activities with children.



FREE FAMILY DAYS
First Saturdays: January 3 and February 7

On first Saturdays of the month admission is free and we 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 getting to know the property, hike the trails, and visit the Bird Window, Gift Shop, and Butterfly Garden.

Admission: free

TALL TIMBERS 2026 RED HILLS FIRE FESTIVAL
January 31 from 11am to 3pm
Rain date: February 7

Tall Timbers' biannual Red Hills Fire Festival will take place again this winter. If you have an interest in prescribed fire or local ecology, you will want to attend this major all-ages event! Birdsong plans to attend and will have a booth and offer activities for children. Final details and list of participants are still being worked out, but you may check for current information on the Tall Timbers Facebook page: <https://facebook.com/events/s/red-hills-fire-festival-2026/708631058526165/> It is a great community festival with something for everyone and we hope to see you there!

CHANGES ARE IN THE AIR FOR THE BUTTERFLY GARDEN

by Donna Legare and Ann Morrow

The Birdsong Butterfly Garden was originally planted in 1990 as a donation by Native Nurseries to celebrate their tenth year in business. For the next 35 years, many dedicated volunteers have worked to maintain the garden, with support from Birdsong staff members.

Despite replanting efforts and regular maintenance by a small group of volunteers, the Garden has been on a slow decline in the last 10 years. In addition, some gardeners have grown too old to continue working; others have passed away. The remaining two, Donna and Ann, have decided it is time to change direction. We both feel that our volunteer time would be better spent working on the removal of invasive plants in the natural areas of Birdsong. Invasives have become a significant problem in parts of the property and continue to expand their reach.

Our thoughts on why the Garden has not been successful in the last ten years:

- The weather has warmed, resulting in inconsistent rainfall and long droughts (thank you Lynn for watering during droughts)
- Deer and rabbit damage – they love our plants!
- Continual effort needed to keep shepherd's needle (*Bidens alba*), also called Spanish needle, from taking over the entire garden. Butterflies love shepherd's needle, but this non-native plant is no longer an annual. As the weather has warmed, it has become perennial, so in addition to producing a vast number of seedlings each season, it also comes back from roots as a very sturdy plant. It overpowers most native wildflowers, making it difficult to promote biological diversity. We do not want it to spread into Birdsong's natural areas. Please note that we did not plant it; it came in naturally.

As a result of fire as a management tool, all of Birdsong is a butterfly paradise, particularly the fields. This was beautifully illustrated in October when we worked with a group of school-aged children in the Butterfly Garden, mainly pulling and digging shepherd's needle. Little else was blooming in the garden at a time when it should have been in full bloom. We took the children to the Gin House Field where the *Liatris* and other wildflowers were blooming; we watched abundant butterflies there – Gulf fritillaries, buckeyes, monarchs, and swallowtails.

One idea we have for the future of the old Butterfly Garden is to maintain its structure by regularly mowing the grass paths (thank you Alan) and leaving the stone benches, arbors, and sundial in place. The beds could be planted with small flowering trees and shrubs preferred by pollinators such as American or Chickasaw plum, more wild azaleas, woods hydrangea and parsley hawthorn. They could be spaced widely so a mower could easily maneuver between them. The beds could be mowed on a less frequent schedule than the paths to create an informal meadow/woods look.

This way The Birdsong Native Pollinator Arboretum (or whatever name we choose to bestow on it) could still be used as a welcoming entry garden as well as a place for weddings and celebrations beneath the arbor and alongside the wild azaleas in springtime.

“A FRIENDLY FLOCK” QUILT Raffle prize

We are pleased to let you know that the beautiful quilt donated by our friend and volunteer Faith Hazelip was raffled off at the November 8th Fall Plant Sale and Open House and it brought in \$500 for Birdsong! This throw-sized quilt featured thirteen whimsical images of differently patterned songbirds with a green print back and border. The winner was delighted. Thank you, Faith!

LAND MANAGEMENT WORKDAYS
Wednesdays: January 14 and 28 and February 11 and 25
9am to noon

Cold weather is here, and we are getting ready for burn season! Prescribed burning is our primary land management practice at Birdsong, and we could use some additional volunteer support to prepare the property for the winter burn season and assist us with burning. We have a wonderful volunteer land management crew that has been doing this for many years, but we can always use more workers. You do not need to be an experienced fire practitioner, but you do need to be physically capable, and able to take instruction. On scheduled workdays we do projects such as raking around trees of concern and trimming overhanging limbs and brush that is encroaching on the trails. We also have ongoing challenges to work on, such as invasive plant removal and cutting down the thriving sweetgum and pine saplings that show up everywhere. This time of year, we'll be focusing on burn prep such as raking around snags and clearing firelanes.

If you enjoy working outdoors with good-natured companions, please join us on these workdays. Alan Parker, our land and site expert, will lead these efforts and be joined by members of our volunteer burn crew. They would be pleased to have your help.

Be prepared for the weather and bring work gloves. If you have a favorite pair of loppers, a saw, or other tools, you are welcome to bring them, but we do have tools on site. There will be water and a snack on the truck; bring a sandwich if you want to have lunch together afterwards and Birdsong will provide drinks and dessert.

Please note: If the weather turns out to be good for burning on a scheduled workday, we will pivot to doing a burn, *and that means meeting at a different time of day*, so do let us know in advance if you are planning to attend so you can be informed of any potential time change. It will also help us prepare for lunch in case you want to join us. Please contact us at 229-377-4408 or email kathleen@birdsongnaturecenter.org. Thank you!

2026 LAND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW
FOR VOLUNTEERS
Saturday, January 24 10AM – 12PM

Join us for a trail ride and conversation about Birdsong's land management plans for 2026. Whether you are a seasoned veteran or a newcomer who has been thinking about volunteering, this overview is designed to give you an understanding of our long-range land management vision and show you specific projects and on-going efforts we'll actively engage in this year.

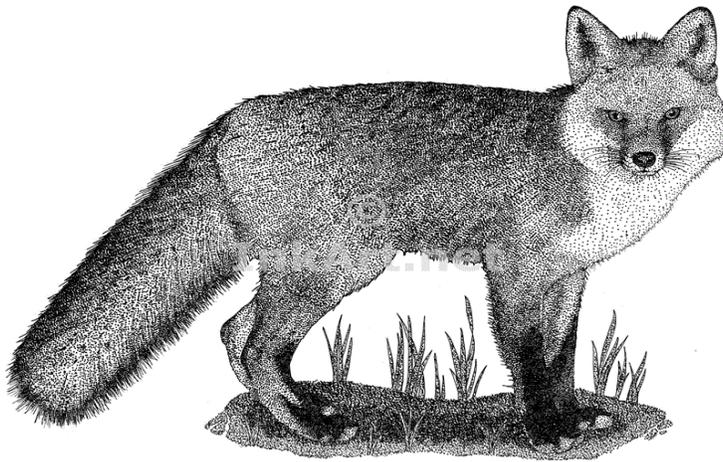
This session is important for anyone who wants to help us burn this year, as well as anyone interested in volunteering to learn about and help with year-round invasive species removal, trail maintenance, and native plant and wildlife habitat enhancement. New folks will get to talk to experienced burn crew volunteers who have been helping us for many years and who can tell you all about how our last season went and show you the results of their efforts. We'll spend time in the field and return to the house for lunch together. You will get to meet some wonderful people and come away with an understanding of how valuable your volunteer role can be in Birdsong's land management.

No charge. **RESERVATIONS, PLEASE.** Call by noon on Friday, *January 23rd* to reserve your place on the trailer or for more information. Bring a sandwich if you would like to stay for lunch; drinks and dessert provided. Dress for the weather.

THANK YOU, BIRDSONG BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We would like to thank our Board of Directors for their commitment and dedication to Birdsong Nature Center's current and future well-being. Thank you to long-time members, President Joe Peresich, Jim Antista, Scott Ball, and Ellery Sedgwick, and to our newly elected members Lora Smith and Sue McFadden. We also thank former members Bill Preston, Margaret Tyson, and Mike Brezin, for their service. This group has made many significant contributions over the years, particularly relating to our Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Project grant and the resulting Conservation Easement we completed in 2023.

They also have continued to provide excellent financial oversight, policy and fundraising decisions, and development and monitoring of the annual budget. They are hardworking, caring, creative folks who have made a difference for Birdsong. We offer our sincere thanks for their ongoing support, time, and talent that makes Birdsong the special place it is. Thank you, all!



HOLLY WOODS RESTORATION WORK GROUP

Saturday January 17, 2026 9-11am

The Holly Woods trail at Birdsong leads you through a diverse hardwood forest with large black cherry, white oak, American holly, smaller rusty blackhaw, possumhaw viburnum, red buckeye and hophornbean. There is even a toothache tree. It is one of the few areas on Birdsong where fire as a management tool has been excluded. As you walk along, be on the lookout for tube spider homes at the bases of many of the trees.

Unfortunately, invasive non-native plants such as nandina, ardisia, camphor, privet and ligustrum have spread into these woods and threaten to shade out native plant seedlings. With enough volunteers, we should be able to really make a difference in this area just by digging and pulling.

Please bring water, a shovel, garden gloves and pruners if you have them. Large plastic bags will be provided as all ardisia berries must be bagged to prevent them from germinating. We will have extra tools and gloves.

If this workday is successful, we (Donna Legare and Ann Morrow) would like to schedule monthly work mornings to manage invasive species at Birdsong.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT NOTES

December 11, 2025

Weather Finally there has been a break in the weather, and the drought has come to an end. We have had three days of light rain, something we have not experienced for many months. The Birdsong rain gauge tells us that 3.24 inches of rain fell here over the weekend. It brings an enormous sense of relief – already the leaves of the shrubs and plants are reviving and their color is improving. Last Saturday, so pleased that it was finally raining, I had to get out in it and walked to the Gin House Field. The Letz Mill trail had a stream of water running down the side of the pathway; even though it reminds us of our erosion problem here, it was a beautiful and unusual sight, inches of water flowing slowly downhill eventually dispersing into the field in front of Carolyn Hamilton's bench and our favorite and possibly oldest loblolly on Birdsong. The sound of the water trickling and the rain falling all around was restorative and healing; the trees and plants and land were finally getting what they have needed for so long.

This past three months has been one of the most beautiful and terrible times we have ever witnessed. Starting as early as September, the trees started to turn color. Further into October and now all the way to December we have watched the woods all around our area put on a magnificent show of color the extent of which we have not seen before. It reminded me of what northeastern Ohio looked like in the fall when I lived there years ago. Just acres and acres of beautiful fall color. This color change was no doubt brought on by the ongoing stress of drought rather than the usual response to cold, although we did have one good cold snap in November. At Birdsong, and along Meridian Road, we have seen leafy expanses far back in the woods turning from bright yellow to deep gold, russet, and rusty brown. It really has shown us how much of our typically uniformly green forest, which hides the identity of individual trees, consists of hardwood trees of all types. It has been a thing of beauty to admire every day, all the while knowing that these trees are severely stressed and in some cases suffering.

The drought has taken a huge toll on many of our big old trees at Birdsong. It has been heartbreaking. Alan works out on the property every day and over the past three or four weeks he has come back to tell us that he found another 6 or 9 or 12 dead trees...all across the place. We have seen at least 7 trees, long-leaf and shortleaf pines, die in full view out in the Gin House Field. We also discovered two big long-leaf pines right in the front yard with their needles turning yellow, so we hooked up hoses from the house and watered them for a good week, to no avail.

They didn't make it. And now we see there is another dead one next to them.

Along with all the stress from drought comes the specter of pine boring beetles, which can infect an entire mass of trees. We have been checking each tree we find to see if beetles are present or not. So far we haven't found any signs indicating a pine beetle infection, so that is a relief.

This is a major loss of trees compared to any normal year. We will be watching to see what kind of impact this has on the woods. One thing that already worries us is how we will manage our future burning in these areas. We typically take great care to rake around our important snags, because they are so valuable to wildlife for food sources and for nesting sites. A snag on fire also presents a major safety and/or containment issue when burning. We rake around the base of the tree to remove potential fuel so the tree will not catch. This has worked well with normal tree mortality at Birdsong, but we will have to see if it is even feasible to rake around this many trees before we do our annual burning. It is a very labor and time intensive practice. Well worthwhile, but we will have to assess this practice as we approach our burning this next season and into the future.

We managed to keep most of our garden shrubs and smaller trees alive with lots of watering, lots of running around hauling hoses and sprinklers to and fro to water the latest plant to show that it was in trouble. We focused on the wild azaleas in the Butterfly Garden and we'll see in the spring how many of the old ones made it through. We seem to have saved the Butterfly Garden fringe tree, too, although it was touch and go.

The Pear Tree Many of you are familiar with the old pear tree by the Barn. We enjoy this tree year-round: it blooms in early March and the white petals blow around like snow, the leaves go from soft bronze to deep green by summer, and by late summer/early fall it is always loaded with crisp, round, flavorful pears. The wildlife absolutely loves this tree, and the deer, raccoons, and woodpeckers especially enjoy it to full advantage. This year we watched the petals float around and saw the green leaves grow large and we could tell where the deer had eaten all the tender leaves off the lower branches. But just recently it dawned: there were no pears this fall. Not a one. Not any evidence any had ever set. What do you think happened? We had a very rainy spring and early summer. Would that interfere with pollination and setting of fruit? Could it be the tree's age? In all the years of watching this tree, we've never missed the pear fall, and the deer leaving big pears with one bite taken out, and pears still

on the tree with holes in them from a woodpecker having hammered away, and one time, getting to watch a Ruby-throated Hummingbird sip pear juice from a hole made by a woodpecker. We feel bereft and we never saw it coming; didn't notice it until they weren't there. We'll be watching closely next summer and hopefully see a tree full of tiny pears developing once again.

The Little Bat The little bat is back! Or at least a little bat is back – we are not sure right now if it is the same little female we got to know over the past few winters. Alan discovered it yesterday – it has been nice and cold, and this time of year is typically when we start to see one roosting in the Barn during the day, especially with very cold temperatures. This one may be a different bat, because it has chosen a completely different place on the ceiling to hang out. In the past the bat positioned herself on the edge of a plywood board with her back to the east, so we could easily see her side and front. This one is oriented with its back to the north, facing south. It makes a difference for us, because now we cannot see its face and belly, they are in shadow. We do get to see its furry back quite clearly and its little fingers holding onto the rough edge of the wood. This one's fur has a slightly reddish tinge to it; in the other location the fur always looked pale gray. As with the former bat, this one has bed-head – its fur is not always perfectly groomed. We'll hopefully see over this winter other characteristics that will let us know who this bat is, or if we have a new visitor. We are so pleased to see one again. They are endlessly intriguing.

Bird Window We are seeing our typical late fall early winter slowdown as far as number of birds and species at the Window. There is abundant wild food out there, plenty of berries and seeds, and it hasn't gotten consistently cold, so the birds are managing fine without needing to visit the Window much.

Since mid-October we have seen our year-round regulars fairly frequently: Northern Cardinal, Carolina Wren, Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, Blue Jay, White-eyed Vireo, (Chickideez, a Stinkbug, and bees drinking water, says Chris, a visitor writing in our daily log). Local birds not typically common at the Window have also been coming by: Pine Warbler, Ground Dove, White-breasted Nuthatch, Mockingbird, American Crow, Brown Thrasher, Eastern Phoebe, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Eastern Towhee.

There have also been many arriving migrants, passing through or staying for the winter. Seen in October: Scarlet Tanager, Ovenbird, Gray Catbird Red-eyed Vireo, American Redstart, House Finch, female Indigo Bunting, Summer Tanager, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and

Yellow-rumped Warbler. Starting November 6, White-throated Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, House Finch, and Ovenbird. Everyone loves seeing the unusual Ovenbird, and we also had a very special sighting on October 21st: a Black-throated Green Warbler – quite spectacular.

After the rain... Even with 3 inches of rain our ponds and swamp are still nearly a foot and a half below normal levels. There is still a wide muddy band around all shorelines where the water receded over the last 4 months. There is no water flowing through any of the drains or spillways at the dams. It will take a lot more rain to bring it all back.

A few other observations Winter romance is in the air for our White-tailed Deer population. Scrapes are back! We are seeing them along our trail edges, particularly in the central and eastern woods. It is interesting to see that many of these scrapes are made in exactly the same locations every year, and some are clearly highly intentional in that they get bigger, and the scratches are really deep. It is an intense time for our bucks!

We had a very unusual occurrence two days ago – there was a ladybug emergence and flight. I've never seen anything like this. Around noon, I started noticing lots of ladybugs on the office window. When I went outside, there were dozens of them flying through the air and landing on the building and electrical poles and crawling up and down. Unfortunately, these are the invasive Asian ladybugs, not our desirable native ladybug that eats aphids and is otherwise ecologically compatible in our environment. These are more orange in color, not red, and are known to bite. They were landing on people and getting all over everything – it was still going on yesterday. Messy, but very interesting and impressive!

We are at a pivotal time of year – the winter solstice. The light is unusual and everything it touches looks shimmery and vibrant. Our days continue to shorten and the sense of compression and darkness closing in is very real. Relief is on the way – the actual solstice is next week so the light will be coming back soon, and off we'll go on our next ride around the sun, full of hope for the coming year.

-KDB

NEW FRIENDS OF BIRDSONG

Thomasville

Beth Price
Kurt and Kyle Unglaub

Tallahassee

Lindsay Schlueter
Carolyn Collins
Ronald Greer
Adrienne Griffith
Kennedy Ryder and Dennis Houlihan
Jared Gardner
Marcia Meale
Bonnie Van Tassel
Garret Hall
Jessica Kennedy

Other

Bill and Amy Baker Cairo
Anne Richter Cairo
Katie Dorris Cairo
Kimberly Conely Coble
and Bill Coble Atlanta

BIRDSONG NATURE CENTER WISHES TO THANK:

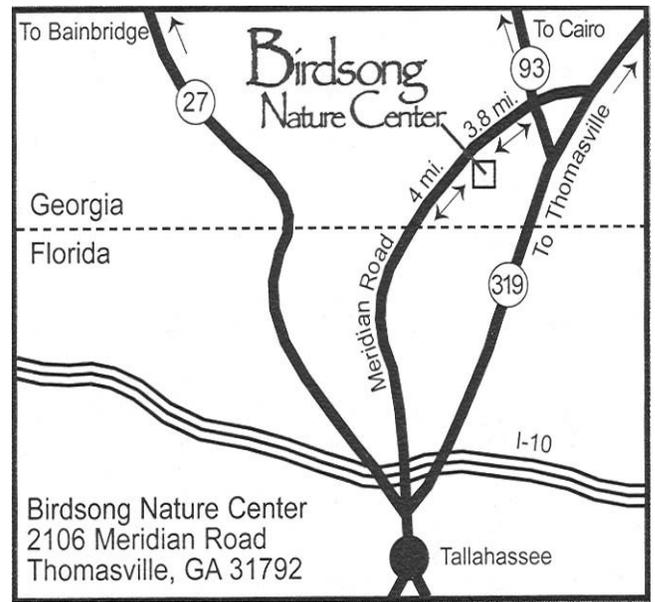
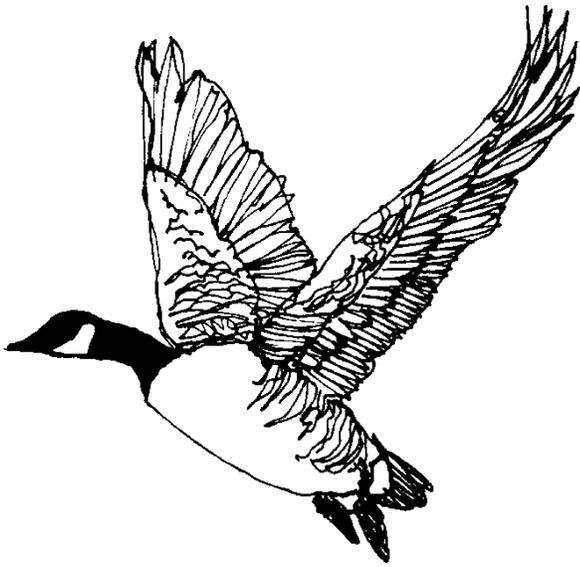
In memory of my sister, Sue Ellen Smith:
Cindy White

Special financial gifts:

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Dean and Sally Jue
Virginia Harmon
Ramona Bowman
John Lovett
DJ and Gayle Underwood
Janeen Key
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DIRECTIONS:

From Tallahassee: Meridian Road north, 4 miles past FL/ GA border 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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