

Camp Talon: a Week of Birding the Coast of Georgia

PAS Scholarship Award Recipient 2019

Young Birder Justina age 16

Justina has attended quite a few birding camps. In fact, you might even say she is a *connoisseur* of birding camps! After applying and being awarded a scholarship from PAS to attend camp, Justina and her sister set out in May 2019 for a week long birding and nature adventure, which they would later describe as one of their all time favorite birding camps - to date.

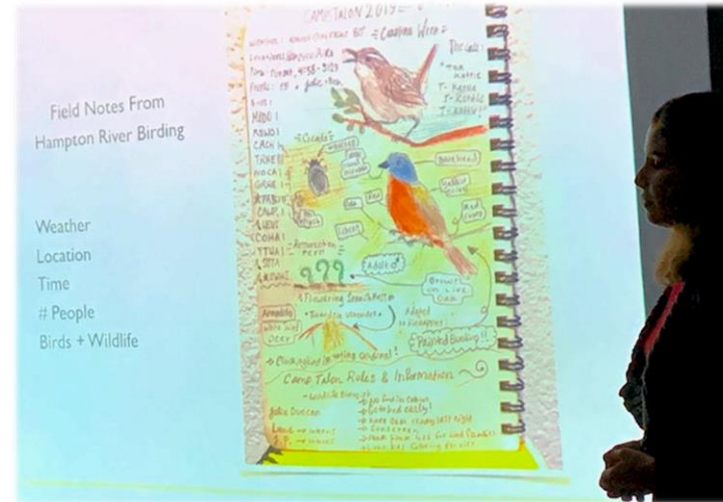
The trip started in Atlanta, Georgia and soon Justina and 15 other teenage bird enthusiasts were joined by their instructors Bob Sargent and Julie Duncan.



Climbing aboard the bus for the first of many bus rides, they found themselves at Epworth by the Sea on St. Simons Island. It wasn't long and Justina had her first of many lifers - a gorgeous Painted Bunting followed by a calling Chuck-Will's-Widow. Cicadas were singing loudly in the warm and humid air and Spanish moss clung to all the trees.

Next they visited the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge. This Refuge would be one of Justina's favorite places in Georgia. Despite the relentless heat and humidity, the young birders were undaunted as they ticked off birds, mammals and insects—many of them lifers!

- Barred Owl
- Red-headed Woodpecker
- Swallow-tailed Kite
- Anhinga
- Marsh Rabbit
- Green Anole (a reptile!)
- Scorpion
- American Alligator - that sighting blew Justina away!



In addition to birding, herping and soaking up nature all around them, there were classroom activities including: Basics of ornithology, introduction to the local birds, bird vocalizations, and working on field notebooks. At the end of camp, Julie scored the field notebooks. Justina won 3rd place! Congratulations Justina!

There was also free time to enjoy soccer, tennis, playing cards, listening to music and just socializing with other like-minded bird-crazed teenagers. Many evenings, Justina and the young birders spent their free time in search of geckos and frogs. The final night the young birders played bird charades and it looked like they had a lot of fun!

On Butler Island, which is a former plantation on the mouth of the Altamaha River, Justina and her fellow campers encountered:

- Pig Frogs - that sound just like pigs!
- Least Bittern
- Black-bellied Whistling Duck
- Common Gallinule

Little St. Simons Island, is a private 10,000 acre barrier island and like St. Simons, Little St. Simons Islands is part of the "golden isles", named for the stunning sunsets. No birding trip would be complete without a bumpy pick up truck ride with wooden seats! Of course, it was worth it as they had a lot of fun and found some nice birds:

- Summer Tanager
- Roseate Spoonbill
- Common Gallinule

On Sancho Panza Beach they encountered:

- Wilson's Plover
- Sandwich Tern
- Least Tern
- Willet
- Black Skimmer
- Brown Pelican
- Blackburnian Warbler - an out of season bird!



- Horseshoe Crabs
- Tiger Beetles

A trip to Norms Pond produced

- Wood Stork with 3 adorable young!
- Anhinga
- Great Egret with young
- Black Vulture



The young birders also visited Cumberland Island. The bus dropped the young birders at Crooked River State Park where 2 law enforcement agents took the young birders to the Island. On the Island they saw Broadhead Skinks in the tall trees and wild horses grazing, while beautiful Yellow-throated Warblers clung from the Spanish moss. If that were not enough, Justina and the young birders were treated to a very special sighting of 2 Manatees raising their nostrils above water!

On the last full day of camp, they explored Sapelo Island. Justina, being knowledgeable and interested in all things fungi - found herself with two other mycophile friends and ecologist Malcom Hodges, and expert in lichens. Some of the non-feathered sightings included:

- Bluejackets
- Swallowtails
- Eastern Mosquitofish
- Sailfin Molly
- Imperial Moth - four inches in diameter!



But of course, Sapelo, also held lots of *birds!*

- Blue Grosbeak
- Pine Warbler
- Orchard Oriole
- Tricolored Heron
- Forster's Terns
- Black Oystercatcher
- Willet

On the very last day of camp, after packing their suitcases and wondering where the time went, they explored Fort Stewart and had some great sightings including:

- Red-cockaded Woodpecker - an endangered species.
- Prothonotary Warbler
- Harvestmen - a type of arachnid
- Frog eggs
- Pitcher Plants
- Wolf Spiders
- Toothpick Grasshopper



Thank you, Justina, for sharing your birding camp experience with us. Many young birders and their parents had not known that such opportunities exist. You did an excellent job preparing for your presentation and your presentation skills are very admirable! We are so proud of you Justina!

