

Video	Audio
	<p><b>NARRATOR:</b> <b>THE GEORGIA COAST IS BEAUTIFUL FOR MANY REASONS AND ITS BIRDS ARE SOME OF THE MOST MEMORABLE. THIS TIME ON GEORGIA OUTDOORS WE'LL EXPLORE GEORGIA'S BIRD ISLANDS TO FIND OUT WHY SO MANY DIFFERENT SPECIES OF BIRDS CALL IT HOME. COMING UP NEXT.</b></p> <p>(GEORGIA OUTDOORS THEME MUSIC)</p>
	<p><b>Narrator:</b> <b>We share our coast with many animals and many birds. Humans have many islands of their own-- islands that are too developed for nesting shorebirds. Now these birds have islands of their own! Islands that are protected giving the birds a chance at survival.</b></p>
	<p>Winn: On the Georgia coast we have many species of birds that are specialty nesters and they nest only on the sands of our outer coast and in very isolated spots of the coast. most of the seabirds that you are familiar with when you come to the coast uh nest right on the ground uh are pelicans, gulls and terns.</p>
	<p><b>Narrator:</b> <b>While these bird islands are protected primarily for the birds that nest here, the islands are also havens for birds that are just passing through—migrating from the southern-most reaches of South America.</b></p>
	<p>Winn: the red knots, Dowachers, and Sanderlings that come through mostly in the spring and fall on their way up to the arctic nest right on the ground. the red knots are spectacular with the bright red orange uh bellies and their really nice pattern uh back color on them, uh grey, brown white in the back. Dowachers are, are long bill, long fin billed birds that feed by probing in the sand and they eat a lot of invertebrates under the sand, they are a brown, dull brown in the back and they too in the spring have a fairly orangy-red uh breast, throat and belly. sanderlings go from silvery white grey in the winter to a really uh pretty chestnutty brown in the head and neck.</p>
	<p>Many of these long distance migrants migrate in large numbers and they have spectacular aerial displays when they are in a large flock and its really a predator avoidance. all of them have white bellies showing at one time and then dark and they are presenting the predator with this white dark flash back and forth and its quite confusing. the birds are moving so efficiently together that the hawk or falcon cannot pick out one bird at a</p>

	time.
	<b>Narrator:</b> Camouflage is an important in predator avoidance for the nesting birds as well. The birds that nest here nest right on the sand, so the eggs are sand colored, blending right in with its surroundings. Another defense is to nest in large groups.
	Winn: The birds that nest on the coast are uh primarily fish eating birds. terns and black skimmers nest in very select spots in large colonies and they are colonial nesting species and the birds nest in large flocks very close to each other in areas where <i>there is no ground predation, there are no raccoons, very few mink, and uh</i> until recently no people were going out to some of these sights
	<b>Narrator:</b> As coastal areas are being developed across the world wildlife is becoming restricted to smaller and smaller areas. In the late 1980s there were more bird islands along our coast than there are now. But they were small islands, just a few feet above sea level. They were susceptible to storm tides.. and that is exactly what happened, violent storms took a few of these islands away.
	Winn: We are now down to one location where these birds are nesting, so literally we have all of the nests in one spot.
	Little Egg Island bar is an incrusting island in the mouth of one of our rivers and the sediments coming down that river have created this very unique spot. And its approximately 50 acres and its becoming more and more vegetated with grasses over about the last five years and uh it was at one time just a big wide open sand patch, now quite a bit of it is vegetated. the pelicans especially don't mind the vegetation at all and they get right in there and rip up the vegetation for nesting material. It has rolling dunes in the middle of it and right now it has a tidal creek that comes right up the center of it as well. The isolation of this island and the fact that we now have safeguards to protect it from the public have benefited the birds and the population is, is doing well up there in this one location.
	<b>Narrator:</b> Little Egg Island is completely protected year round, this means that you shouldn't even step one foot on its

	<b>beaches.</b>
	Winn: if you get near one of these islands, please stay in your boat. the birds will appreciate it tremendously.
	<b>Narrator: Some Bird Islands, like Williamson Island near Savannah and Pelican Spit near St Simons, are only partially protected—there has been an effort to find a balance between the birds' needs and our desires for recreation. These islands have restricted zones and people must stay out of these areas. Dogs, however, must stay off these islands completely.</b>
	Winn: it's quite clear that dogs are even more detrimental to the birds than just people are. dogs have a way of walking over a dune and finding a nest or finding young birds and eating them or doing what dogs do, not all dogs, but we had to pass regulations
	Primary nesting takes place starting in April, But most of it occurs in late April, May, June chick rearing goes right through August and there are some, some pelicans that are still with young all the way into October. but main nesting is earlier in the season than that.
	<b>Narrator: We wanted to visit one of the bird islands to see what was so unique about these habitats. We decided to visit in late February, before the nesting started so that we would cause less disturbance to the birds—this is their home after all, we are just visitors.</b>
	Winn: you might be surprised but this looks like a potential oystercatcher nesting area. Its just above the general high tide line, I mean high tide line and it doesn't take much, they just need a little bit of elevation and uh they come in here and scrape a little pocket in the sand like that and uh eggs would be camouflaged and look quite a bit like the sand. Skinner: So that's it, that's all they do is just scrape out a little indentation. Winn: That's all and they will protect this from other oystercatchers the whole area here and uh you can see how um, um sensitive the area is as far as a tide inundation, if we get a storm tide then the nests will be lost and then the birds will move to another section up here on the beach, but uh yeah it doesn't take much

	<p>um, that's uh that's, they will be the first ones to nest as well they begin nesting in early April, late March early April uh here in Georgia and uh and they will continue nesting right into the summer.</p> <p>Skinner:</p> <p>Well there are some other areas then down here that you can show me for some other types of habitat?</p> <p>Winn:</p> <p>Oh sure, if we move inland a little bit uh here in the island we can look at the uh we can, we can look at some better habitat for Terns and for some of the pelicans as well.</p> <p>Skinner:</p> <p>let's go take a look.</p> <p>Winn:</p> <p>sure.</p>
	<p><b>Narrator: Oystercatchers are not the only birds that nest right on the ground. Royal terns and black skimmers also create nests by simply scraping a small bowl right in the sand.</b></p>
	<p>Winn:</p> <p>many of our birds in the middle of the day are not actually incubating the eggs or chicks they are shading them from the sun and when we come along and disturb them, the eggs are exposed to the sun and it doesn't take long in a in a hot sun environment to destroy the developing embryo.</p> <p><b>Narrator: There are other dangers to the developing eggs—predators. But these birds are smart, they choose islands that are extremely isolated. There is no fresh water to support mammals that might prey on the eggs or chicks. Another way these birds protect their eggs and chicks is by nesting together in large colonies and they will help protect each other out in the event of a flying predator, like laughing gulls. But, despite these efforts, birds are lost every year to natural causes.</b></p>
	<p>Winn:</p> <p>the birds nest in large flocks very close to each other in areas where there is no ground predation, there are no raccoons, very few mink, and uh until recently no people were going out to some of these sights</p> <p>Uh yeah this is a clearly a uh, a pelican nest from last year. Uh, the size of the nest is uh, uh there is nothing else out here that would create a nest this size. And all these materials too,</p>

	<p>pelicans bring all this grasses, these grasses in. Uh, they actually pull these up as live grass at times and uh, and uh and form a very well made nest like this. The eggs are, too uh, uh indicative of a pelican, just the size of them, uh generally white, pure white like this without any patterning on it, uh there is nothing else that would have eggs this size out here either so... this egg looks like it was depredated, by a bird by the way it was opened up: a crow or a gull would come in here and crack it from the top like that. The nest could have been abandoned before this happened. the birds could have abandoned it because it is fairly low on the island out here, there could have been high water that came in and the birds abandoned it for that reason as well. Uh, one of the adults could have died. eagles for instance will eat an adult pelican The birds will be here in a couple of months to start nesting again and uh this area, this whole area behind us will be wall to wall pelicans starting in April into May. they nest in quite close proximity to each other on the tops of these dunes back here uh on, on this island.</p>
	<p>Pelicans, when they hatch, if something in the wild can be ugly, I don't tend to think of things as ugly in the wild, but they are uh, uh their skin and they are purple and pink and they look like big erasers. when they get large they are quite pretty with white fluff all over them. They are quite downy and uh we will find uh white downy chicks all the way into October.</p>
	<p>Skinner: this is, I always like looking at these things but I am not quite sure what this one is. Do you know what this one is? Brad: uh I would guess that with the feathers in here, this is, this is a sure way to figure out what it was, this is a skull and its quite clearly a pelican that's uh died up in here n the grass we are right up in the breeding are, a main breeding area for the pelicans here, uh just by looking at it, this is not very well calcified bone, and my guess is that this is from a young bird really unique, they will open this up as they are diving and uh this area fills with water and then the water drains out and they will catch the fish or shrimp within, within that area. Skinner: So what are the possible scenarios for this bird not making it? Winn: uh, mortality for young birds is quite high and I would guess that starvation would--uh possible disease, uh we do have some predation out here. My guess would be that it went in late in the season and probably starved up here. The parents eventually abandoned it.</p>
	<p><b>Narrator: Pelicans are the biggest birds that nest on the bird islands. Some of the prettiest is the royal terns, named for that crown of black they wear so regally.</b></p>
	<p>Winn: royal terns on the ground nest within about uh, beak's length</p>

	<p>of each other., they nest very close to each other, royal terns lay one egg per pair</p>
	<p><b>Narrator:</b> Courtship in these birds can also be an incredible time to witness one of nature's most fascinating events. But be sure to watch only from a boat. You'll need good binoculars!</p>
	<p>Winn: Uh Least Terns have a really interesting courtship behavior the males will offer a fish as uh, as uh as a gesture of compassion maybe uh to the uh female uh before copulation and uh that's an interesting behavior to watch as well. Uh Lease terns are a species on the coast that nest in a variety of areas including some of our larger islands.</p>
	<p>There are some islands on the coast where birds, there are no birds nesting, people have uh, uh the human presence is too great for them. Uh Tybee island with several surveys up there, has no birds nesting on the uh beach. Uh St. Simon's Island is too populated with people and dogs. Uh the other islands, the birds are nesting in quite isolated areas. Mostly the north and south tips of the islands where there is a big, flat, open beach area. stay close to the water, uh don't spend a lot of time up in the dunes or on the big, we call them rack flats, it's a terraced area on the beach that's dry and uh and look for the birds too. The oyster catchers stand out, you can see them from a long way off, black heads, bright bills, brown backs, um, and uh just be conscious of them, uh they are part of our, our heritage and something that we are trying to keep on the coast.</p>
	<p>FEMALE NARRATOR: For over one hundred years the Oconee River had a secret. A species of fish virtually lost to science was living there on the brink of extinction. In 1991, biologists with Georgia's Department of Natural Resources were sampling the fish population of the Oconee. They found several large fish which they couldn't identify. It took two or three years to discover the Robust Redhorse had first been described in the mid 1800's. and Georgia now had the only known population. Efforts to reintroduce the robust redhorse to other rivers in Georgia have been hampered by heavily impacted watersheds. Poor water quality poses a threat to the long-term survival of this species. While it might not be the most photogenic of our native animals, the Robust Redhorse teaches us an important lesson. If we are not very careful, we can easily lose a species before we learn the part it plays in our world.</p>

	<p><b>Narrator: Birding is fast becoming America's favorite pastime. Some traditionalists might still say our favorite pastime is baseball, and others rank gardening higher, but a recent study found "birding" to be our most popular pastime. Oh, and that's "birding" not "birdwatching".</b></p>
	<p>Williams: I probably have the ideal job, or at least I think I do.</p>
	<p>Narrator: And we think so too. EJ Williams is a wildlife Biologist with The Georgia Department of Natural Resources Non-game and Endangered Wildlife Program and her specialty is birds. A specialty that certainly suits her.</p>
	<p><b>Narrator: We're on Butler Island, part of the Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area near Darien, in southeast Georgia and EJ is taking Georgia Outdoors birding.</b></p>
	<p>Williams: This is a real popular spot for both waterfowl hunting, but also for bird watching...There's our great egret Skinner: And there's a great way to see him Williams: Yeah Skinner: Was this put in for that purpose? Williams: Yeah this was actually a non-game funded tower to help people with their bird watching Skinner: This is great Williams: Isn't this nice Skinner: What a way to look at birds Williams: Yeah, that's exactly what it was designed to do is to give people a nice look out into the impoundments and into the vegetation. Skinner: Great 360. You can see all these guys. You can see right down on them. They can't hide from you. Williams: Exactly. You can see right down into all their little haunts. It's real good to, especially for some of those wading birds like glossy ibis because they'll get down in that and they're so dark that you really can't see them until you kind of look down on them.</p>

	<p><b>Narrator:</b> The nice thing about birding is that it's seasonless...at any time of year there will usually be something, and usually something interesting, to see. In the spring and fall you can see migrating birds headed either north or south. And for some birds, Georgia is their southern destination for wintering. And, of course, many birds stay here year around. EJ has some tips for the beginning birder.</p>
	<p>Williams: traditionally the best time of day for almost any kind of birding is early in the morning. Um, that's particularly true for the songbirds, but also, you tend to get the early morning movements of a lot of the herons and the egrets when they are moving from their roost areas into their feeding areas. But um out on the impoundments, you are going to see something just about anytime of the day, a good field guide and a pair of binoculars would be the essentials.</p>
	<p>When folks come down, kind of the key things to look for if you're not an experienced birder, some of the things to key on are of course...Size, are you dealing with a small bird, a medium sized bird or a big bird? And then color...even if you just took the wading birds, there tend to be white wading birds and dark wading birds. Segregating things out that way will help you start putting things into those logical groups. And then some finer points, once you've kind of gotten it from size and color are the shape of the bill, the length of the legs, the shape of the wings, and so those kind of generalities that help get you to the right part of the field guide. And field guides are set up different ways. Some are set up according to groups, and there are some that are actually set up by color. So there are different approaches to field guides. And it's a good idea to spend some time with your field guide before you get to the field. And, one of the cardinal rules of birding is don't take your eyes off the bird, you know, don't spot an interesting bird, and then start looking through your field guide, because by the time you look back up, the bird's gone. So, it's a good idea to just soak in every bit that you can about a bird, the color, the size, the bill...the real distinctive markings. Then, when the bird has flown off...open your field guide up.</p>
	<p><b>Narrator:</b> The Altamaha Waterfowl Management includes over 27,000 acres and encompasses 10 islands. But the area, despite its name, is not managed solely for waterfowl or birding, it's an area that accommodates many activities</p>

	<p><b>including hunting, fishing and camping. Finding a balance that works for all kinds of wildlife is the job of area's Wildlife Biologist, Carmen Martin.</b></p>
	<p>Martin: When you think about the Altamaha Waterfowl Management Area, you think about waterfowl, but we also have thousands of acres of upland habitat and also bottomland hardwoods that are great for turkey hunting, hog hunting, deer hunting and that sort of recreational activities. The benefits, the water manipulation and the habitat that we create in these old rice field impoundments benefit both; both the waterfowl, non-game, when you talk about wading birds and shorebirds. This is a very productive area for alligators. We see eagles constantly flying over. There are fish that occur in these impoundments, so you get just a lot of diversity in the impoundments themselves</p>
	<p><b>Narrator: Water is an very important element in maintaining the great diversity of wildlife here. No one knows this more than the area's Wildlife Technician David Edwards.</b></p>
	<p>Edwards: The basic four types of management we have on the area – First of all there's a permanently flooded impoundment. Permanently flooded means it's flooded one entire growing season. And then the second type of management – we have what we call a June draw down impoundment. Uh, we'll flood it again in November. It'll stay flooded through the duck season and up until June. The third type of management we have is what we call a moist soil impoundment. It's not flooded, it's not dry, it's just kind of a moist soil. The fourth type of management, and we have a few of those type impoundments, is we'll keep the impoundments dry all year, right on through duck season, right on through the summer and all. And that's to facilitate for small game – our rabbits, also have a place for our deer.</p>
	<p>Martin: Here on the Butler Refuge, a lot of our management is looking providing habitat for migrating wading birds and shore birds. instead of dropping those water levels down relatively quickly, we do incremental steps, and what that allows for is areas of interspersed mud flats, which each increment you'll get new areas of mud flats exposed with also deeper water habitat.</p>

	What you'll see are some plovers and sandpipers that will come in and probe the mud and scurry and find insects that are laying on those exposed mudflats
	<b>Narrator: What's neat about wading birds when you're a beginning birder, is that they are quite large and easy to spot. You can even catch sight of some from the highway.</b>
	Williams: They're accessible to anybody... You don't have to be an expert birder. And, it helps if you get in an area... You're very likely to see six or eight species. What I try to do first is say "Okay, who's out there?" - There's white wading birds and then there's darker wading birds. Within those large white gorgeous birds you get great egrets, and they're the big guys. They're the tallest birds. Black legs, yellowish bill. And then, just a little smaller, but still, very obvious white bird are the snowy egrets. A good bit smaller than the great egrets, and if you get a chance to see them fly, or perched up on a stick or something, they'll have these gorgeous yellow slippers. So you've got these black legs and then these gawdy yellow feet. And so you've got snowy egrets and then you've got cattle egrets. And, most people are familiar with cattle egrets because they've seen them, but you will see those out in these marsh areas even though they're more typical in fields and such. Um, and then white Ibis, and they're so distinctive because they've got that long thin D curved bill, and when they get in breeding plumage they get these bright red patches around their eyes, and...just beautiful birds, but that bill is just a dead ringer. Then if you see a dark version with that real distinctive bill you've got glossy ibis. Real iridescent greens and rust colors, but very obviously an ibis. Little blue herons are seen in these impoundments and it's a snowy egret sized, kind of a medium-sized wading bird, and just a beautiful dark blue, really, really classy color...Little green herons, we see those, or green backed herons – they're one of the smaller, kind of stubby. They can look blueish depending on the light, but they're...you know have a shorter neck and a real stocky pointed bill unlike some other birds who are a little bit more graceful and have a longer neck. So there's a whole variety and so many of those you can really see without binoculars...you'd miss a lot because you can't see the real finer points of the bird, but you can see that they're out there and you can start identifying them at least in general groups even without binoculars.
	One of the more obvious ones that we've seen around the impoundments. And a lot of people are familiar with them, are the great blue herons. Cause you'll see those all around the state, around the small ponds....A lot of time even in the city you'll see a great blue heron...But, you'll see a lot of

	<p>those out here. Sometimes you won't notice them at first. You'll start looking at these big white birds that really show, and you're scanning across and then all of a sudden it's like look there goes a great blue heron standing right there and I didn't even notice it. Not quite as showy, but a huge, really nice...just a good sized bird.</p>
	<p>Skinner: I'm seeing lots of tree swallows Williams: Yeah, we've had some estimates of millions of tree swallows, and they're literally swarms. It's just amazing. Skinner: Wow. Williams: Yeah, a lot of good insects coming off this nice wet vegetation and the mud, really gives them something to feed on. One of the main things they feed on is sand gnats. Skinner: Oh really? Williams: Yeah. So keep that in mind. If you see a lot of tree swallows, you better hope for a windy day (laughs). That or have a good collection of cigars.</p>
	<p>Williams: If you're here in the winter time, you're gonna hear a certain constant kind of chatter along in all the bushes and it's yellow rumped warblers, they're just everywhere. Year round, one of the very common birds that you're gonna hear and see are red winged black birds. They're here all year round, they nest out in the marshes and in the standing vegetation, so that's one of the common species.</p>
	<p><b>Narrator: Another thing that is here year round... is history. Ownership of this area can be traced back all the way to the Revolutionary War.</b></p>
	<p>Edwards: Back in the late 1700's, around 1790 all this area was diked in to use as rice fields. during that time, most of the people were revolutionary war soldiers, especially Major Butler. colonials back in that time didn't have a whole lot of money so they'd</p>

	<p>give land, and he was deeded this part of Georgia. He stayed into the rice business until his death, it was deeded to Pierce Butler. And then he kept it going and it stayed as a working rice plantation until after the war. Uh, then after the war basically everything started to fall apart. They started share cropping, and uh this type of stuff, and about, oh 1890 the hurricane came and wiped out the last of the rice culture.</p>
	<p><b>05:13:02:12</b>—Tape 10689 After that the area basically stayed pretty much unattended. Until, um a colonel Houston bought it back in um 1923. Now Colonel Houston owned the New York Yankees back when Babe Ruth and Lou Garrig played for them. And he finally got tired of the old hustle bustle of New York life and he decided he'd move down to the country. The big house, the barns, things like that came from him. Well, his kid's, parents didn't want to have anything to do with life in the Georgia Marsh, so they sold it to R.J. Reynolds. Now R.J. Reynolds ran it the same, as a truck farming operation until about 1953 where he sold it to the state of Georgia for 1 dollar, the whole place – land, building, equipment, the whole thing. and ever since then it has been a working waterfowl area.</p>
	<p><b>Narrator: Now the owners of the area are mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians and birds that live here and call it home.</b></p>
	<p>Williams: An important thing to keep in mind about Altamaha Wildlife management area – it's not just the impoundments. This is a very large wildlife management area that extends up the Altamaha river for a couple of miles and takes in some very pristine bottom wood hardwood forest. And that's so important for so many of our very high priority species. And species that you're gonna see in those mature hardwood forests and those bottomlands are things like piliated woodpecker, the god-almighty bird. And then, of course, personitary warblers – our only warbler that nests in cavities in the east – beautiful yellow bird that people used to call swamp canaries, and for good reason. Beautiful little guys, so it's a real diverse area that provides not only this real obvious habitat for water fowl, wading birds, shore birds, and other song birds along the edges, but then just take in all that area that goes up the river and you've really got a gem that protects a lot of really good bird habitat.</p>
	<p><b>Narrator: Yes we do, and it's up to all of us to keep it that way.</b> (Georgia Outdoors theme song)</p>