



February 2016 Newsletter of the

Rockbridge Bird Club, encouraging
the enjoyment, knowledge, &
conservation of birds in the Rockbridge Area

Calendar

Unless otherwise noted, program meetings are held at 7 pm in the Old Courthouse meeting room, in downtown Lexington.

Sat., Jan. 30, 8:00 a.m. till mid afternoon—trip to Greenfield and Audubon exhibit at Taubman (weather date Sunday, Jan. 31) *

Sat., Feb. 6, 8:00 a.m.—Boxerwood Bird Walk *

Weds., Feb. 10, 7:00 p.m.—Program: “Attracting Birds with Water,” by Bob Schamerhorn *

Fri., Feb. 12 - Mon., Feb. 15—Great Backyard Bird Count (see gbbc.birdcount.org)

Weds., Apr. 13, 7:00 p.m.—Program by VDGIF bird conservation biologist Sergio Harding

Fri., Apr. 29 - Sun., May 1— Virginia Society of Ornithology’s [Annual Meeting](#), hosted by the Roanoke Valley Bird Club

*see article below

Greenfield & Audubon on Saturday, January 30

This is an all-bird event, part field trip and part art show—plus lunch! We’ll meet in the Lexington Food Lion parking lot at 8:00 a.m., stop at the I-81 Arcadia exit to pick up southern Rockbridge residents, and proceed to Greenfield Recreation Park in Botetourt County to look for ducks in the pond and other winter birds.

Then we’ll go on to the Taubman Museum of Art in Roanoke to see the exhibit [John James Audubon: Swift Birds of Passage](#), a rare gathering of over fifty of Audubon’s works on paper. Admission is free. Those who’ve seen this show highly recommend it.

We’ll have lunch at the City Market either before or after the Museum visit, returning to Lexington in mid-afternoon.
(continued next page)



RSVP to Wendy Richards at 463-5214 (home) or Laura Neale at 261-1909 (home) or 460-9237 (cell).

Boxerwood Bird Walk on Saturday, February 6

Meet Kerry Kilday at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot for the regular first-Saturday Boxerwood bird walk, lasting about two hours. If you have questions, or in case of doubtful weather, please call Kerry at (561) 389-9612. Directions are at www.boxerwood.org.

“Attracting Birds with Water” at 7:00 p.m on Wednesday, February 10

Bob Schamerhorn, photographer and bird blogger, will be our speaker. Bob has designed an inexpensive, low-maintenance water feature that provides birds with clean, running water for drinking and bathing year-round, even at sub-freezing temperatures. His presentation will include a segment for do-it-yourselfers describing how to build and install a simple “bird spa” in their own yards. And there will be plenty of photos of birds drinking and bathing!

Bob was inspired to build his backyard spa after observing that a small puddle of water left standing in his patio garden attracted a remarkable diversity of birds. He has since spent thousands of hours watching and photographing them.

The program will take place in the Old Courthouse Meeting Room.



Cedar Waxwing, by Bob Schamerhorn

Conservation Note: Industrial Wind on North Mountain?

The Board of Supervisors of Botetourt County has approved construction of an industrial wind facility called Rocky Forge on a privately owned ridgeline of North Mountain. The American Bird Conservancy's Director of the Bird-Smart Wind Energy Campaign, Dr. Michael Hutchins, wrote a letter to the Botetourt Board describing his concerns. I thought Rockbridge birders might be interested in reading his perspective; please find below a portion of his letter. If you would like to read it in its entirety, please let me know and I'll forward the pdf to you.

Also, the ABC website has good information on [its effort to promote bird-friendly wind energy](#), and there you'll also find the Google Earth map referenced in the first sentence of the Hutchins excerpt below.

—Laura Neale

...from ABC's Michael Hutchins's letter to the Botetourt Board:

"The proposed Rocky Forge Wind Project is located in an orange area on the map, within a Globally Important Bird Area. This is a key source area for neotropical migrants including the Wood Thrush and the Worm-eating, Canada, Black-throated Blue, Golden-winged, and Swainson's Warblers. Several subspecies have breeding ranges confined to the Southern Appalachians, including races of the Ruffed Grouse, Northern Saw-whet Owl, and Black-capped Chickadee. The Southern Appalachians are an important breeding area for many neotropical migrants, several at the southern limit of their breeding ranges. The cool high-elevation (above 2,000 feet) areas form islands of habitat for species normally confined to more northerly regions, such as the Black-capped Chickadee and Northern Saw-whet Owl. Both are represented by particular subspecies in the region, as are the Ruffed Grouse, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Blue-headed Vireo, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Red Crossbill, and Dark-eyed Junco. The eastern subspecies of the Bewick's Wren now appears to have been extirpated from this part of its former range. Subspecies of particular conservation concern are those of the Northern Saw-whet Owl, Black-capped Chickadee, Red Crossbill, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Brown Creeper, all of which survive only in small and fragmented populations, principally in higher altitude spruce-fir forests. Prairie and Golden-winged Warblers are found in early successional forests, and Cerulean, Black-throated Blue, Kentucky, Canada, Blackburnian, Worm-eating and Yellow-throated Warblers all breed [there]. Swainson's Warblers also breed in lower altitude forests with a thick rhododendron understory.

"The conclusion is that great care should be taken to assess the potential impact of the Rocky Forge Wind project on our native birds and bats pre-construction. All efforts should be made to consult with the state wildlife agency and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during this process, and all aspects of the voluntary Land-based Wind Energy Guidelines should be followed to the letter. If threatened or endangered species are present, then this should involve Section 7 consultation under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

"I've looked on the Rocky Forge Wind Project web site and could not find a copy of the Environmental Assessment, which is somewhat problematic, nor could I find a copy of the Avian Protection Plan. It is possible that these documents have not been produced yet, but if [that is] so, approval of this project is premature. Apex Clean Energy, the developer, should also file for incidental take permits under the ESA and Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) to comply with these important wildlife protection laws. If the Board of Supervisors facilitates the building of this project and protected species are killed, there could be shared liability under ESA and BGEPA."

...and local response to Rocky Forge, relayed by your editor:

The Rockbridge Area Conservation Council is seeking volunteers to participate in the state and federal reviews of Rocky Forge and/or to work on preparing Rockbridge County for future industrial wind proposals here. If you're interested, please contact Lee Merrill, merrill@rockbridge.net, or RACC, racc@rockbridge.net or 463-2330.

Your Executive Board has voted to enroll the Club in [American Bird Conservancy](#) membership and to send ABC a letter in support of any monitoring of Rocky Forge they are able to do.

—Alexia Smith

A “Continental Gyre of Birds”

That’s how David Haskell, nature blogger, describes this [animated map](#) showing the yearly migration cycles of 118 bird species in the western hemisphere. The map illustrates the results of a study by scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, based on data from eBird—citizen science put to work!

The President’s Perch: Shelter from the Storm

I love the contrasts that winter gives, and many of them are related to birds. Today I’m looking out on the emerging white palette offered by the latest “snowmageddon,” and some of the contrasts appear at the feeders. Even as the landscape fades to white and grey, it’s striking how some of the resident birds have already begun to take on their spring colors. A group of Goldfinches have gained control of a tube feeder, for example, fighting off the Titmice and Purple Finches and Chickadees pretty relentlessly. As you look at them more closely you can see the brighter yellow emerging much more than just a month ago. Is it just the white background, or have the plumages actually started to change even as the weather argues for more dark and cold to come? I think it’s both.

One of the big activities for the club this fall was the placement of more than a dozen Kestrel boxes around the County. Patti Reum and Dan Bieker brought their boxes and placement experience to us in early December, and we covered a lot of territory in just two days. Thanks go out to the many club members who allowed us to traipse across their properties in search of just the right locations, and don’t forget to let us know if there is action in your boxes this year.

We’ve already learned that some of the action won’t be limited to Kestrels, of course. In a couple of cases the boxes were swarmed by Bluebirds before we even left the spot – it seems they provide good roosting shelter, and we’ve heard that at least one has been inspected by a Screech Owl who didn’t seem to be looking for the different kind of wood used for the Owl boxes that Patti and Dan brought along, nor for a special owl-pleasing location. Kestrels generally want lots of open fields in their line of sight from the box and some separation from the forest edge, while Owls like to have some open views but also want to be much closer to the edge.

As an added bonus for us, and to lighten their load as they headed home, Patti and Dan left several boxes – two Kestrel and two Owl – with us, so if you’re interested in having one and you think you have good habitat, let us know and we’ll get one out to you (first come first served). You can send me an email at janandbob@verizon.net.

The Club newsletter welcomes your submissions! These could be birding observations, thoughts, or travel stories; bird conservation news; photos—or some bird-related surprise. Please send items to alexia@rockbridge.net. Thank you. —Alexia Smith, Editor



For more information about the Club visit our website at www.rockbridgebirdclub.org

Contact the Club by email at rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com or call Bob Biersack, 540-463-1942, or Laura Neale, 540-261-1909.

Join the Club by making out a check for \$15 per household to Rockbridge Bird Club and sending it, along with your address, email address, and phone number, to Betty Besal, 120 Chavis Avenue, Lexington, VA 24450. Thank you.

Club Officers

President, Bob Biersack
Vice President, Laura Neale
Secretary, Alexia Smith
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Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith & produced by Jan Smith (produced this month by Alexia). Please send feedback & news items to alexia@rockbridge.net.