



May 2016 Newsletter

of the

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

Calendar

Sat., May 7, 8:00 a.m.—Boxerwood Bird Walk *

Sat., May 7, 6:30 a.m.—carpool for Apple Orchard Mountain field trip *

Fri., May 27, 5:15 p.m.—carpool to Summers property for Veeries, wine, & cheese *

June—potluck picnic: date, time, and location TBA

*see article below

Field Trips

Boxerwood Bird Walk May 7

Meet Kerry Kilday at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot for the 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.

Apple Orchard Mountain trip May 7

Meet in the Lexington Food Lion parking lot behind McDonalds at 6:30 a.m. to carpool; alternatively, meet the group at 7:30 a.m. at the Sunset Fields pull-off on the Blue Ridge Parkway (mile marker 78.4). From there, we'll take a walk of about two miles up the Apple Orchard Mountain access road, in search of warblers and others. Bob Biersack, Laura Neale, and Wendy Richards will lead. In case of serious rain, the trip will be cancelled. Please call Bob Biersack, 540-463-1942, for information and weather decision.

Canada Warbler, by Dick Rowe



Friday, May 27: Evening Veeries, wine, & cheese chez Summers

Bruce and Nancy Summers once again generously invite members of the Club to their Blue Ridge home -- this time, come listen to the song of the Veery on forested slopes in the Blue Ridge, near Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area. We'll toast the birds with wine provided by the Club and enjoy potluck refreshments. Meet at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot at 5:15 p.m. to carpool to the Summers' home, about a half hour's drive from the meeting point. Please bring some finger food to share! To help with planning, please RSVP to Wendy Richards, 540-463-5214, or Bob Biersack, 540-463-1942

VABB2: What is it?? A way we can ALL help birds!

It's the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2, a huge five-year statewide project to determine what birds are breeding where, here in Virginia. A comparison between results from the 1st (1985-1989) and the 2nd (2016-2020) Breeding Bird Atlases will provide data for all who wish to support conservation of birds and their habitats. State Co-ordinator Ashley Peele gave us an overview in her excellent and enthusiastic talk to our Club in April, and the [VABB2 website](#) is a fun place to explore and learn more.

But here's something **everyone can start doing right now: you can watch birds carefully to see if you think any of their behaviors suggest reproduction.** Fundamentally, that's all this huge, somewhat intimidating scientific project hopes to record. Many folks believe that they need to be expert birders to participate, but just by paying attention to the birds in our yards and out and about, we note our residents—and our summer visitors—singing it up or flitting down to the ground gathering nesting materials. By more closely following the bird activities around us this spring and summer, we can develop our observation skills. So, for starters, just look at the birds! Then you can go to the project website to learn how to submit your observations, or let us know if you'd like the Club to have a couple of workshops on how to “submit the data.”

—Laura Neale



Rose-breasted Grosbeak, by Dick Rowe

Haiku, from you

Seeking dawn morels
Ovenbird shows me her nest
Five perfect eggs gleam
—Betty Besal

On Brushy Hills trails
Tanager teases with call
One chick-burr, then gone
—Kit Huffman

Two years have rolled around since these haikus were written, and now they're back in season! Wouldn't *you* like to report a sighting in haiku form? Of Japanese origin, a haiku is an unrhymed verse form having three lines containing usually five, seven, and five syllables respectively, and typically having a seasonal reference. **Please send a bird-related haiku for the newsletter, at any season, to rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com.**

Conservation Note: North Mountain Wind Project and Eagles

Twenty-five 550-foot wind turbines are planned for a privately-owned North Mountain ridgeline, in Botetourt County, bordering Rockbridge. This is the project called Rocky Forge, that we wrote about in our February issue. Already approved by the Botetourt County Supervisors, it is now in the midst of a simplified, fast-track state-level process called Permit by Rule, whereby the company submits documents to the Department of Environmental Quality to show it complies with regulations. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service must also be consulted about compliance with federal laws, including the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (though wildlife casualties are generally acceptable, unless the area is inhabited by organisms regulated by the Endangered Species Act).



*Golden Eagle, by B.N. Singh
on allaboutbirds.org*

Is this the right place for a utility-scale wind project? Bird-lovers are among those asking this question. Raptors are particularly vulnerable to being killed by collisions with wind turbines, and in a letter to the Fish and Wildlife Service, the American Bird Conservancy's "Bird-Smart Wind Energy" expert Dr. Michael Hutchins raises concerns

about the consequences for the Eastern Golden Eagle. Excerpts follow; if you'd like a copy of the whole letter, please email me at alexia@rockbridge.net.

...from ABC's Michael Hutchins's letter to USFWS:

According to the DGIF [Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries], the Eastern Golden Eagle is believed to be a "small and potentially vulnerable population" that is "geographically isolated and potentially [a] distinct population." This population breeds in northeastern Canada, migrates through the central Appalachians, and winters in Virginia. According to DGIF, "Eastern golden eagle migration is strongly associated with the Appalachian ridgelines...." In fact, "in the East they spend the winter primarily in dense deciduous forests, usually at higher elevations, like ridgetops and mountaintops."

...[Eastern Golden Eagle experts] have estimated that this distinct migratory population is at a critically low level of 1,000-2,500 individuals. With a population size this small east of the Mississippi River, extreme care must be exercised to ensure its viability. One recent study stated: "The eastern population of Golden Eagles is of increasing concern to conservationists and managers range-wide due to its small size, its vulnerability to a suite of human threats (e.g., wind-energy issues, trapping bycatch, lead poisoning) and the general lack of knowledge about these birds."

Considering that the Rocky Forge WEP is sited precisely in the concentrated migration and nesting location of the "small and potentially vulnerable population" of the Eastern Golden Eagle, viability of the project and its impact on this population should be a matter of great concern for the USFWS and DGIF.

Because this is such a small population, which may be genetically distinct from other populations of Golden Eagles, it is imperative that any threats be closely examined and prevented. Even a small number of eagle deaths from collisions with wind turbines or power lines and electrocution could have serious consequences for this population.

...and how to find out more and take part in the discussion:

You can learn more from [Virginians for Responsible Energy](#), who keep abreast of the Permit by Rule process on Rocky Forge. During the comment period, May 5 through June 6, you can email Rocky Forge Wind, and/or you can comment in person at the company's public meeting on Wednesday May 25, 2016, from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. at the Eagle Rock Library, 55 Eagles Nest Drive, Eagle Rock, Virginia 24085. All written comments will be forwarded by the company to the Department of Environmental Quality. For involvement in Rockbridge area efforts to address wind energy issues, please contact Lee Merrill, merrill@rockbridge.net, or RACC, racc@rockbridge.net or 463-2330. And the American Bird Conservancy's [Bird-Smart Wind Energy Campaign](#) is very useful for a general perspective.

—Alexia Smith

The President's Perch

Woke today (April 27) to the song of a Wood Thrush. I think it's the best alarm the earth can provide, melodic and complex and alive. It has become one of the "rights" of spring; a feeling of belonging, really, that comes from familiarity and the rhythm of the seasons. I guess there are things in the city that worked the same way in our city years, but the ones we see and hear now feel much more grounded and connected to a place and time. Understanding the flow of nature is something I was looking forward to as we moved here, and it's slowly sinking in now.



There are sightings everywhere these days of the full variety of migrants, but they're hard to see and never seem to be where I am. It can be frustrating when you're new to this to be surrounded by songs and calls that are vaguely familiar, so you think you should know them but most just don't come to me quickly or correctly enough. I often think I'll memorize the sound "in the field" and find it in a guide or app when I get to the house, but that seldom works for me either, as the memory fades.

Patience is the key to this, and also accepting my limitations. Even some birds I've come to know are hard to distinguish just by sound. I know I'm hearing vireos now, but are they Red-eyed or Blue-headed? I'm not at all sure about that.

Blue-headed Vireo
by Dick Rowe

We had an ornithology session in Master Naturalist class last Saturday with John Spahr, whom many of us know as one of the fine birders in the state. I offered one identification during an afternoon walk, thinking I'd seen a Blue-headed Vireo. Without flinching, and not seeing the bird, John asked if I was sure it wasn't a Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher. . . and, of course, he was right. I reacted to a white eye ring, a feature these two birds share, though the rings aren't really very similar, and pretty much nothing else about the two birds would cause you to confuse one for the other. . . so it's more than just sound that confuses me.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
by Dick Rowe



But patience is sometimes rewarded with a feeling that you're in on the excitement of the new arrivals. A pair of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, three Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and a solitary Indigo Bunting singing at the top of an old black walnut bring me back to that feeling of belonging I keep hoping for.

—*Bob Biersack*



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 or more 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.

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