



November 2016 Newsletter
of the
Rockbridge Bird Club
encouraging the enjoyment, knowledge,
& conservation
of birds in the Rockbridge Area

If I keep a green bough in my heart, the singing bird will come. (Chinese Proverb)

Calendar

Unless otherwise noted, programs are held in the Old Courthouse meeting room, downtown Lexington.

Sat., Nov. 5, 8:00 a.m.—Boxerwood Bird Walk *

Weds., Nov. 9, 7:00 p.m.—Program: “Flight of the Whimbrel” by Fletcher Smith of the Center for Conservation Biology *

Sat., Nov. 12, 9:00 a.m.—field outing: “Citizen Science Get-together” at the home of Bonnie Bernstein *

Weds., Feb. 8, 7:00 p.m.—Program, subject TBA

Weds., Apr. 12, 7:00 p.m.—Program, subject TBA

*see article below

Monthly Birding at Boxerwood: November 5...

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

Program on Whimbrel migration at 7:00 p.m, Wednesday, November 9

During fall migration, the Whimbrel, a wide-ranging migratory shorebird, flies 6,900 kilometers non-stop over the Atlantic Ocean from a staging location in eastern Canada to wintering grounds in northern Brazil. In spring, Whimbrels return to their breeding grounds in the Canadian Arctic, many by way of Virginia’s Eastern Shore, where they stop to fuel up on fiddler crabs for the final 4,800-kilometer leg of their journey.

The flight of the Whimbrel has been tracked over the past several years by Fletcher Smith, a research biologist with the Center for Conservation Biology (CCB) at William and Mary College and VCU. At our November meeting, Fletcher will present highlights from his team’s fieldwork, including the outfitting of seven Whimbrels with solar-powered satellite transmitters, and will talk about the significance of their work for conservation efforts.



Whimbrel at Chincoteague. Photo by Dick Rowe

The “Flight of the Whimbrel” will be preceded by announcements and...

The Rockbridge Bird Club’s 2016 Annual Meeting

There are just three items on the agenda. For the election of officers, a slate will be presented, as listed in the [October newsletter](#) (Alexia Smith for President; Laura Neale, Vice President; Bob Biersack, Secretary; and Betty Besal, Treasurer). A vote will also be held on a change of bylaws, as described in the [September newsletter](#) (changing our fiscal year from the calendar year to September 1 to August 31, to sync with our activity cycle). And the Treasurer will present her annual report. If you need more information on any of these matters, please email the Club at rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com.

Citizen Science Get-together on Saturday, November 12 at 9 a.m.

On November 12th we are kicking off the 30th season of Project FeederWatch with a "Citizen Science Get-Together" at Bonnie Bernstein's home. Please join Bonnie and me at 9 a.m. for 2 or 3 hours as we observe and tally the variety of birds that frequent her yard and adjacent meadow, pasture, and woods. Together we'll also explore opportunities to participate in programs like FeederWatch and NestWatch that crowd-source data to assist scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in their research. And we'll share notes about recommended bird-feeding practices and nest-monitoring protocols.

Light breakfast refreshments, including coffee, will be served. We plan to be outside most of the time, so dress for the day's forecast!

Please contact me at richardsw@wlu.edu or home phone: 463-5214 if you plan to attend this event. Car pools can be arranged, although parking is not a problem. Here are Bonnie's directions to her home, from Lexington (about 13 minutes):

- Leave town on Main Street, going north past VMI and continuing on Rt. 11 N across the Maury River on Veterans Memorial Bridge.

- Turn right at the traffic light onto Old Buena Vista Road (VA 631).
- Go 2.3 miles on Old BV. At the bottom of the hill, turn left on Forest Grove (VA 703) and go 1.9 miles.
- Turn right onto East Ridge Drive at the Stage Coach East development sign (just past the Stage Coach Crossing development sign on the left).
- Follow the gravel road up the hill. At the first mailbox on your left – #155 – turn left into our driveway. The house is around the bend.
- Parking is OK in the area at the top of the drive, near the garage at the bottom of the drive, and along the road.

I hope to see you on the 12th!

—Wendy Richards

Join the Club now, or renew your membership

Household dues are \$15. Any extra you can donate will also be put to good use—for example, recruiting good speakers and supporting bird-related programs for young folks. Please make out your check to Rockbridge Bird Club and send it, along with your address, email address, and phone number, to Betty Besal, 120 Chavis Avenue, Lexington, VA 24450—or bring your contribution to the meeting. Thank you!



White-crowned Sparrow. Photo by Dick Rowe

The President's Perch: Transitions

So here I sit, surrounded by various Guides and Life Histories and Apps, trying to work through an identification for the birds I saw this morning while walking the dog through the pastures. We live in the era of asking Siri or Alexa or whatever distinctive name some other technology company comes up with to personalize its “intelligent assistant” system and getting clear and definitive answers to complicated research questions. I haven’t found one yet that would allow me to ask for the name of the small

bird with the faded yellow underside, darker greenish brown on the back, a lighter throat, and faded bars on its breast, moving quickly among the cedars and walnut trees along the stream as the sun moved down the hill toward the field.

There is some consolation in the claim that ID's are harder during the fall migration because many of the birds have faded from their breeding plumage (Arthur Cleveland Bent refers to "pre-nuptial" and "post-nuptial" appearance), but it doesn't necessarily resolve the question. These guys gave me decent views for several minutes, and I was pretty sure I'd remember what I saw well enough to find them when I got back to the house.

The Peterson Guide helpfully offers a couple of pages of "confusing fall warblers," and while I didn't think I was confused when I opened the book, I pretty clearly was after a couple of minutes. Were they Magnolia Warblers? The coloring seems right and the bars are there, but I'm not sure about the tail feathers, which seem more like a Prairie Warbler, though the yellow around the eye wasn't obvious to me, or maybe a Blackburnian, but again the eye doesn't look quite right. Am I really remembering as precisely as I thought? It was early, the light wasn't perfect, I was only partially caffeinated. . .

Sibley isn't helping at all, with the drawing of the non-breeding Magnolia fairly completely different from the immature presented by Peterson. The photos from Crossley lead me to a first-winter female Magnolia, but is that more because the angle of the picture is close to the one I had for the birds, or because I'm getting increasingly desperate as I move from source to source, and the Prairie might be more likely given the time of year here. Looking through the Bent life histories wasn't really helpful either, though it's always fun to pull them out and fall back a century or so in language and observation methods. The Audubon app on my iPad takes me back to the Magnolia —"immature male (first winter)," he says with false confidence.



This one's a Palm Warbler. Keep reading. Photo by Dick Rowe.

Last week on a similar kind of day I was pretty proud of myself when I got to spend just a few seconds with a similar bird, but long enough to see the tail-bobbing that convinced me I'd seen a Palm Warbler. This was a few minutes before I had a much shorter look at a Nuthatch that streaked through the cedars leaving a distinct impression of some faded red and a strong eye line that tells me it was a Red-breasted, which it seems should be possible here, though I don't remember ever seeing one around our property before, and we're probably a little low in elevation for them. It's that kind of find that is exciting, but today I'm left wondering about the confidence I felt then.

It's here that I face the boundaries of my own birding experience and skill, and there is some poetic justice here. I'm of the generation increasingly proud (with age) of the fact that we actually learned (and sometimes were captivated by) things like geography, while the generation behind us was equally proud of the fact that while they didn't necessarily know where cities or even countries were, they knew how to find out if they needed to. My ID skills are still in the "I know where to find it" stage, and today I've been reminded of the limitations of that skill, and it makes me smile a bit at my own shortcomings.

— Bob Biersack



For more information about the Club, visit our website at www.rockbridgebirdclub.org and find us on Facebook.

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.

Rockbridge Bird Club on Facebook

Becky McKenzie reminds us that if you're on Facebook you can like the Rockbridge Bird Club page and share our posts, thus spreading word of the Club's mission and activities. You can also post photos of birds and bird outings directly to Facebook, or send them to Becky for posting, at beckymckenzie128@gmail.com. Thank you!

Club Officers

President, Bob Biersack
Vice President, Laura Neale
Secretary, Alexia Smith
Treasurer, Betty Besal
Program Chair, Sarah Burleson

Field Trip Chair, Wendy Richards
Publicity Chair, Bonnie Bernstein
Membership Chair, Adrienne Bodie
Club Ornithologist, Dick Rowe

Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith. Logo by Jennifer Cox
Website managed by Bob Biersack
Facebook page managed by Becky McKenzie