



June 2017 Newsletter

of the

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

Calendar

Sat., June 3, 8:00 a.m.—Bird Walk at Boxerwood *

Sun., June 11, 5:00 p.m.—Potluck Picnic at Boxerwood *

Sat., June 17, 4:30-8:30 p.m.—Earth Day celebration at Hopkins Green in
Lexington, including the Club's "Go Birding" activity for families *

*see article below

When the moon covers the sun, we have a solar eclipse. What do you call it
when birds do that?

—Kim Young-ha, Korean novelist, b. 1968

Monthly Birding at Boxerwood: June 3...

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.

A Sunday Picnic: annual Club potluck June 11

Come one and all to Boxerwood for our 2017 Potluck Picnic! The appointed time
is 5:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 11. Bring friends and family and a picnic-style dish to
share; the Club will provide table ware and assorted drinks.

We're hoping for a lovely June evening in the Pavilion, but in case we need shelter,
the Lodge is available as well. Weather permitting, a bird stroll around the Garden will
begin at 4:30 at the Pavilion.

We know some of you will want to help with this event! If you can come early for
set-up (we'll be there at 4) or stay after for clean-up, please let us know, by responding
to this email or by calling Alexia at 463-4010.

—Alexia Smith & Kathy Morikawa (the Potluck committee)

Help folks "Go Birding" at the Earth Day celebration on Saturday, June 17

The rescheduled Earth Day festival, which begins at 4:30 on Hopkins Green, will
have plenty of information and activities for all ages, with music and food too; learn
more at the [webpage](#).

You can volunteer to help get families excited about birds! Bonnie Bernstein
& Anne Henderson have come up with a great "Go Birding" activity for kids & others.
The Bird Club table will have binoculars to lend and a special checklist of 20 birds.
Here & there around the Green (or the indoor venue, in case of rain) will be cut-out
images of those birds, variously perching, feeding, on nests, etc. Your part will be to

show people how to use binocs & send them off, checklist in hand, on a kind of treasure hunt.

The checklist will have information about the Club on the back, and we'll have available some bird guides etc. for people to look at & the Club calling cards to hand out. If you can help for an hour or two between 4:30 and 8:30, please email the Club at rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com.

Report from The Biggest Week

My husband Steve and I travelled to northwest Ohio on the Lake Erie shoreline in early May to spend a few days at The Biggest Week in American Birding. We wanted to see what all the fuss was about — and we came away from our time there more appreciative than ever of the great birding locale that western Virginia offers.

It's not that we didn't see birds; I recorded 92 species, some of which I had never seen before, such as the Lark Sparrow. Also, our time spent at what has become known as the "The Warbler Capital of the World" afforded us up-close views of Cape May and Bay-breasted Warblers in breeding plumage, both of them species that migrate through our area but don't stay here long.

The thing is, a stroll along the famous Magee Marsh boardwalk required us to squeeze through bottlenecked crowds as birders strained to see what someone had just identified as a Hooded Warbler or a Chestnut-sided Warbler. There were so many cameras with large lenses that you felt like you were constantly blocking someone's coveted view of a life bird. I asked one man who had just taken a photo with an



The Magee Marsh boardwalk is not very long, maybe a third of a mile, but at times there are a thousand or so birders on it; while we were there they vastly outnumbered the birds. Photo & comment by Steve Richards.

impressive lens what he had seen, and he said he didn't know — he'd have to check it out when he took the time to review his photos. So you get the picture — frenzied birders, adding species to their life lists.



One unidentified bird in the bush equals a traffic jam on the boardwalk. The foliage was pretty advanced, so it was hard to spot the solitary warbler. Wendy is on the left, not wanting to charge into the mob. Photo & comment by Steve Richards.

However, the really great thing about the experience was the very fact that all these people flocked to northwest Ohio specifically to see birds. And this has given the major sponsor of the event, Black Swamp Bird Observatory (BSBO), an opportunity to share their mission of bird conservation. Here is a quote from an article about the Observatory in the visitor's guide for this year's festival: "Ecotourism, or more specifically bird-tourism, has become a major part of BSBO's conservation efforts. BSBO's goal for organizing The Biggest In American Birding is to generate support for habitat conservation." By inventing this annual festival the observatory and its co-sponsors have established an amazing collaboration with the area's visitor's bureaus, chambers of commerce, and businesses, since it has become evident that birders are happy to spend money and offer a boost to local economies if it helps birds.

In summary, we saw some great birds and met some amazing birders... but the real bonus for us was the realization of how fortunate we are to live in another great bird migration area, right here, near the Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains.

— Wendy Richards

Eastern Phoebes on our ledges

Where did they build their nests before we started providing such handy structures for them? Here's what [All About Birds](#) says: Phoebes nested on bare rock outcrops — and sometimes still do. Whatever the site, they prefer a niche or overhang, where the young will be protected from the elements and fairly safe from predators, and they seem to prefer the nests to be close to the "ceiling." Another preference is for woody understory vegetation nearby (they breed in mostly-wooded areas), possibly to make the nest site less visible or to provide perches near the nest for the adult.



Photo by Wendy Richards. She reports that the two youngsters, left, fledged the day after she took this picture.

All About Birds reports that historically, Phoebe numbers and range increased as people spread across the landscape and built structures the birds could use as nest sites. They go on to note: "Eastern Phoebe populations were stable overall between 1966 and 2015, with small declines in Canada and small increases in the U.S., according to the North American Breeding Bird Survey." Here is one case where human activity has apparently helped a bird species! You may already have a good nest site for Phoebes; since they depend on low woody plants for foraging perches, you can enhance their habitat quality by your garden and woodland practices.

— Alexia Smith

Bob's Perch

I spent some time this morning helping staffers from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) conduct "point surveys" to assess the long-term effects of fire on bird species locations and numbers. They conduct these surveys at about 100 points within 11 burn units that cover parts of 18,000 acres. About half of the land being studied is owned by TNC on Warm Springs Mountain in Bath and Allegheny Counties, and the other half is a contiguous area in the Jefferson National Forest.

The units are burned at various intervals over the years, and the purpose of the survey is to see how fire affects the distribution of birds – right after the fire and over a number of subsequent years. They are currently in the 7th year of a planned 10-year study. They believe this is the only study ever done on this scale for this duration.

Earlier research has suggested that eastern forests were routinely touched by fire at between three- and nine-year intervals, so relatively frequent fire was a characteristic of these forests throughout the time before European immigration.

The surveys themselves are pretty intense and focused ten-minute sessions, generally after one has scrambled and bushwhacked for quite a distance through the scrub and thickets that develop in the years after a burn. The locations are marked with stakes and identified as GPS points so that the teams can return each year. Every bird, seen or heard, is counted in each of the ten minutes. So a new list is created when the clock strikes one minute and another new one when you reach two minutes and so on until you get to ten. It actually puts a lot of pressure on the observer to remember where each bird is located from minute to minute and what new species arrive or leave at a given point during the survey.

At year seven, some patterns are beginning to emerge in the data. Generally, it seems that species are affected by fire in somewhat common-sense ways. In the first year after a burn, for example, Eastern Towhees are relatively hard to find where they had been plentiful before the burn. As the years go by, however, they seem to return to their previous numbers or in some cases possibly expand their populations. It suggests that over a full landscape (or at least over these 18,000 acres) birds move around as habitats change but don't disappear so long as the pattern of change and regeneration is allowed to continue.

Perhaps another lesson in letting nature take its course, something at which we don't really excel. . .

Oh, and as we were driving out, a bobcat trotted across the road in front of us – carrying what looked like a rabbit it was no doubt planning to have for lunch. Turns out DNA analysis of scat suggests that bobcats are actually more plentiful than coyotes in this area – another surprise, at least to me.

—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 Alexia Smith, 540-463-4010, 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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