



## September 2017 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. Field trips are half day, and the meeting place is the Lexington Food Lion parking lot.*

Sat., Sept. 2, 8:00 a.m.—First-Saturday bird walk at Boxerwood \*

Sat., Sept 9, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch open house \*

Weds., Sept. 13, 7:00 p.m.—Program: Dick Rowe, Club Ornithologist, on his Tree Swallow research \*

Sat., Oct. 7, 8:00 a.m.—First-Saturday bird walk at Boxerwood

Weds., Nov. 8, 7:00 p.m.—Program: Mixon Darracott on Purple Martins

\*see article below

The sun is always shining. We have oxygen, trees, birds. There's so much good things on Earth, still. We haven't destroyed everything.

— Ziggy Marley, Jamaican musician, b. 1968

### Monthly Birding at Boxerwood: September 2...

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](http://www.boxerwood.org).

### Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch open house Saturday, September 9

The Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch station located at the Inn at Afton is planning its "Where the Raptors Soar" [Open House](#) on Saturday, September 9, 2017 from 10:00 am to 2:00 p.m. The event promises many hands-on displays and bird-friendly activities, including raptor identification workshops, owl pellet dissections, information about local environmental organizations, and nature-related activities for kids. This will also be an opportunity to meet the folks who count the raptors and to learn how and why the watches are conducted.

In an exciting addition to this annual event, the Wildlife Center of Virginia will be exhibiting live native raptors representative of the species that migrate through the Hawk Watch station. They plan to be there from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm.

If you are interested in attending and would like to meet up with a group of local folks to carpool from the Lexington Food Lion parking lot at 9 am on Sept. 9th, please contact me at [richardsw@wlu.edu](mailto:richardsw@wlu.edu) or 463-5214.

—Wendy Richards



*Tree Swallows. Photo by Dick Rowe*

### **Tree Swallow talk by Dick Rowe on Wednesday, September 13**

At our September meeting, Dick Rowe, VMI biology professor and Club ornithologist, will give a presentation about his research on the breeding behavior of Tree Swallows. Dick will first describe their nest defense behaviors generally, then focus on the vocalizations of nesting Tree Swallows in the presence of a competitor or a predator. He'll explain how he and his research students went about determining the meaning of a particular Tree Swallow call, the "chatter call," in the process initiating us into how an animal behaviorist thinks.

The meeting begins at 7:00 p.m. in the Old Courthouse meeting room in downtown Lexington.

### **Dues-&-Donations Season**

Goldfinches are gleaning sunflower seeds in my garden, and squirrels are digging in the lawn. Fall is upon us!

For our Club, September brings another start to nine months of interesting programs and exciting field trips. Remember that you can pay your dues (\$15) anytime now for the Club's 2017 to 2018 year. Extra donations are always welcome, as dues make our public programs possible by funding speaker honoraria, travel, and lodging. When you renew, please update me if your address or contact info has changed. You can mail payment to me (see address near the end of this newsletter) or renew at our next program. Thank you for your support!

*—Betty Besal, Treasurer*



*Pay your dues, please! American Goldfinch, photographed by Dick Rowe*

### **Bob's Perch: Tales from the Breeding Bird Atlas**

As I've written before, this year I decided to try my hand at the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas. While I can't say I've been very successful in terms of volume or quality of data about my block (the state is divided into large geographic squares), I do feel like I've learned a lot.

The process forces you to slow down and spend more time with each bird you see, trying to track and understand its behavior. Of course, the first challenge for me is still identification. I've written before about some of the tools I try to use to help with that – eBird and guides and song recognition apps that I have on my phone. These help me make up for my limited knowledge and experience – as long as they're working. I found the limits of that technology, though, when I chose a block that is pretty remote, which makes cell service sketchy at best in large areas. There were many times when I couldn't even use eBird to keep a list because I couldn't get a connection – turns out that paper and a pencil still have a pretty important place in birding... Even knowing exactly where I was in relation to the boundaries of the block was pretty hard without the GPS mapping program on the phone.

Sometimes the lack of connection magnified the isolation of being several miles into the Goshen Wildlife Management Area, and I know I missed a lot of possible confirmed breeders because I wasn't sure what I was seeing. But in other ways it added to the experience. On one late morning in July while hiking back to the car I saw four bears – or maybe the same two at two different places.

It was good to be reminded that the joys of being in nature don't come with your head in a phone. The focus on breeding behavior helped me find more nests this summer than I think I ever had before, and to appreciate each of them more. I found an

active Cedar Waxwing nest – actually in a cedar tree. Several minutes watching two Acadian Flycatchers moving around in a relatively small area eventually led me to their nest as they returned with food for their young. No earth-shaking discoveries, really, but each one remarkable nonetheless.



*Cedar Waxwing, not in a Cedar. Photo by Dick Rowe*

There are a number of resources available to those who want to try Atlasing, including active web and Facebook sites. It's easy to ask questions and get suggestions from the Atlas staff and other birders. There are training sessions and lots of printed materials, like charts of the timing of breeding, that help you focus on what should be happening at the time you're looking. I got particular help – with accessing some of my block – from the state DGIF.

There are three more years in the Atlas schedule, so we'll have more chances to make contributions.

— *Bob Biersack*



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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For more information about the Club, visit our website at [www.rockbridgebirdclub.org](http://www.rockbridgebirdclub.org) and find us on Facebook.

Contact the Club by email at [rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com](mailto:rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com) or call Alexia Smith, 540-463-4010, or Laura Neale, 540-261-1909.

### Club Officers

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

Field Trip Chair, Wendy Richards  
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Club Ornithologist, Dick Rowe

Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith. Logo by Jennifer Cox  
Website managed by Bob Biersack  
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*What does this Tree Swallow have to say? Find out at our meeting on September 13, when Dick Rowe will talk about his research. Photo by Dick.*