



April 2018 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 Piovano Room at Rockbridge Regional Library, in downtown Lexington, and field trips generally meet at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot.

Weds., Apr. 11, 7:00 p.m.—Program: Bryan Watts, of the Center for Conservation Biology, on the conservation of Virginia raptors *

Sat., Apr. 21, 8:30 a.m.—Spring Bird Walk at Kendal with Kerry Kilday
(rain date Sun., Apr, 22) *

Sat., Apr. 28, 7:00 a.m.—Bird Walk in Brushy Hills, led by Paul and Lock Cabe *

Sat., May 5—Field trip to Apple Orchard Mountain with Dick Rowe
(rain date Sun., May 6)

Fri.-Sat., May 18-20—Virginia Society of Ornithology [Annual Meeting](#), Harrisonburg

*see article below

In honor of Bryan Watts's talk on raptors, we hear Blake's call again this month:

When thou seest an eagle, thou seest a portion of genius; lift up thy head!

— William Blake (1757 - 1827)

Raptor Talk by Bryan Watts on Wednesday, April 11

Bryan Watts, Director of the Center for Conservation Biology in Williamsburg, will give a presentation on the successful come-back of Virginia's raptors on Wednesday, April 11, at 7:00 pm in the Piovanno Room of the Rockbridge Regional Library.

Bryan will discuss the history and recovery of the Peregrine Falcon, Osprey, and Bald Eagle populations in Virginia, describing CCB research on the causes of their decline and management efforts that have led to their recovery. He'll also discuss some of the hurdles and threats that the populations face moving forward.

Bryan is a Professor of Conservation Biology as well as Director of the Center for Conservation Biology, a research unit shared by the College of William and Mary and Virginia Commonwealth University. CCB scientists work throughout the Western Hemisphere, from the Arctic to Argentina, exploring the habits and needs of wild birds and working to ensure the viability of their populations. Bryan co-founded the Center and has directed it for more than 25 years, overseeing more than 800 research projects focused on finding solutions to conservation problems.

—Bonnie Bernstein



Bryan Watts about to release a northern adult female Bald Eagle wearing a transmitter...



...and with a "tiny" third-year male, by Bryan's own description

Bird Walk at Kendal on Saturday, April 21

Our Club is partnering with Kendal at Lexington to offer a spring bird walk on the Kendal campus on Saturday, April 21st. We'll meet at 8:30 a.m. in front of Anderson Center (see Kendal [map](#)) and spend a few hours looking and listening for whatever birds are around. Kerry Kilday, accomplished birder and patient teacher, will be leading the walk. Kerry reports we will likely see Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds fighting over nest boxes and hear the lovely song of the Eastern Meadowlark. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds may also be back in our area by then (they typically return around April 15th).

Please put this date on your calendar and join us for a chance to explore the varied habitats of Kendal. Remember your binoculars and wear study footwear, and you may want to bring a snack and a bottle of water. In the event of rain, we plan to hold the walk on Sunday, April 22nd. For additional information or questions contact me at richardsw@wlu.edu or 463-5214.

— Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair



Eastern Meadowlark. Photo by Dick Rowe

19th Annual Bird Walk in Brushy Hills, Saturday, April 28

Guided by Paul and Lock Cabe, we'll be in search of woodland residents, nesters, and passers-through. Paul is a W&L Professor of Biology with interests in conservation genetics and, of course, birds; his son Lock is an 8th grade student at Stuart Hall with a lifelong interest in birds and other native animals. Together they offer sharp eyes and ears and an abundance of knowledge about bird life — and other life — in the woods.

Meet at Town Spring at 7:00 a.m. for an outing of about two hours. Directions: from Lexington, drive to the end of Ross Road (2.3 miles from city limits) and turn right on Union Run Road. Continue 0.6 miles to the Brushy Hills Trails sign and Town Spring on the right, with parking lot opposite. Questions? Please contact Alexia Smith: 460-0854 or alexia@rockbridge.net.



Possible woodland sightings: Scarlet Tanager and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Photos by Dick Rowe

A Migrant from the West Coast

Here's a bird you won't see at this season (unless you stop by my house): a Northern Pintail. It recently arrived from my stepmother's house in California. But my most vivid memories of this bird are from my childhood in Berkeley: it floated on the mantel in the living room. And my guess is that it was put to real use before that by my farmer uncles and cousins in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, where duck hunting has been a favorite sport and source of food for generations — rural tradition in a place without woods full of deer, but with wetlands full of waterfowl.



Ironically, though, farming greatly reduced waterfowl habitat in the Delta: farmers built levees around marshy areas and drained them, creating "islands" of deep rich peat soil, the fields way below the water level of the bordering rivers and other waterways.

In recent decades the state of California has begun to restore some of these islands to a more natural wetland state — including Sherman Island, where my grandfather farmed. These days, cap and trade dollars are being used for [such projects](#), which are intended to protect a water supply hugely important to the state, as well as improve flood control, sequester carbon — and provide critical wildlife habitat.

Thanks for accompanying me to my home state for a bit. Back here in Rockbridge County, you might see a winged and feathered Northern Pintail next winter, between late December and late February, on its way north. These birds don't linger; according to *Birds of North America*, Pintails are among the earliest nesting ducks in North America.

—Alexia Smith



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.

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.

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Due back in early to mid April: Black-and-white Warbler. Photo by Dick Rowe