



May 2018 Newsletter

of the

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

Calendar

Unless otherwise noted, field trips meet at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot.

Sat., May 5, 6:30 a.m.—Field trip to Apple Orchard Mountain with Dick Rowe
(rain date Sun., May 6) *

Tues.-Weds., May 22-23—overnight field trip to Piney Grove Preserve *

Sat., June 2—potluck and optional overnight at Nature Camp *

*see article below

Hear how the birds, on every blooming spray,
With joyous music wake the dawning day.

—Alexander Pope (1688 – 1744)

Field Trips

Apple Orchard Mountain, Saturday May 5 (rain date May 6)

Meet at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot 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 walk the access road to the top of Apple Orchard Mountain, about two miles in all, up and back. Our guide will be VMI biology professor and Club ornithologist Dick Rowe. Possible bird species include Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and an array of warblers: Cerulean, Redstart, Canada, Black-throated Blue, Black & White, Black-throated Green. In case of serious rain, the trip will be postponed till the next day, Sunday, May 6. Please contact Wendy Richards for information and weather decision: 463-5214 or RichardsW@wlu.edu.

*Canada Warbler
Photo by Dick Rowe*



Two-day Piney Grove Preserve trip, May 22 - 23

Read all about it in the [red-cockaded edition](#) of our newsletter!

This trip to see the Piney Grove Red-cockaded Woodpecker breeding colony, with guidance by Nature Conservancy staff, is described in the April 30 special-edition newsletter, found [here](#) on the Club website. The Conservancy has limited our group size to 12, so if you can come, be sure to sign up soon: contact Wendy Richards at richardsw@wlu.edu or 463-5214.



*More to look for on Apple Orchard Mountain: Black-throated Blue Warblers, female (left) and male (below)
Photos by Dick Rowe*



Potluck at Nature Camp, Saturday, June 2

This year's annual member potluck promises to be an adventure, because the venue for our supper gathering and optional overnight is Nature Camp in Vesuvius. Yes, you're invited to enjoy a beautiful evening and early morning birding as campers!

Our plan is to arrive at Nature Camp at 6:00 pm, in time for a leisurely potluck in the dining hall as we listen for the first night calls of the Whip-poor-wills.

An outdoor campfire will follow (we'll use the dining hall hearth in the event of rain), and perhaps a stroll; then those who opt to spend the night can set up their beds in the bunkhouse.



The bunkhouse is rustic, divided into two wings, and equipped with metal bunk beds and screened windows. Men's and women's bathhouses, located a short distance away, have hot showers and flush toilets. Campers will need to bring their own bedding, towels, toiletries, and flashlights – and binoculars, of course! A caretaker will be on the premises, but Club members are responsible for their personal health and safety.

On Sunday morning, we'll wake to the dawn chorus around 6:00 am, grab coffee in the dining hall, and go birding along camp trails before breakfast. Nature Camp occupies six acres of woodland habitat leased from the U.S. Forest Service. After breakfast, we'll tidy up and pack out.

The Bird Club will pay the \$250 fee to use Nature Camp facilities and will provide all beverages and a light breakfast. Members are asked to contribute a dish for the potluck. Donations toward camp costs will be welcome as well.

Please RSVP to Alexia Smith (460-0854 or alexia@rockbridge.net) by Friday, May 18, if possible to let us know if you plan to join us for the potluck, the overnight, or – we hope – both!

— Bonnie Bernstein

Bob's Perch

I glanced out the window toward the barn a few minutes ago as a steady rain fell, and the feeder near the house was commanded by a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak. They were relatively common visitors in the past at this time of year but I haven't seen one in at least a couple of springs.

Yesterday I saw an Ovenbird across the road and a Blue-grey Gnatcatcher on the edge of the woods, and a few days ago a Black-throated Green Warbler and a Yellow-throated Vireo moved high in the trees behind the house. It was the same day that I heard a couple of Wood Thrushes singing in the same area.



Rose-breasted Grosbeak, above, and Ovenbird. Photos by Dick Rowe

It's a time for renewing old acquaintances and feeling the excitement of new beginnings. A Blue Jay caught my eye this morning because it was carrying a piece of dried grass in its mouth. After landing in the crotch of the maple next to the house it was joined by its mate, and they worked a bit on the early stages of a nest. There are already five eggs in one of the Bluebird boxes and a pair of Carolina Chickadees in another box just behind the kitchen.

A lot of these sightings seem random or just lucky. Were the Grosbeaks gone for a couple of years, or was I just not paying attention? Maybe the seed in the feeder is different and more to their liking. There are so many variables and possible

explanations when you're relying on just a few observations. The challenge of science is to question each of these possibilities (and others) over long periods of time to turn possibility into explanation.

I was reminded of this last Saturday when Wendy Richards and I ran into Bob Paxton (a member of the local Paxton family and professor emeritus of history at Columbia University—for those of you, like me, who are newer to the area) in the parking lot at Kendal. He casually told us about sightings he'd made around the County as a boy in the 1940's (there was a resident Barn Owl in those days in a barn just over the hill from the Kendal property) and about working on Christmas Bird Counts here some seventy-five years ago. The "big data" in his memory and the documentary evidence we get from J. J. Murray and later Dick Rowe in *The Birds of Rockbridge County* give us access to more than just the happenstance of our own observations. Oh, and Bob saw a Blue-grey Gnatcatcher that we missed on the Kendal walk, but we saw the Green Heron that he missed. . .

And so it goes. Irrespective of the weather and the slower start for some of the plants and trees, the migrants and breeders are coming and beginning the hard work of renewal.

— *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.

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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Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith. Logo by Jennifer Cox
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Psst — there's a bird on page 6



Chestnut-sided warbler. Photo by Dick Rowe