



October 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.

Sun., Oct. 7, 8 a.m.—meet at Lexington Food Lion parking lot for hot-spot field trip *

Fri., Oct. 26—deadline for Seed & Suet Sale orders *

Weds., Nov. 14, 7 p.m.— Annual meeting: election of officers. * Program: Peg Sheridan, artist, with a demonstration of painting birds.

Weds., Feb. 13, 7 p.m.—Program: Dr. Daniel Klem, Bird-Window Collisions

Weds., Apr. 10, 7 p.m.—Program: Maureen Eiger, subject TBA

*[see article below](#)

Wonders of migration: see an [animated map](#) of migration paths of 118 bird species

Half-day field trip to Rockbridge hot spots on Sunday, October 7

Meet for carpooling at 8:00 a.m. at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot this Sunday, returning by midday. We'll check out local birding hot spots: where we go will depend on what species may be visiting the area, the weather, and where the group wants to go. Some possible locations are the Blue Ridge Parkway, Willow Lake, McCormick Farm, the Ponds, and the Chessie Trail. Come spend the morning looking and listening with other bird enthusiasts like yourself!

For more information, or in the event of inclement weather, please contact me at 463-5214 or richardsw@wlu.edu.

—Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair

Dues-&-Donations Season

It's time to renew or begin your membership! You can pay your dues (\$15) any time now for the Club's 2018-19 year. Extra donations are always welcome. Your contributions make our public programs possible by funding speaker honoraria, travel, and lodging.

In addition, the Club has begun a tradition of financing a scholarship at [Nature Camp](#), the treasured local institution combining natural history and environmental science education, outdoor learning, and fun. Nature camp has inspired a love of nature for generations. Help make this happen for a kid who might otherwise miss out!

When you renew, please update your information if needed. You can mail payment to Betty Besal (see address near the end of this newsletter) or renew at our November program. Thank you for your support!

Slate of officers

From the Club bylaws: "Officers shall be elected by a majority vote of members present at the annual meeting in November." November 14 is the meeting date, and here's the slate of nominees: for **President, Laura Neale; Vice President, Bob Biersack; Secretary, Sue LaRue; and Treasurer, Jan Smith.**

The current executive committee, which already includes Laura & Bob, is extremely grateful to Jan and Sue for volunteering to serve as officers. They'll bring new viewpoints and new energy to the executive committee! We're also extremely grateful to Betty Besal for acting as Treasurer ever since the Club's founding, six years ago. That's a long period of impeccable handling of our finances and helping the Club in myriad other ways.

Seed & Suet Sale: order by October 26!

Bonnie Bernstein is again organizing the Club's annual Bird Seed and Suet Sale, a fundraiser for Boxerwood co-sponsored with the Rockbridge Farmers Co-op. Order your winter supplies now, and you'll benefit both the birds and Boxerwood!

Items include black-oil sunflower seed, nyjer, gourmet mixes, and suet cakes. You'll find product information and order forms on the Boxerwood webpage beginning on October 10. Order online or download an order form and mail it with a check to Boxerwood. Orders must be received no later than Friday, October 26, and will be available for pick-up at the Rockbridge Farmers Co-op on Thursday, November 15, from 10 a.m. to noon and 4 to 5:30 p.m.

Have questions? Please send email to bonnie.Bernstein@gmail.com.



Field Trip Report: Boxerwood, September 15

Hurricane Florence threatened; nonetheless, five people turned out for a walk in Boxerwood Gardens and saw 23 bird species. Says Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair, "It didn't rain, but it sure was humid!"

Here are the 23 species seen, as recorded by Wendy with help from Dick Rowe: Mourning Dove 5, Yellow-billed Cuckoo 1, Ruby-throated Hummingbird 4, Black Vulture 2, Turkey Vulture 4, Red-bellied Woodpecker 3, Downy Woodpecker 2, Eastern Wood-Pewee 3, Blue Jay 12, American Crow 5, Carolina Chickadee 6, Tufted Titmouse 1, White-breasted Nuthatch 4, Carolina Wren 7, Eastern Bluebird 3, American Robin 1, Northern Mockingbird 2, European Starling 12, American Goldfinch 4, Field Sparrow 2, Song Sparrow 1, Northern Cardinal 12, and Indigo Bunting 3.

At walk's end, participants saw this swarm of honeybees near the bee hives.

Photo by Wendy Richards



Bob's Perch:

As we come to the end of this tropical September, the word I keep coming back to is adaptation. Every species is forced to adapt to the circumstances of the day (we were turned back by high water on Furrs Mill Road on Friday), but each of these can gradually lead to broader changes as we adapt to larger shifts in climate and habitat.

Hurricane Florence forced everyone to adjust their plans this month, keeping many of the migrants to the north, waiting for the weather to pass. Thousands of Broad-winged Hawks, for example, waited out the storm before passing through the openings in the Blue Ridge to move south along the Piedmont. It also forced some shorebirds to move inland and find refuge in the lakes and streams in our area. Dick Rowe reported finding a Red-necked Phalarope, the first such bird reported in the county, and a Short-billed Dowitcher, the third of these ever reported here, on the same day less than a week before the storm made landfall. There were many other reports of unusual shorebirds in the area as everyone tried to get out of the way.



Short-billed Dowitcher. Photo by Dick Rowe

While coastal birds moved inland, those who would normally be heading for the coast on the way south were making other plans. The first weeks of the Hawk Watch at Rockfish Gap were unusually quiet, with relatively small numbers, particularly of Broad-winged Hawks moving through the mountains toward the coast. By the 17th of September only about 150 Broad-wings had been counted moving through the pass at Afton, but the 18th brought better weather there and to the south leading more than 3,700 BW's through the pass. Counts were still below normal, though, until September 26th when more than 10,000 Broad-wings made their way through the pass.

The general migration of warblers and songbirds has also been delayed but seems undaunted as reports of mixed flocks keep coming from popular birding spots throughout the valley. I came across one of these flocks last week on a hike to the Lexington Reservoir (no binoculars, unfortunately). The tops of a few trees were full of birds feeding and chipping but hard to see and identify. Faded colors, few songs, and different species together make this time of year a big challenge.

And now, word of poor pinecone production in Canada and the northeast may be leading to irruptions of species moving further south than normal to find food. I remember a couple of years ago finding many Red-breasted Nuthatches throughout the winter in one of these irruption years. This year may be a repeat, with several sightings of these little Nuthatches already this year and one report of possible Evening Grosbeaks today near Harrisonburg. These large birds with flashes of yellow are also an example of bigger trends, as they were common visitors in this area many years ago but are almost never seen today.

Making new discoveries and noticing different patterns are big elements in the fun of birding. We've had plenty of opportunities this year, and it looks like there will be more to come.

—Bob Biersack



Pine Siskin. Photo by Dick Rowe

What *is* an irruption, anyway?

—not a forcible entry, but an irruption in the ecological sense: a sudden sharp increase in the relative numbers of a natural population, usually associated with alteration of the environment.

The first such event I remember experiencing happened many years ago in Massachusetts: caterpillars dropping from trees in large numbers, all over the place. My biologist brother called this an irruption. I have no memory of the species or the cause!

In our area, environmental changes elsewhere may cause a bird species to "irrupt" here. For instance, unusually high breeding success may cause some members of a population to go places they don't usually. An example is the Snowy Owls we see here some winters, when a surge in lemming populations up north leads to extra-high numbers of new owls, and some of the "extras" then go south looking for open feeding territory. Another cause is low availability of winter food in a species' usual range, causing many individuals to "irrupt" elsewhere in search of sustenance.

It's food scarcity up north that may bring us irruptions this winter. Every year Ron Pittaway, of the Ontario Field Ornithologists, makes a "[winter finch forecast](#)" based on observations of food supplies in Ontario and northeastern Canada. This year Pittaway notes poor cone and birch seed crops in much of that area, as mentioned by Bob in his Perch. As a result, some species—and not all of Pittaway's subjects are finches—are likely to move south in greater numbers than usual. So this winter we may experience irruptions of Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and Red-breasted Nuthatches... and perhaps we'll even see occasional Common Redpolls or Evening Grosbeaks.

—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.

Club Officers

President, Alexia Smith
Vice President, Laura Neale
Secretary, Bob Biersack
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



Purple Finch. Photo by Dick Rowe