



December 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.

Sat., Dec. 15—Christmas Bird Count *

Sat., Dec. 15, 8 a.m.—Special Bird Walk, Boxerwood *

Sat., Dec. 15, 5 p.m.—Christmas Bird Club Potluck *

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

Winter is on my head, but eternal spring is in my heart. —Victor Hugo

Christmas Bird Count on December 15—a note from Dick Rowe

The Lexington area CBC will be held on Saturday 15 Dec. This will be our 82nd consecutive count (in 1936 no count was held) and overall our 93rd count. Last year, we counted 12,777 individual birds and 80 species. If you'd like to participate in the counting, please let me know at RoweRA@vmi.edu. You don't have to be an insane birder (it is helpful but not necessary) to assist with the count.

Our count circle is centered on Big Spring, with a 7.5 mile radius. It extends roughly to Decatur Road north of Lexington, the dam at Lake Merriweather on the northwest, Lake Robertson on the west, the intersection of Kyger Hill and Collierstown Road on the south, and to just east of I-81 and Rt 60. All counting is done inside the circle.

As a participant, you can cover an area on your own or be a member of a team/group covering an area (for those of you who are new to CBC or are not confident of your bird ID skills this is a good way to participate), or you can count birds at your home bird feeder. If you'd like to cover a particular area, let me know (including who will be with you and where you'll count). If you'd like to join a team, let me know and I'll put you in contact with a "team leader." If you'd like to do a feeder count, let me know and I'll send you the rules for the feeder count.

—Dick Rowe, RoweRA@vmi.edu

Dec. 15th Walk at Boxerwood: A Christmas Bird Count Special

In conjunction with the December 15th Christmas Bird Count (CBC), the bird club and Boxerwood will be holding a morning bird walk at Boxerwood Gardens. This is your chance to participate in the Lexington CBC, by joining me and my team of knowledgeable birders. We'll start at 8:00 am and spend approximately 1-1/2 hours tallying the species seen and heard in Boxerwood's bird-friendly habitat.

Please wear footwear and clothing appropriate for the weather conditions, and bring your binoculars. Unless the weather is hazardous, the CBC is held as scheduled. For more information, contact me at 463-5214 or richardsw@wlu.edu; and I'd appreciate hearing from you if you plan to come, but feel free to just show up!



— Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair
Brown Creeper. Photo by Dick Rowe

Christmas Bird Count Potluck, a Bird Club Tradition—December 15

Once again the Bird Club plans to end the annual Lexington Christmas Bird Count (CBC) with a potluck get-together at Boxerwood Lodge. We invite you and your family to join us in what has become a festive and fun tradition for our club.

Lexington's CBC, organized by Dick Rowe, is taking place on Saturday, December 15th. We invite you to join us at 5 p.m. on that day for an early evening gathering to share in the excitement of finding out what birds have been recorded and to feast on what is always a delicious spread.

Tableware and assorted drinks will be provided by the club, and we ask that you bring a dish to share. Also, to help with planning, we ask that you contact Wendy Richards at either 463-5214 or richardsw@wlu.edu if you plan to come and how many will be in your party. But if you decide at the last minute, come anyway. We hope to see you there!

— Wendy Richards for the Rockbridge Bird Club

Field Trip Report: a cold day in November

Eight hardy birders met on the frigid morning of Tuesday, November 27th at the Lexington Food Lion. Our destination was the Locher Tract, a 100-acre section of the Jefferson National Park that is managed for wildlife, in the Arnolds Valley area southeast of Natural Bridge Station. The James River forms one of the borders of the tract, but due to recent rainfall it was flowing high and fast, and waterfowl were therefore absent. We hiked around a loop trail that afforded field and wetland views. Our sightings were sparse. We figured most of the birds must have been hunkered down, which was not surprising considering the bone-chilling temperature and gusty wind.

Undaunted, we drove to nearby Cave Mountain Lake, which was closed and gated for the season. We walked down the road to the lake—which was drained. Along the way we did have great sightings of Golden-crowned Kinglets and other familiar winter species. Despite the challenges of the day we all agreed our efforts were worth it. It was great just to be outside looking, listening, and sharing the experience. My thanks goes out to a great group of birders and a memorable day.

Here is our short but hard-earned list: Food Lion parking lot: Fish Crow - 1. Driving to the Locher Tract: Common Merganser - 6, Great Blue Heron - 2, Common Crow - 2, Blue Jay - 1, Northern Mockingbird - 1. At Locher Tract: Red-bellied Woodpecker - 3, Northern Flicker - 1, Dark-eyed Junco - 2, Eastern Bluebird - 4, Turkey Vulture - 3, White-throated Sparrow - 4, Blue jay - 8, Common Raven - 1, Downy Woodpecker - 2. Arnolds Valley Rd/Cave Mtn. Lake Rd: Northern Cardinal - 1, Dark-eyed Junco - 12. At Cave Mtn. Lake: Tufted Titmouse - 5, American Robin - 1, Turkey Vulture - 2, White-breasted Nuthatch - 5, Red-bellied Woodpecker - 1, Golden-crowned Kinglet - 4, Carolina Chickadee - 4, Downy Woodpecker - 1, American Crow - 2, American Goldfinch - 2. Driving back on Cave Mtn. Lake Rd: Red-tailed Hawk.

—Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair



Golden-crowned Kinglet. Photo by Dick Rowe

Annual Meeting report

On November 14, members elected the following officers for terms beginning on January 1: Laura Neale, President; Bob Biersack, Vice President; Sue LaRue, Secretary; and Jan Smith, Treasurer. All four deserve special thanks — Laura and Bob for continuing yet another two years on the Executive Committee, Sue and Jan for volunteering to join in!

And we all owe particular thanks to Betty Besal, who is retiring as Treasurer after six years on the job. Betty contributed in many beyond-treasurer ways, too, bringing her organizing skill to potlucks, refreshments, logistics for ambitious field trips, and more, lending a hand and a thoughtful approach on many occasions.

Here is Betty's final report, presented at the Annual Meeting:

Treasurer's Report, 2017-18 fiscal year

<u>Income</u> (September 1, 2017 to August 31, 2018):	\$ 1280.00
<u>Expenses</u> (September 1, 2017 to August 31, 2018):	\$ 1169.30
Difference:	\$ 110.70

<u>Checking Account Balance</u> – September 1, 2017:	\$ 2660.50
<u>Checking Account Balance</u> -- August 31, 2018:	\$ 2771.20
Difference:	\$ 110.70

Number of Memberships 2018: 47 household memberships

Income Details (amounts rounded to nearest dollar)

Dues	\$ 720.00	70%
Donations	\$ 310.00	30%

Expense Details (amounts rounded to nearest dollar)

Memberships & Donations (VSO, Nature Camp Scholarship)	\$ 470.00	51%
Speaker Costs (includes honoraria, travel expenses, meals)	\$ 271.00	30%
Other miscellaneous expenses (potluck beverages, meeting refreshments, gifts)	\$ 178.00	19%

— Betty Besal, Treasurer

Red-breasted Nuthatch
Photo by Dick Rowe



© Dick Rowe

Bob's Perch:

Sometimes, for me at least, the best birding comes when you're not birding at all. Large areas that are mostly "natural" surround us, and this offers a window into the habitat of lots of different species. For those of us who live "out in the county," spotting interesting birds can be a daily experience, and even though it happens a lot I'm always surprised when different birds pop up unexpectedly.

It's not really unexpected, I suppose, it's more that I'm just not paying attention a lot of the time. Last week I stepped out the side door without a specific destination in mind. I just stood at the edge of the drive and wondered what might be checking the feeders or just flying through. I didn't have binoculars or any expectations, just a little time to scan the big old maple trees nearby, and they didn't disappoint. I should note that these trees aren't really standing alone. Within a hundred yards of the house to both the north and the south are mostly-uninterrupted forestlands covering thousands of acres, broken only rarely by pasture or other open areas. We live in the birds' neighborhood, they don't live in ours.

It began with some flitting in the tops of the tree: small birds moving quickly and picking at things that seemed edible to them. Mostly they are Titmice or Chickadees drawn by the feeders, but this time there was at least one that was smaller and busier, perhaps a Kinglet. Further down there was movement up and around one of the larger branches. The bird was big enough to see some details, and the red on the throat and the cat-like cry told me it was a male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. They make the rounds of these maples, especially in winter, leaving straight rows of small holes that seem like they would damage the tree, but it just shrugs them off.

*Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
(female, with white throat)
Photo by Dick Rowe*



By now I was pretty pleased with the experience, rewarded for just standing around, which is something I'm inclined to do anyway. My eye hadn't gotten to the ground, though, and near the bottom of the trunk was another surprise. There were two

Brown Creepers moving silently up and down in more animated ways than I've seen before. When they're still, their markings blend perfectly with the bark and they pretty much disappear, but these two weren't trying to hide.

None of these sightings were "exceptional" but they were unexpected reminders of the season. There have been other signs of winter recently, with some Pine Siskins passing through along with House Finches and at least one Purple Finch. A couple of Red-breasted Nuthatches moved about in the evergreens; we don't normally get these quick and striking birds that are smaller than their white-breasted cousins, but a couple of recent years have been bad for pinecones in the north woods, and that has sent them our way. This might also have been the reason for the sighting of an Evening Grosbeak in the County last week – a very rare treat, which Kerry Kilday shared with us via a quick photo sent to the list serve.

All of this is a long way of saying that while we really like taking field trips (and Wendy has more in mind for later in the winter), great birding experiences come in all shapes and sizes, and sometimes it's just a matter of slowing down and directing your attention to the things around you that will bring a special treat.

—Bob Biersack



Merlin. Photo by Dick Rowe



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 needed

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



Ruddy Duck. Photo by Dick Rowe

*You might see any of the birds in this issue on the Christmas Bird Count!
Many thanks to Dick for the photos.*