



March 2019 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., Mar. 16, 8 a.m.—Quarterly Boxerwood bird walk *

Weds., Mar. 27, 4:30 p.m.—Presentation at Kendal: "Birds In and Around Rockbridge County," by Dick Rowe *

Weds., Apr. 10, 7 p.m.—Program: Maureen Eiger, "Beyond Birdwatching"—what to do when you find an injured bird, and more

Sat., May 11—Field trip: Apple Orchard Mountain

*see article below

Quarterly Boxerwood bird walk on Saturday, March 16

Meet Bonnie Bernstein and Bob Biersack in the Boxerwood parking lot at 8:00 a.m. for about two hours of walking in the Gardens. Early migrants may be passing through, as well as those returning to breed in the nature center's varied habitats. As always, birders of all levels of ability and experience are welcome! Boxerwood is at 963 Ross Road, Lexington. For more information or in case of doubtful weather, please contact Bonnie at 460-9147, bonnie.bernstein@gmail.com or Bob Biersack at 463-1942, bob.biersack@gmail.com.

"Birds In and Around Rockbridge County" by Dick Rowe, March 27

Dick will be giving an illustrated talk on "Birds In and Around Rockbridge County" at the Kendal retirement community, and Bird Club members are invited. The program will take place in Kendal Hall at 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, March 27.

Dick teaches biology at VMI and is our Club ornithologist; his knowledge, humor, and beautiful photos always make for engaging presentations. A wine reception will follow.

Kendal Hall is the main gathering spot in Kendal's Anderson Center. Coming from Lexington on Enfield Road, turn left onto Kendal Drive, which will take you to a one-way circle; park within the circle. See this interactive [map](#) for more details.

Thanks go to Kendal resident Don Holmes for passing this invitation on to us. Don notes "a growing interest in nature and birds in particular" at Kendal, with many residents reporting what they've seen and requesting help with identification.



Great Blue Heron. Photo by Dick Rowe

Preventing bird-window collisions: a talk by Dr. Daniel Klem

At our meeting on February 13, we met Dr. Daniel Klem, Jr., the Sarkis Acopian Professor of Ornithology and Conservation Biology at Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pennsylvania. He was wearing a great necktie showing bird eggs! But he had come to speak to us on a more sobering bird topic: window collisions.

According to Dr. Klem, window strikes are the third leading cause of bird death, after habitat change and cat predation. It's estimated that in the U.S. alone 559 million birds die each year by flying into windows — over a million per day. And the true scope of the problem may be hidden from our view: birds stunned or dead beneath windows may be found and eaten by other animals.

As Dr. Klem explained, birds cannot see windows, and they will fly into them if they see either a reflection of habitat or what appears to be a continuation of habitat, such as house plants near windows. 50% of such collisions result in death, either immediately or else later due to injuries. And if the victim was nesting, its young will most likely die

as well. Window collision is, said Dr. Klem, an indiscriminate killer of birds both common and rare, in both rural and urban environments.

Dr. Klem pointed to several effective ways to collision-proof glass. An arrangement of 1/8"-diameter cord hanging vertically 4" apart on the outer surface of a window will accomplish this. Acopian Bird Savers sells kits for this treatment, or you can do it yourself inexpensively using their [instructions](#). For a quick fix, use non-toxic tempera paint on the window's outer surface, any kind of squiggles, just so they follow the 4-inch rule. Other solutions can be found on an Acopian Center for Ornithology [webpage](#) (with a fine example of paint squiggles).



This photo and the one on the next page are from the Acopian BirdSavers website and show DIY installations. Here you get a bird's-eye view.

The placement of bird feeders is critical, as well, Dr. Klem pointed out. Closer is better: a distance of three feet or less from the window will help prevent serious collisions. That's because if a bird takes off from the feeder and hits the window, it won't be going at top speed and thus has a better chance of surviving.

— Sue LaRue and Alexia Smith

Bob's Perch: VABBA2 Year 4

This spring begins the fourth year of the second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas. This five-year program is creating an inventory of the bird species known to breed statewide, as well as those that breed in the various different ecosystems we enjoy in Virginia. Its purpose is to contribute the essential data needed to drive the policy decisions necessary for conservation.

(cont'd.)



Also from Acopian BirdSavers, an indoor-animal's-eye view

Bob's Perch, continued

As we've passed the halfway point, it might be helpful to take stock of how much progress has been made, and identify areas where a little effort might make a big contribution to the finished product. All of the data that has already been collected is accessible on the Atlas website. You can get a quick overview of the status of each county, including the number of "blocks" (geographic squares that divide the state) with at least some information; the status of "priority" blocks, planned to make sure different areas of the state are included; and the list of species that birders have confirmed to be breeding in that area.

Club members particularly active so far in Atlasing in Rockbridge County include Kerry Kilday, Laura Neale, John Pancake, and Wendy Richards, with many others contributing. 61 blocks contain at least some part of the County, and 10 of those are priority blocks. We now have at least some data for 56 blocks in the County and for all 10 priority blocks. Still, only three of the priority blocks are "completed" (criteria for completing a block include covering all of its habitat types and spending time in different stages of the breeding season). So while we've made good progress, there's more work to be done. In the case of the block I've taken responsibility for, I'm heading out some night soon to check for owls (it's getting late for the larger species), and I want to spend more time checking for breeders toward the end of spring.

We've identified 125 species in Rockbridge during the breeding season, and 73 of those have been confirmed as breeding here. There aren't a lot of surprises in the confirmed breeding list, but it's nice to know that we have "probable" breeding status, as defined by the Atlas project, for species like White-eyed, Yellow-throated, Blue-headed, and Warbling Vireos. We also have probable status for the Blue-winged Warbler – this is one of the few areas in Virginia where they are thought to breed. We don't yet have



Breeding??

Great Horned Owl. Photo by © Bill Detmer, from VABBA2 website

listings for a number of other Warbler species, though, that are breeding all around us – I’ll be trying to confirm more of these this year.

Looking at data for some of the surrounding counties, I notice that Augusta County confirms breeding status for Ruffed Grouse, Virginia Rail, Sora, and American Woodcock—leading me to think that some of these must nest in Rockbridge too. Allegheny County shows less activity than here, and, even as we finish our own blocks, some of our Club members have begun to move beyond the County line to help survey during this year and next.

The Atlas website is a tremendous resource, even if you’re not able to participate directly. You can learn a lot about how to identify breeding behavior and what birders throughout the state are discovering. And if you’d like to help collect data, the best way to learn how is to accompany an experiential Atlaser on an outing, so please email the Club at rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com, and Laura and Wendy and I will find a partner for you. Once familiar with the process, you can add a listing if you see breeding behavior in your yard or neighborhood or anywhere in the County (or in the state!). All the data adds to our own knowledge and will be a resource for conservation planning now and in the future.

—Bob Biersack

Editor’s Note

We received a lengthy response from Steve Hodapp to Laura Neale’s feature in the February 2019 newsletter, “The Rio Grande: what would The Wall mean for birds?” In her piece, Laura noted that the Rockbridge Bird Club had signed on to a letter from the American Bird Conservancy expressing concern over plans to expand the United States – Mexico border wall across environmentally sensitive conservation areas. To read the Conservancy letter and Steve’s response, please go to the [Club website](#).

—Alexia Smith



Breeding!
Great Blue Heron. Photo by Bob Schamerhorn, from VABBA2 website



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 Jan Smith, 564 Big Hill Road, 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, Laura Neale
Vice President, Bob Biersack
Secretary, Sue LaRue
Treasurer, Jan Smith
Program Chair needed

Field Trip Chair, Wendy Richards
Publicity Chair, Bonnie Bernstein
Membership Chair, Adrienne Bodie
Club Ornithologist, Dick Rowe

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