



April 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.

Weds., Apr. 10, 7 p.m.—PROGRAM CANCELLED *

Sat., Apr. 20, 1 to 4 p.m.—workshop for kids: Bluebird Box Building, at Natural Bridge State Park. *

Sat., Apr. 27, 7 a.m.—Bird Walk in Brushy Hills *

Weds., May 8, 7 p.m.—Program on native grasses, including their benefit to birds, by John Dickerson

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

*see article below

. . .well-apparell'd April on the heel/Of limping winter treads. . .

—William Shakespeare

APRIL PROGRAM CANCELLED

We're sorry to report that our speaker for April just had an accident and fractured her TMJ joint, making her life in general difficult for a while and, in particular, greatly limiting her ability to talk. We've sent her healing wishes on the Club's behalf, and we hope she'll be able to come speak to us another time.

Fortunately, Kendal resident John Dickerson has generously agreed to give a program on May 8 (see calendar). Details will follow in the May newsletter.

Here's an invitation from Natural Bridge State Park in celebration of Earth Week:

Building Bluebird houses: a workshop for kids

on Saturday, April 20, 1 - 4 p.m.

Help instill an early love of stewardship and learning by joining us for a kid's workshop where we'll be building bluebird houses out of recycled materials! Like many birds, the Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) can be threatened by loss of habitat or competition with non-native species. Besides being beautiful, these birds have a strong appetite for pest insects, making them especially helpful to gardeners and farmers. Using pre-cut kits made from repurposed lumber, we'll create houses that can be taken home with you or left with the rangers to develop more bluebird habitat space along our

trails. Join us for this family activity to help local bluebirds and learn about the benefits of native species.

Register in advance to make sure we will have a bluebird home kit available when you arrive. Each kit will cost \$3. Payment can be made in person at the park.

To register, or for more information, call the park at 540-291-1330.



A male Eastern Bluebird at home. Photo by Dick Rowe

Volunteer to help kids build bluebird houses!

The Park would welcome your assistance on April 20th. Here's a chance to help birds and also help kids to form bonds with non-human beings and their lives and surroundings. Call the Park at 540-291-1330.

20th Annual Bird Walk in Brushy Hills, Saturday, April 27

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 9th grader 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.



Scarlet Tanager (Piranga olivacea). Look for tanagers way up in the forest canopy—before the leaves come out! Photo by Dick Rowe

Bob's Perch:

March is the month of beginnings, and one of its most important characteristics for me is the sound of the season's first Louisiana Waterthrush. Along the mountain streams that surround us, these are among the first sounds of spring. This year the first one arrived about the 20th of March, and they've come in numbers, at least by the sound of things. I find them to be among the most skittish birds around—big voices, but disappearing as soon as they get a sense of someone's presence (mine, at least).

It's a shame they're so shy, because they have a rich kind of physical beauty as they bob up and down while singing from low branches along a quick moving stream. From the strong eye line to the streaky, richly-cream-colored breast, they are surprisingly pretty despite the simple brown back and wings.

I was surprised to learn that their favored food is actually at the bottom of the streams they call home (you may see them foraging along a stream border, or even wading in). Cornell Lab's [All About Birds](#) tells us that "[b]ecause Louisiana Waterthrushes feed on streambed ('benthic') invertebrates, the species is an excellent indicator of the quality and health of a stream—or 'stream ecosystem integrity,' as a scientist might say." Another reason to be grateful to live in such a special place.

Oh, and Tuesday the dog and I came upon a bear climbing a hill behind the house, as we begin another season of new life.

—Bob Biersack



Louisiana Waterthrush (Parkesia motacilla). Photo by Nigel Voaden, from [Cornell Lab](#).



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

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