



September 2019 Newsletter of the

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

Calendar

*Please note **NEW MEETING DAY: MONDAY***

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., Sept 7, 7:30 a.m.—Field Trip: Roanoke Regional Water Pollution Control Plant *

MONDAY, Sept. 9, 7 p.m.—Program: Haley Olsen-Hodges on rehabbing birds *

Sat., Sept. 14, 8 a.m.—Field trip: quarterly bird walk at Boxerwood *

Sat., Sept 21, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.—Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch open house *

Mon., Nov. 11, 7 p.m.—Program: "Birding Western Alaska," by Len Smock

Mon., Feb. 10, 7 p.m.—Program: TBA

Mon., Apr. 13, 7 p.m. —Program: "Our Wonderful Wood Warblers," by Bob Schamerhorn

*see article below

The bluebird carries the sky on his back..

— Henry David Thoreau (1817-1962)

Program: "Wildlife Rehabilitation From a Birding Perspective"

Monday, September 9, at 7 p.m.

Learn about wild bird rehabilitation from an expert – and from a couple of her patients in rehab! Haley Olsen-Hodges, staff naturalist at the Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center in Roanoke, will tell us about her bird rehab work. She'll share stories about bird behavior, describe some of the more unusual avian patients admitted to the Center, and provide information about what to do and whom to contact in common bird rescue scenarios.

Accompanying her will be two "Educational Ambassadors" – Jack, an American Kestrel, and Tuskegee, a Red-tailed Hawk. Educational Ambassadors are animals who are non-releasable due to various circumstances.

Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center is a state and federally licensed veterinary rehabilitation center dedicated to the protection and care of injured and orphaned wildlife in the greater Roanoke Valley and surrounding areas. Staff use the "soft release" technique, in which animals gradually acclimate to foraging methods before final release into the wild. The facility specializes in native Virginia wildlife with a strong emphasis on birds, which constitute a majority of the more than 2,000 cases admitted each year.

Upcoming Field Trip Opportunities

As we move into September, the following events will give you a chance to join knowledgeable birders on the lookout for species migrating through or staying put in our area. Please join us for any or all of these events. Happy Birding!

— Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair

Saturday, September 7th: Guided Field Trip to the Roanoke Regional Water Pollution Control Plant

Join us on Saturday, February 7th for a field trip to the Roanoke Regional Water Pollution Control Plant (aka The Roanoke Sewage Treatment Plant) located in southeastern Roanoke County. This is a favorite birding spot of Kent Davis, long-time Roanoke County birder, and we're excited that he'll be our leader. As his guests, we won't need the normally required permits. The location is known for attracting shorebirds, especially at this time of year as they stop to refuel before heading south. You'll find more information about the site [here](#).

We'll meet at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot at 7:30 a.m. to carpool to the plant. Kent will meet us at the entrance at 9 a.m. On the way we'll make a quick stop at the Arcadia exit off I-81 for those folks wanting to meet the group there. We should be finished with our tour by 11 or 11:30 a.m. and then head back to Lexington. For more information, or to find out if the trip is canceled due to heavy rain, contact Wendy Richards at 540-463-5214 or richardsw@wlu.edu.



*Semi-palmated Plover, not in Roanoke. Photo by Dick Rowe.
Dick notes that this is one of the species reported recently
at the Roanoke Sewage Treatment Plant.*

Saturday, September 14th: Our quarterly bird walk — Birding at Boxerwood

Bird Club members will lead a two-hour stroll around the Boxerwood gardens. Meet in the nature center parking lot at 8:00 a.m. Wear clothing appropriate for the weather. In the event of heavy rain the walk will be canceled. For more information contact Wendy Richards at 540-463-5214 or richardsw@wlu.edu.



*Eastern Bluebird, the sky on his back.
Photo by Ryan Schain, from the Macaulay Library*

Saturday, September 21: Open House at Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch

From 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the grounds of the Inn at Afton. It's a family affair, fun and educational. See you there! Find more information on the Hawk Watch [here](#).



***Where the Raptors Soar!
A Day at the Hawk Watch***

Join us for our annual *Open House*.
Witness the great migration and
enjoy a fun day of family events.

SATURDAY Sept 21, 2019 10am – 3pm

Dues-&-Donations Season

For our Club, September opens nine months of interesting programs and exciting field trips. You can pay your dues (\$15) any time now for the Club's 2019-20 year. Extra donations are always welcome: your contributions go towards honoraria and expenses for our speakers, an yearly Nature Club scholarship, and support for bird conservation. You can mail payment to Jan Smith, our Treasurer (see address near the end of this newsletter), or join or renew at our next program (please note any new contact information). Thank you.



*American Kestrel. Photo by Dick Rowe.
Come meet a Kestrel at our September 9 meeting (see page 1).*

Hello & Goodbye to Club Secretaries

When Sue LaRue was elected Secretary at our 2018 Annual Meeting, we understood she could serve just half a term, as she and her husband Lash were getting ready to move to northern Virginia. Sue is now in the thick of moving preparations. We're grateful for the time she was able to give us, and we'll miss her in the Club and in the community. Sue, we hope you'll come back and visit!

Joyce Cambron has kindly agreed to finish out Sue's term, fresh cause for thanks. Joyce and her husband, Chris Barood, moved here from Charleston, South Carolina, in the spring of 2017—and immediately began attending local events and entering into Rockbridge life. Joyce, we're glad you're here in the mountains, out of Dorian's way, and we're grateful to you for jumping into the secretarial job.

Bob's Perch

August always seems to surprise me. I'm not sure how that can be true, of course, but even though I've felt the early transitions that come in August before, they seem to lead to new surprises just about every year. The first big change for me is the quiet, or rather the shift in sounds, as early morning birdsong shortens and fades and is replaced by the constant sound of cicadas and crickets in late summer.

Breeding season is largely complete for our most common birds, so the drive to sing on territories and the cries of fledglings diminish with the need for food to prepare for migration or winter becomes most important. The birds don't draw our attention as much, even as they move all around us, because they're quiet and, like us, looking for respite from the mid-day heat that also often settles in at this time of year.

Now the surprise sightings aren't so much the birds themselves, but the nests, no longer in use and becoming more apparent as the foliage that protected them begins to fade and fall. I've found several nests this year in places I walked past pretty much every day with no idea what was happening so close by.



As the peaches got ripe and I competed with the deer for the best fruit, I found this – not really hidden very well but completely unknown to me during the weeks it was used. I guess if I'd been better about thinning the peaches I might have been able to learn about who else was happy with this relatively new tree. Not far away, just outside the barn among the Wingstem and other weeds, was a newly planted Dogwood that turned out to be a good home for some other bird, with me obviously walking and mowing nearby.

I've made a cursory look through [Nest Watch](#) trying to identify these two nests, but they seem pretty indistinguishable to my uninformed eye, so I still don't know who my closest neighbors were this year. It makes me realize, though, that this time between breeding and migration can offer other discoveries, hiding in (now) plain sight.

In one case, though, I know what might be a little too much about an unexpected nest even closer to the house. For the second year in a row, a pair of Bluebirds, having fledged a first brood in a box nailed to an old Maple trunk, moved in July to a copper teakettle we keep as an ornament in a flower bed directly in front of the porch.



The kettle's giant opening is facing almost due north, which should be the opposite of the favored orientation. Most significantly, though, this thing sits out in the sun all day and must be quite literally an oven during this hottest time of the year. The Bluebirds were unfazed by all of this, or by the old nesting material that we left inside from that first strange effort last year. While we knew they were "around," we had no idea they were back in the kettle until the two adults began spending each day bringing food to this piece of broiling metal. I will say, though, that they didn't stay very long, spending most of each visit reaching their heads in from the perch just outside the kettle.

I say we learned too much about this nest because one morning we found the adults in distress and the tail of a black snake outside the entrance. We hadn't thought about this as a useful nest box, so we hadn't made any preparations for this possibility, but nature has a way of taking its course. We did pull the snake out once, and tried to protect the nest with netting and some pole grease, and I know that there were two nestlings remaining after that first episode—but a couple of days later all activity had ended, and I don't know if anyone fledged or if they just provided sustenance for a growing young snake.

There are some other mysteries from the summer that I haven't been able to resolve. This year, for example, we left our fields uncut, which proved to be a boon to the hundreds (well, dozens?) of Indigo Buntings who made homes in and around the weeds and grass. I watched them on defense, chipping and drawing me away from what must have been their nests, but I was never able to find even one. It's just one of the things that will bring me back to these fields and edges next spring, when the songs begin again.

—Bob Biersack



JOIN THE CLUB or renew your membership...

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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 Laura Neale, 540-261-1909.

Club Officers

President, Laura Neale
Vice President, Bob Biersack
Secretary, Joyce Cambron
Treasurer, Jan Smith
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



*Least Sandpiper. Photo by Dick Rowe.
Reported recently at the Roanoke Regional Water Pollution Control Plant*