



October 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**

*Program meetings are held at 7 pm in various locations,
and field trips generally meet at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot.*

Mon., Oct. 14, 8 a.m.—All-Day Field Trip to Hanging Rock Raptor Migration
Observatory *

Mon., Nov. 11, 7 p.m.—Program: "Birding Western Alaska," by Len Smock, **at
Grace Episcopal Church meeting room, downtown Lexington**

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

Autumn birds speak cheerful poetry from their berry-stained beaks.

— from anthologist Terri Guillemets, b. 1973

All-Day Field Trip Monday, October 14 to a Raptor Observatory in the West Virginia Mountains

October is a great time to visit the Hanging Rock Raptor Migration Observatory on Peter's Mountain in Monroe County, West Virginia. Bald Eagles, Sharp-shinned and Red-tailed Hawks, and American Kestrels are often sighted there at this time of year. You're invited to join the bird club on Monday, October 14th for a trip to the observatory, which is located in a former fire lookout on a very rocky ridge line at 3,812 feet with a 360-degree view. More info about the observatory can be found [here](#).

We'll meet at 8:00 a.m. at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot to carpool to the site, which will take about an hour and a half. Bring a packed lunch and water, and wear comfortable hiking shoes for the one-mile moderate-to-steep walk from the parking lot up to the observatory tower. Also, bring layered clothing, as it will be cold and windy at that high elevation.

On our return trip we plan to stop for an early supper, around 4 p.m., at [The Swinging Bridge Restaurant](#) in Paint Bank, VA. Their specialty is bison burgers. This should put us back in Lexington around 7 p.m. For more information, or in case of inclement weather, please contact me at 463-5214 or richardsw@wlu.edu.

—Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair



Hanging Rock Raptor Migration Observatory. Photo from the Observatory website.

**Is that bird injured? Or is it going to be OK? What do I do??
Answers from the expert "rehabber" who spoke at our September meeting**

Haley Olsen-Hodges, staff naturalist at the Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center in Roanoke, gave a great program at our last meeting, which included instructions on how to know if a bird should be taken to a wildlife rehabilitation center and how to handle injured birds. In case you missed her talk or wish you'd taken notes, here's what she said about adult birds. Come spring, we'll give readers her tips on baby birds, too.

Always bring a bird to rehab if:

- you see blood or an injury
- the bird hit a window or was suspected to hit a window (don't wait to see if it flies, as flight doesn't mean it is unharmed)
- it's been caught by a cat or dog
- the bird feels cold and/or looks very wet and is acting lethargic
- it's been caught in a glue trap (cut the glue trap close to the body, or put towels over the glue trap—do not remove the bird yourself!)
- it has hit a car or other vehicle
- it's been caught or tangled in a fence or netting

(cont'd. next page)

How to care for the bird overnight:

- Place in a container (cardboard box, tub, etc); be sure there are air holes.
- Keep in a dark, quiet place (closet, bathroom, etc); the bird will think it's night.
- Adult birds may be offered a very shallow dish of water, and you can place appropriate foods in box IF appropriate (bird is stable).
- If the bird is unstable on its feet, you can make a "donut" with a towel and place the bird in the center of the "hole" to keep it upright



Haley at our meeting, with Red-tailed Hawk Tuskegee. Photo by Bonnie Bernstein

Here are two wildlife rehabilitation facilities you can call for help with a sick or injured wild bird: the [Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center of Roanoke](#) (where Haley works), 540-798-9836, and the [Wildlife Center of Virginia](#), in Waynesboro, 540-942-9453. Both have more information on their websites about handling injured wild animals of all kinds. Both recommend calling first thing if you find an injured animal. And if you need help transporting the animal to either Center, they can call on volunteers for that service. You may want to get involved yourself!

It's Still Dues-&-Donations Season

Get ahead of the game now by paying your dues (\$15) and added donation (no limit!) for the Club's 2019 to 2020 year. Your contributions support speakers, a Nature Club scholarship, and bird conservation. See the box on page 5 for where to send payment; or join or renew at our November program (and please note any changes in contact information). Thank you!

Bob's Perch

I'm sitting outside near the end of September, grateful for some shade to protect me from what my computer tells me is 82 degrees, which feels like 87 degrees. Did I mention that it's 10 a.m.? The angle of the sun has changed in a way that throws long shadows across the landscape, but today it's muted by haze more common in August than October.

Our minds are always looking for patterns, so we remember most strongly the things that break familiar rhythms. I think of fall as a time with a quicker pace – birds migrating through moving quickly through the treetops feeding on insects before heading further south overnight. Resident birds are also moving quickly and feeding as they bulk up for winter. This year, though, it's the weather pattern that we'll remember and the unrelenting heat makes it hard to think of anything moving quickly.

Another surprising burst from nature this year has been the invasion of Common Green Darner dragonflies passing through over the last few weeks. They arrived in our fields by the thousands one day and seemed to stay for a couple of weeks. While I'm sure the numbers have been exceptional this year, it turns out that they are multi-generational migrants, kind of like Monarch Butterflies. These critters' grandparents began the journey last February or March and their parents spent the summer in the north, sending their offspring back south now to a place they've never seen but have always been able to find.



Male Common Green Darner. Note the extra-large eyes.
Photo © Mark A. Chappell (see [web page](#) for spectacular Green Darner photos)

I don't know what combination of factors led to the population explosion we've seen this year – they're back in numbers now again after a break of a week or so – but it's made me look for some kind of response from the birds. A surge in arctic Lemmings, for instance, yields too many snowy owls, giving us a chance to see one or two as they spread south; is there an effect on dragonfly predators when dragonfly numbers surge? I haven't seen swarms of insect eaters following these waves, but my thoughts turn to the Eastern Phoebes we see throughout the year here, whether migrants from the north or local nesters overwintering. For a Phoebe, however, a Green Darner would be (literally) a big challenge – they're among the largest of dragonfly species, and they're hard to catch as well: they "can fly quickly and dodge predators easily, and they also have very good vision that allows them to spot threats" ([Animal Diversity Web](#)). If they're beyond the Phoebe's ability, who else might take advantage?

—Bob Biersack



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

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