



December 2020 Newsletter
of the
Rockbridge Bird Club,
encouraging
the enjoyment, knowledge, &
conservation of birds in the Rockbridge Area

Calendar

Thurs., Dec. 3, 9 a.m.—Chessie Trail Bird Walk, 2 - 3 hours *

Sat., Dec. 19—Christmas Bird Count (Sun., Dec. 20—fallback/rain date) *

Sat., Jan. 16, 2021, 9 a.m.—Glen Maury Park Bird Walk (rain date Sat., Jan 23)

* See article below

The soul has illusions as the bird has wings: it is supported by them.

—Victor Hugo

Another Bird Walk for Beginning Birders—and others, too

Chessie Trail at 9 a.m. on Thursday, December 3

There's still room for more participants in this 2- to 3-hour walk! You can **reserve a spot** by contacting me at 463-5214 or at richardsw@wlu.edu.

Emphasis will be on getting to know our resident birds by careful observing and listening, with Club members leading the way. Dress for the weather, bring binoculars, snacks, and water, and wear sturdy footwear. For Covid safety, masks are required, we'll stay at least 6 feet apart, and group size will be limited to 4 people per leader.

And do warbler save the date for our first walk in 2021, on the 16th of January!

—Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair

Christmas Bird Count, Saturday December 19

As you might expect, this year's Count will be different due to the corona virus, with changes enacted by the Audubon Society/CBC. First, teams in the field conducting counts must be in the same "bubble"—so I cannot assign individuals who would like to participate in the count, but who do not wish to cover an area on their own, to a team. Second, the rules forbid gatherings like the Tally Potluck.

A great way to participate is doing a home feeder count, and the Audubon Society is expecting that there will be more of these this year. If you wish to do a feeder count, let me know (rowera@vmi.edu), and I'll send you the feeder count "rules."

—Dick Rowe



Hermit Thrush



Yellow-rumped Warbler

Bird Club Participates in the Festival of Trees

Here's a way to recognize our bird club, help a local organization and feel a bit of holiday spirit! Bird Club members Bonnie Bernstein, Jan Smith, Steve Richards, and I created a Rockbridge Bird Club entry in the 5th Annual Festival of Trees at Natural Bridge State Park. Our creation, shown in photo below, is a bit different: it's a birdhouse tree. The event is a friendly competition among area organizations, where the trees that attract the most donations for Project Horizon are recognized as first-, second- and third-place winners. We hope you'll consider putting on a mask and visiting the display located at the Park's visitor center, in the gift shop area. Trees are on display now through the entire month of December from 9 a.m. to dusk, and admission is free.

Here's a list of the most urgently needed donations for Project Horizon, a local nonprofit that works to prevent domestic violence and sexual assault: toilet paper, paper towels, laundry detergent, light bulbs, pillows, diapers, deodorant (men's and women's), toothpaste (full & travel size), body lotion/baby lotion, towels, bed sheets (twin & full size), plastic mattress covers (twin & full size), sponges, gas gift cards/certificates, and gift cards/certificates for Walmart, Kroger, Food Lion, Goodwill, and other local merchants.

—Wendy Richards





Pine Siskin. Photo by Dick Rowe

Annual Meeting Report

Arrival of the pandemic in March meant the Club had no further programs or field trips in the spring, reducing our expenses, and then conducted a virtual annual meeting in the fall. Here are the results. Our felt losses, as we've been unable to gather to see and learn about birds, are not accounted for here!

Election

Thirty three votes were received by email, all cast for the proposed slate. Congratulations to the following officers-elect! Wendy Richards will take office as President in January, and the following will continue to serve in their current roles: Bob Biersack, Vice-President; Joyce Cambron, Secretary; and Jan Smith, Treasurer.

Treasurer's report for September 1, 2019, to August 31, 2020

Income	\$1,580.00	
Expenses	<u>\$1,146.62</u>	
Difference	\$433.38	
Checking account balance		
Start of year	\$2,014.25	
End of year	<u>\$2,447.63</u>	
Difference	\$433.38	
Income details		
Dues (48 household memberships)	\$855.00	54%
Donations from members	<u>\$725.00</u>	46%
Total income	\$1,580.00	

(cont'd.)

Expense details, rounded to nearest dollar

Donations		79%
Boxerwood Nature Center	\$200.00	
Center for Conservation Biology	\$100.00	
American Bird Conservancy	\$100.00	
VSO, for the Breeding Bird Atlas	\$500.00	
Organizational membership		2%
VA Society of Ornithology	\$20.00	
Miscellaneous (get-well flowers*)	\$65.00	6%
Speaker costs (including honoraria, travel, meals)	<u>\$161.00</u>	14%
Total expenses	\$1,146.00	

* for long-time membership chair

— Jan Smith, Treasurer



Purple Finch. Photo by Dick Rowe

Bob's Perch

Birding is always a chance to be amazed by the ordinary, but sometimes something extraordinary happens and the amazement just grows. This year we've been presented with one of those extraordinary events – an irruption of Evening Grosbeaks, a species that was common here decades ago that has chosen to return in numbers this fall.

Perhaps you've seen them at your feeders in the last few weeks. Your eye seems drawn to them when they appear with their Grosbeak size and big beak and distinctive and bold colors that make them unmistakable. To say that they're yellow doesn't really do them justice. It's more like a series of yellows, moving from autumn sunlight to brown as you move from the legs toward the neck, with flashes of the brighter color at the top of the wings and in a slash above the eye. The rest of the wing is a combination of surprisingly pure white with black edges and a black tail with white streaks.



Evening Grosbeak. Photo by Wendy Richards

Dick Rowe tells us in *The Birds of the Greater Rockbridge County Area* that J. J. Murray reported them in the county from the mid 1940's through the mid 50s, and there were sightings during the Christmas Bird Count almost every year from 1968 through 1987. While more than 200 were counted in 1975, the last Christmas Bird Count sighting here was 1993. Arthur Cleveland Bent devotes a full 30 pages of his *Life Histories of North American Birds* to the Evening Grosbeak, which apparently spread from west to east in the later years of the 19th Century, with a big move from Ohio to the east coast in 1890.

I think it must have been the fall of 2011 when I encountered a pair in one of the maple trees near our house. At the Bird Club meeting right afterwards I casually asked if "you all get Evening Grosbeaks around here," which triggered a firm instruction to "let us know when you see them again." Of course they didn't reappear then, but there are sightings and reports throughout the area this year. Apparently the pinecone crop is limited throughout the north woods, so the birds have moved south in search of food. Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, and Red-Breasted Nuthatches also depend on pine nuts

in the winter and are "irrupting" here this year as well. Another occasional winter visitor, the Snowy Owl, doesn't appear when food is short but rather when food was plentiful earlier in the year, meaning more young birds survive and are forced to spread south in the winter. No indication yet that this will be one of those years here.

In this year of challenges nature seems to be offering us some unexpected and much appreciated pleasures. The Grosbeaks are partial to black oil sunflower seeds, so keep your feeders full and there's a good chance that you'll see a few. Maybe they'll stick around for a few more weeks so we'll have a chance to find them in this year's CBC.

—Bob Biersack



Red-breasted Nuthatch. Photo by Dick Rowe



JOIN THE CLUB OR RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

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	Field Trip Chair, Wendy Richards
Vice President, Bob Biersack	Publicity Chair, Bonnie Bernstein
Secretary, Joyce Cambron	Membership Chair, Alexia Smith
Treasurer, Jan Smith	Club Ornithologist, Dick Rowe
Program Chair needed	

Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith. Logo by Jennifer Cox

Website managed by Bob Biersack

Facebook page managed by Becky McKenzie