



**April 2021 Newsletter**  
of the  
**Rockbridge Bird Club,**  
encouraging  
the enjoyment, knowledge, &  
conservation of birds in the Rockbridge Area

**Calendar**

**Sat., Apr. 24, 7 a.m.**—bird walk in Brushy Hills; raindate Sun. Apr. 25 \*

— and stay alert for possible **spur-of-the-moment** bird walks!

\* See article below

Spring won't let me stay in this house any longer! I must get out and breathe the air deeply again.

— Gustav Mahler, Austro-Bohemian composer & conductor, 1860 - 1911

**Brushy Hills bird walk at 7 a.m. on Saturday, April 24th**

Brushy Hills offers well maintained trails in a native forest close to Lexington—and spring will be in full swing by late April! We'll start early to catch morning birdsong, for an outing of about two hours.

Meet at Town Spring at 7:00 a.m.: 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 and kiosk opposite. Wear sturdy footwear, and bring water, binoculars, and a mask. We'll observe COVID protocol by social distancing. In the event of heavy rain we'll move the event to Sunday, April 25th. For more information, contact me at richardsw@wlu.edu or 436-5214. Hope to see you there!

—Wendy Richards, President

*Black-and-white Warbler:  
a bird we might see  
in Brushy Hills in late April.  
Photo by Bill Elrick  
from the Macauley Library*



## Web resources: spring migration

Perhaps you know ornithologist and author Scott Weidensaul from his books or have heard him speak. Or maybe you recall the big Snowy Owl "irruption" in the winter of 2013-14, when Rockbridge residents could take a short drive to see one of those magical birds of the north; Weidensaul and colleagues responded to that extraordinary event by founding Project SNOWstorm, to study the winter ecology of Snowy Owls. Now Weidensaul has a new book out, [A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds](#), which led to an interview by Terry Gross on her NPR program "Fresh Air," [well worth a listen](#). Weidensaul has amazing facts and stories to tell, and his enthusiasm will make you want to — well, for one thing, go outside at night and listen for birds migrating north!

And, in that case, you may want to check out [BirdCast](#), the bird migration forecast project using weather surveillance radar to gather information on the numbers, flight directions, speeds, and altitudes of birds aloft. There you can do a city search and see what's predicted for Lexington, Virginia, for the next three nights. (I'm looking at that now: low, and "No migration alert" — better check again a bit later on.) BirdCast supports research, which in turn informs conservation decisions, and you can participate in its citizen science dimension by reporting your observations on eBird.



*From Saul Weidensaul's [website](#), his photo and caption: "Tens of thousands of Amur falcons lift off from their nighttime roost in Nagaland, India, a few of the millions that crowd these remote mountains each autumn en route to Africa."*

Among the migrants heading our way, we eagerly await the warblers—some of us hoping to learn or re-learn to ID them. John Pancake recommends the Cornell Lab class [Be A Better Birder: Warbler Identification](#). The cost is \$125; if you're a Lab member (you could [become one](#) for \$44), the code Warblers50 gets you a 50% discount.

—Alexia Smith



## Lake Robertson Bird walk, March 27



A calm lake greeted the six of us on a picture perfect early spring morning. Some of us were seasoned birders, some were beginning birders, and one was getting reacquainted with eastern birds after leaving California to return to Virginia. It was a great opportunity for sharing knowledge and tips and for experiencing the excitement of first sightings for the newbies. We identified some great birds in this transitional time where winter species linger and breeding species return. The Long-tailed Duck was long gone, but happily it appears that a good variety of species like to hang out at Lake Robertson.

*Bloodroot at Lake Robertson.  
Photo by Linda Cunningham*

Here are the 26 species we were able to identify: Canada Goose 4; Wild Turkey 1; Pied-billed Grebe 3; Turkey Vulture 7; Belted Kingfisher 1; Red-bellied Woodpecker 2; Downy Woodpecker 2; Northern Flicker 1; Eastern Phoebe 6; Blue Jay 4; American Crow 5; Common Raven 3; Carolina Chickadee 8; Tufted Titmouse 2; Golden-crowned Kinglet 2; Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1; Red-breasted Nuthatch 6; White-breasted Nuthatch 3; Carolina Wren 4; Eastern Bluebird 2; American Robin 2; Chipping Sparrow 1; Dark-eyed Junco 12; Red-winged Blackbird 2; Pine Warbler 4 (saw one); Northern Cardinal 2

—Wendy Richards, President

### Bob's Perch

We humans don't like to think of ourselves as "instinctive." We've been told (less frequently in recent years) that our reliance on intellect rather than instinct makes us different from the rest of life on earth. Sometimes, though, we have experiences that seem much more instinctive—we can understand them and explain them, but they feel like they just happen, and every society that I can think of has expressed them in similar ways.

One of these is feeling the rhythm of Spring—shaking off the mental fog of Winter (especially this year?) and experiencing a quickening pace all around us. There are examples throughout the natural world, but as birders we get it with the return of early migrants even as the winter birds linger. On the walk at Lake Robertson on March 27 we found Pine Warblers and Chipping Sparrows (and had a good conversation about their similar songs) that might have been new arrivals, mixed in with groups of Dark-eyed Juncos and Red-breasted Nuthatches and Kinglets, both Ruby- and Golden-crowned, still in their winter homes.

So far, the new sights and sounds are coming at a manageable pace. One day Field Sparrows are singing on the edge of the pasture. The next day a Louisiana Waterthrush arrives and Tree Swallows are checking out boxes. Soon, though, the new sights and sounds will come in bunches, bringing tests for the ear and the eye and the memory—all of which seem to me to be a little weaker as the years pass. [It](#) does all come back, though, and with it comes a new sense of energy and excitement: a “shot in the arm” of another kind, both of them offering hope for the future.

Another hopeful sign came this week with a report of continued growth in the Bald Eagle population in the U.S. Their numbers have likely passed the 300,000 mark recently, up from only about 72,000 in 2009 according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We spent a couple of days on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay recently, and there was an occupied Eagle nest just a couple of hundred yards up the creek. The male spent his days roaming the area, keeping an eye on things. This became clear when a younger Eagle (maybe third-year?) flew in and perched in a tree right above us. The resident male was having none of that as he swooped in and drove the youngster off. I quickly decided that the young one may have fledged from this same nest a couple of years ago and dad wanted to be sure [he](#) understood that he needed to move along. The population surge may mean that the neighborhood is just a little more crowded, making territorial defense a bigger job. A nice problem to have, I think.

—Bob Biersack

*Third-year Bald Eagle. Photo by Mia McPherson, whose website includes a [page](#) on the age progression of this species from one to five years old.*



ON THE WING PHOTOGRAPHY  
©Mia McPherson



## Big Bird



Newsletter reader Susie Lynch tipped us off to this photo from the science journal Nature's pick of March's best science images (Nature's excellent daily email newsletter called [Nature Briefing](#) is what tipped *her* off). Here's the story:

Hundreds of starlings flocked together above Lough Ennell in County Westmeath, Ireland, in a stunning murmuration that photographer James Crombie captured on 3 March. The birds are nesting in the reeds around the lake, and take to the sky every four or five days around sunset. It took Crombie hundreds of photographs to capture this "perfect" shot, a moment in which the flock took the shape of a giant bird.



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](http://www.rockbridgebirdclub.org) and find us on Facebook.

Contact the Club by email at [rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com](mailto:rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com), or call Laura Neale, 540-261-1909.

### **Club Officers**

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