



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

Calendar

Sat., Nov. 6, 9:30 a.m.—Bird walk at Boxerwood: beginning birders welcome *

Mon., Nov. 8, 7:00 p.m.—Zoom interview with Jonathan Meiburg, author of [A Most Remarkable Creature](#) *

* See article below

"In order to see birds, it is necessary to become a part of the silence."

—Robert Lynd, Irish writer, essayist, nationalist (1879-1949)

Boxerwood Bird Walk, Saturday 6 November

We'll meet at 9:30 a.m. in the [Boxerwood](#) parking lot for a two-hour stroll along the nature center's woodland paths and fields—aiming to "become a part of the silence" as we look and listen! New birders are especially welcome.

Please wear good walking shoes and bring water and masks. And don't forget your binocs. In case of inclement weather, the walk will be cancelled. For more information, email Bob Biersack, bob.biersack@gmail.com.

Program via Zoom: interview with an author and his remarkable book

(Save 7 p.m. on Monday, November 8 — we'll send you the Zoom link separately.)

Jonathan Meiburg's book is entitled [A Most Remarkable Creature: The Hidden Life and Epic Journey of the World's Smartest Birds of Prey](#). It's about Caracaras, and, to quote David Sibley, it's a "fascinating, entertaining, and totally engrossing story of these under-appreciated birds, deftly intertwining natural history and human history, and with insights and lessons that go far beyond the subject birds."

[A Most Remarkable Creature](#) also receives praise from artist and musician Laurie Anderson: "this will quickly become one of your all-time favorite books" — and from Publishers Weekly: "Meiburg elevates himself to the top ranks of science writers with this enthralling debut."

Jonathan is an engaging person via Zoom, too, and we can look forward to a fascinating and delightful hour in his company. He invites us to invite our friends to attend, and his presentation will be of interest to anyone who cares about the natural world.

By the way, Jonathan is a musician by trade; he's a singer and songwriter and the leader of his band, which is called... Shearwater.



*Striated Caracara feeding on an Upland Goose chick.
Photo by Laurent Demongin, from the Macauley Library.*

Wendy Richards: This Winter I'm Following The Migrants

In early November my husband Steve and I are heading south to Florida in search of warmer temperatures, a slower pace of life, and new adventures. We've discovered a place that fits these criteria.

Pine Island is located on the Gulf Coast, close to Fort Myers and Sanibel Island but without all the development and heavy traffic that plague both of those familiar Florida destinations. Located in Lee County, Pine Island hosts 9 of the 51 nature preserves established through Conservation 20/20, the County's program for acquiring land and managing it in an environmentally-sensitive manner. On Pine Island there aren't any stoplights, just a 4-way intersection in the middle of the island. There aren't any high-rise buildings, because the local folks don't want them. There aren't sandy, seashell-strewn beaches — but there's an amazing system of canals for exploring by kayak.

But most important of all, there are birds! Pelicans, Egrets, Wood Storks, and Herons hang out along our canal view, and we can ride our bikes to check on what's happening at the Bald Eagle nest in a nearby preserve.

We plan to return to participate in the Christmas Bird Count which is always a highlight of our year. The date of this year's count is unofficially planned for Sunday, December 19th. Due to COVID concerns, the Bird Club will not be hosting a post-tally potluck at Boxerwood. Updated information about the CBC will be included in the December newsletter.

After a short time at home, Steve and I plan to travel to Tucson, Arizona, to spend January through March exploring the American Southwest. Yes, it will be warmer; and, yes, we will be birding. I hope to share with you through the newsletter reports of what we see in these locations.

I wish everyone a healthy winter enjoying our beloved Virginia birds. See you in the Spring!

—Wendy, Wandering President of the Rockbridge Bird Club



Looking out the window at Steve and Wendy's lodgings on Pine Island, Florida

Cultivating young birders at Boxerwood

Encouraging enjoyment, knowledge, and conservation of birds in the Rockbridge Area – that's the mission of the Rockbridge Bird Club. And with that in mind, two Club members have been sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm with children participating in the Bird Watchers after-school program at Boxerwood Nature Center.

Ten second and third graders from Central Elementary School join Bonnie Bernstein, Wendy Richards, and Boxerwood's Early Education Coordinator, Jess Sullivan, on Wednesdays for two hours of fun and learning in the field. The Bird Watchers program is free of cost to their families thanks to grants from the Rockbridge Community Health Foundation and Boxerwood Educational Foundation, and to volunteer support from the Rockbridge Bird Club.

Throughout their adventures, Bird Watchers are encouraged to apply what they learn in creative ways. Activities to date have included fall foraging for food, migration storytelling (harrowing!), measuring and comparing the wingspans of raptors, and building owl nesting boxes. In upcoming weeks, the kids will focus on ways to help the birds that winter in Rockbridge by designing decals to prevent window strikes, cleaning and stocking feeders, and making brush piles for shelter.

Every session includes time to birdwatch with binoculars in the woods, the meadow, and behind a bird blind built by kids participating in the PALS program last spring, another program supported by members of the Bird Club.

Scenes from the Boxerwood Bird Watchers Program



Clockwise from left: Bird Watchers measured their own wingspans and compared them to the wingspans of raptors.

Bird Watchers assembled two Screech Owl boxes for Boxerwood from kits made by Dave Agnor, a local woodworker.

The kids showed off their boxes before setting out to find locations they judged to be good habitat for Screech Owls.



—Story & photos by Bonnie Bernstein

Membership: dues reminder

The Club's 2022 fiscal year has already begun: please join, or renew your membership! Extra donations are always welcome. Your contributions go towards honoraria for our speakers and support for bird conservation. Mail payment to Jan Smith, our Treasurer, at 564 Big Hill Road, Lexington, VA 24450—along with your address, email address, and phone number. Thank you!

An Owl in the Oak



Baron Schwarz took this photo of a Great Horned Owl in the Great Oak at Boxerwood on our walk last month. Was the Owl just passing through, or might we see her again — or maybe she's still at Boxerwood but less conspicuous... We wondered if she might be a young one looking for new territory. And, of course, maybe she's a he.

Bob's Perch

An article by Scott Weidensaul in the Autumn issue of Living Bird Magazine reminded me that the spectacle of migration passes by in many different ways. He describes the discovery and documentation of the largest Whimbrel roosting site found anywhere in the world. (You can read the article [here](#).) Many thousands of birds, of a species in serious decline, stop to rest and recover on a small barrier island off the coast of South Carolina, after flying across the Caribbean from South America on their way to nesting sites across northern Canada.

I usually think of birding as a singular thing, searching out individual birds or maybe small groups, focusing on the identification and behavior of each individual. Roosting, though, is a different thing altogether. My experience comes from a small creek feeding into the Chesapeake Bay near Chestertown, Maryland. On a fall evening, as the sun fades and clouds reflect orange and pink in the sky and on the water, small groups of Red-winged Blackbirds move in from all directions toward a little peninsula covered with marsh grass. There is a constant flow of twos and threes or sometimes tens or twenties disappearing into the grass during the last hour or so of sunlight. Once in the grass they are invisible, calling occasionally but generally quiet, with surprisingly little squabbling over accommodations as they settle down for the night.

If you're awake in the morning though, just as the grass becomes visible again in predawn light these birds explode into the sky, leaving for a day's feeding. They seem to move all at once, but you soon realize that it's taking several minutes for them all to head off – thousands of birds moving in waves and then scattering in all directions. As individuals they're "just" Red-winged Blackbirds, but when they leave a roost the whole is much greater than the sum of its parts.



Photo by Gordon Dimmig, in the Macauley Library

Most everything in nature faces pretty big challenges throughout its life, and there are times when it's just better to be part of a large group that shares information and experience, helping each individual carry on. Even just observing the experience from a distance leaves a strong feeling of hope and admiration for their perseverance.

—Bob Biersack



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

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* traveling at present

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