



February 2022 Newsletter
of the
Rockbridge Bird Club,
encouraging
the enjoyment, knowledge, &
conservation of birds in the Rockbridge Area

Calendar

Fri.-Mon., Feb. 18 - 21 — Great Backyard Bird Count *

Sat., Feb. 19, 11:00 a.m. — Feeding Birds Naturally: virtual plant clinic *

Thu, Feb 24, 6:00 p.m. — "Birding with J. Drew Lanham": live virtual event *

* See article below

What a severe yet master artist old Winter is.... No longer the canvas and the pigments, but the marble and the chisel.

John Burroughs, American naturalist (1837 - 1921)

The Great Backyard Bird Count, February 18 - 21

Here's a chance for bird-lovers of all abilities, all across the world, to make a contribution to science — and have fun doing it. You spend 15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days, and report to GBBC what you see or hear. Your observations can help scientists better understand global bird populations at a time of year preceding one of their annual migrations.

The GBBC [how-to webpage](#) makes it easy for those who have never taken part before, and from there you can register for a [free webinar](#) on February 16 to learn more. You may want to explore the whole website — look for the live world map showing bird sightings as they happen over a 24-hour period!

And here's a local GBBC volunteer opportunity: this year, Natural Bridge State Park is hosting a group count along park trails throughout the long weekend. Cassidy Sept, the park's volunteer coordinator, is in need of volunteers to help staff information tables during the count and lead bird watching hikes on Saturday and Sunday afternoons at 1:00. Interested birders, please contact Bob Biersack (bob.biersack@gmail.com). Bob is organizing volunteers from the Bird Club willing to assist with these activities.

Feeding Birds Naturally, Saturday, Feb. 19 at 11 a.m.

The Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners are offering this plant clinic to the public via Zoom, covering what kinds of food birds need at different times of year and how to garden with bird-friendly plants. To register, go to the RAMGA [website](#). Thanks to Jan Smith, our Treasurer and also a Master Gardener, for alerting us to this opportunity — as we anticipate gardening season!

2022 Membership: a quick reminder

You may have sent in your dues in the fall, when our fiscal year began. But, if not, now's a good time! Please mail payment to Jan Smith, our Treasurer, at 564 Big Hill Road, Lexington, VA 24450—along with your address, email address, and phone number. Extra donations are always gratefully received. Thank you.

Getting Acquainted with Dr. Drew Lanham

Just before the pandemic struck, I travelled over to Sweet Briar College to listen to Clemson University Professor Dr. Drew Lanham give a talk. A Bird Club member's copy of his book [The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature](#) had made the rounds, and I'd become a fan after reading it. For me, the most powerful takeaway was Dr. Lanham's deep attachment to a piece of land—a powerful connection that has zip to do with skin color and more to do with the privilege of growing up on family land.

Following his presentation at SBC, he was queried about being a Black birder. Of course he accepted the opportunity to respond. As a committed birder and educator, I wished that he was being asked more questions about birds and conservation and ideas for creating the next generation of birders.



By June of 2020, Dr. Lanham had joined other prominent Black birders in both promoting Black birder groups and educating the rest of the birding world on best protocols for welcoming BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color).

Dr. Lanham is also a poet; please go [here](#) to minute 49 and listen to a poignant reading by Dr. Lanham of his response to the "coming to roost" at the newly found Whimbrel stopover along the South Carolina coast. (The whole webinar is really great!)

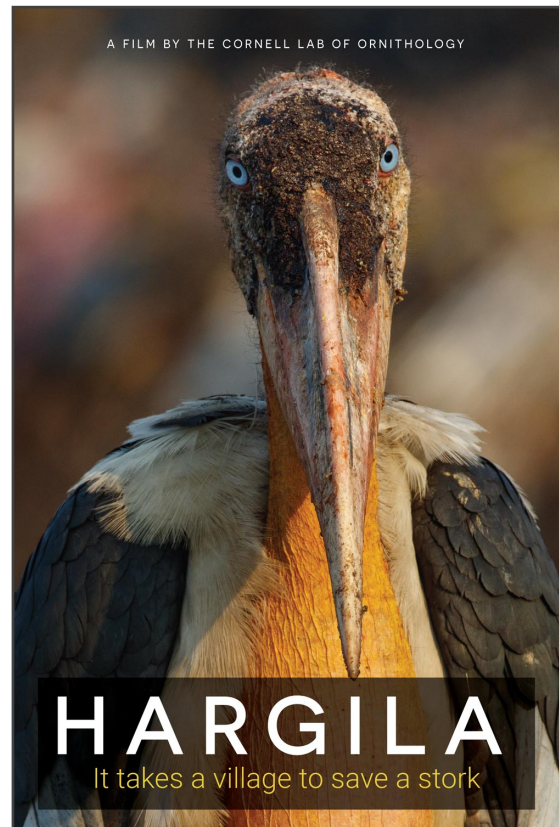
Orion Magazine is hosting a **live virtual event on February 24 at 6:00 p.m.**, where *Person Place Thing* podcast host Randy Cohen will be conversing with Dr. Lanham on birding and on birding as a Black man in America. Find an opportunity to listen to passionate birder Drew Lanham: **register [here](#)**.

—Laura Neale

A short movie about a big, strange, wonderful bird

The movie is well summed up by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, whose Center for Conservation Media produced it: "For an uplifting look at one of the world's rarest storks, and a remarkable woman at the heart of a community's efforts to save it, [watch our new 28-minute film, *Hargila*](#). Most of the 1,200 Greater Adjutant storks in the world are found in a last stronghold in Assam, India. *Hargila* reveals the lives of these magnificent birds where they nest above two Assamese villages, and the women there who helped the birds gain support from their human neighbors."

Following along with the wildlife photographer, you'll also see a huge garbage dump where big flocks of storks and of people make their living — as well as a distinctive Assamese solution for documenting bird nests high in the treetops.



Tucson Sojourn — A Tip Pays Off

Shortly after the New Year began, Steve and I packed our Prius and headed west for Tucson, Arizona, our winter destination. We drove steadily across the country, taking 5 days to follow a generally southwestern course, luckily avoiding inclement weather and finding mostly sparsely traveled roads. We crossed the Mississippi River at Greenville, MS on Rt. 82. Passing over the prairies we saw many hawks along the roadside; without properly scoping them out I'm guessing they were buteos — Red-tailed or Ferruginous Hawks.

Our little "Bohemian Bungalow" sits in a tucked-away area of Tucson. We have a large back lot where we often see Mourning Doves, House Finches, and Gila Woodpeckers (the southwestern version of our Red-bellied). I've also seen a Cooper's Hawk several times; once it surprised me as it was eating a rodent right above my head! I put out two hummingbird feeders and right away starting seeing visitors, including one of the woodpeckers precariously hanging off the feeder and sipping the nectar. I'm still trying to figure out which hummers I'm seeing here.

Just now we've returned from a trip away from our Tucson locale. We drove down southeast of Tucson to spend a few days birding and hiking in the Chihuahuan Desert. The main purpose was to visit the Whitewater Draw Wildlife Area, which was established by the Arizona Game and Fish Department in 1997. A former cattle ranch, this grassland offers marshland, mudflats and shallow open-water habitat that attract many species of birds, including a truly impressive number of Sandhill Cranes. The [website](#) boasts that more than 20,000 cranes come to this location to spend the winter, but I'd guess that what we saw was more like 50,000. It was a truly amazing spectacle to watch the cranes fly in, fly out, and circle around the area. Adding to the visual thrill was the audio performance — lots of cooing and squawking. Constantly in motion, the

huge flocks of cranes intermingled with each other but appeared like one organism. As we watched and listened, Steve compared the scene to what it must be like to witness a penguin colony in Antarctica.



Photo by Wendy. (Editor's note: I regret that the newsletter can't carry the multi-megabytes of Steve's flying-cranes video; Whitewater Draw offers a Crane Cam [here](#).)

In addition to the main attraction, numerous groups of Northern Pintails and Northern Shovelers were probing the shallow water. Other dabbling ducks we were able to identify were American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal, and the especially entertaining duck-like swimmer American Coot. A Spotted Sandpiper teetered back and forth along the shore, and a small group of what a local birder identified as Long-billed Dowitchers could be seen investigating a mudflat. That birder's gesture leads me to extolling the virtues of the local birders out here. They are so generous with sharing their knowledge and clearly pleased when I get excited about seeing a bird they helped me identify. It was one of these generous fellow birders who urged me to visit Whitewater Draw. What a good tip that was!

—Wendy Richards, Wandering Bird Club President

Bob's Perch

I heard a Black-Capped Chickadee singing yesterday. The birds always get more vocal and their songs more clear about this time of year. Longer days are offering hope for spring even as the snow lingers much longer than we've gotten accustomed to. It's always exciting to me to find a Black-Capped, since they're the more unusual of the Chickadees around here – unless you're at a higher elevation, where the proportions might change.

I always feel more confident of my ID for Black-Capped Chickadees when I hear them. I know there are distinguishing markings, but I find them very hard to see. Of course, I suppose there might be a lazy Carolina choosing to skip one of the four notes in their normal song—which would make it sound like a Black-Capped.

Correctly identifying the birds we see can be a pretty complicated thing. There has been some discussion recently in Crozet about the possible sighting of a pair of the Oregon subspecies of Dark Eyed Junco. They tend to be more brown than grey, and they have some reddish color under the wings. Birds have a lot of individual variation in their markings, though, so it's possible to read more into some small differences than we should. I see lots of Juncos that look pretty different from each other, though they have enough of the common features to clearly be Juncos. These “maybe this, maybe that” situations are part of the fun, and also part of the frustration of birding.



Ed. note: Can you identify these Chickadees? Their IDs are on the next page.

There will soon be another opportunity to spend some time identifying and counting the birds near us: the Great Backyard Bird Count begins on February 18 and runs through the 21st (as described on page 1). This joint effort by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Audubon, and Birds Canada is a chance to practice our ID skills and add to the ever-growing volume of data that has allowed for a much better understanding of bird numbers and behavior in recent years. I hope you'll consider participating in this year's GBBC, and add to our collective knowledge of the birds whose home we share.

—Bob Biersack

Chickadees on page 5, clockwise from upper left: Black-capped, photo by Mark Ludwig; Carolina by Herbert King; Black-capped by Brennan Roy; and Carolina by Herbert King. All images from the Cornell Lab's [Macaulay Library](#).



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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