



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

Calendar

April 11, evening — Program: "Our Wonderful Wood Warblers," by Bob Schamerhorn *

Thank God men cannot fly, and lay waste the sky as well as the earth.

— Henry David Thoreau

A Program in April — and we hope it can be in person!

Bob Schamerhorn is an outstanding photographer and lifelong nature lover, and the program he gave for the Club on attracting birds with water was a favorite. This time, he'll get us ready to greet the warblers who pass through — or arrive to stay — during spring migration. Save the date, and we'll have more information in the April newsletter.

Volunteers needed to monitor nest boxes along several Rockbridge bluebird trails (late March through mid-August)

If you enjoy birds, have an hour or two free each week, and plan to be home for most of the spring and summer, this community science and service opportunity is for you!

What's involved: Monitors check several nest boxes every 3-4 days and record when eggs are laid, when they hatch, and when the young birds fledge (or -- gulp -- if they don't). They walk or drive from one box location to the next and spend no more than a minute or two opening the box and observing the nest. The data they collect helps the Virginia Bluebird Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology study cavity-nesting birds in our region and track changes over time due to climate, habitat loss, and other factors.

Volunteers can monitor on their own or with a friend or make it a family activity. Experienced monitors will provide the tools and training (in an hour, on your schedule), but you have to arrange your own transportation.

Nest monitoring is a great way to be out in nature, learn firsthand about birds, and contribute valuable information to science -- all at the same time!

Please send a message to Bonnie Bernstein (bonnie.bernstein@gmail.com) if you're interested.

Tucson Sojourn: Hummers — a report from our Club president

We've been in Tucson for over 6 weeks now, and I've had the opportunity to join a Tucson Audubon field trip at a local city park. The two women leaders were excellent at finding and pointing out great views of all the hoped-for species. By "pointing out,"

I mean they didn't actually *point* but instead competently described exactly where the bird was located, a skill that I'm still learning.

One of the exciting finds was an Anna's Hummingbird perching on what looked like the beginnings of a nest. We watched as it hovered around a branch and then clearly plopped itself down in the familiar nesting position on a little bit of fuzz.



Female Anna's Hummingbird. Photo by Dana Miller-Blair, from the Macauley Library

Anna's Hummingbirds are clearly the most common hummer in Southeastern Arizona at this time of year. I can now confidently report that it is this species that is frequenting the feeders I put out in the backyard where we are staying. Male Anna's display a fiery reddish-pink throat and crown in the right light. Their magenta crown is unique to U.S. hummingbirds, which is a real plus when you're trying to identify these chunky and feisty creatures that rarely sit still for very long. Females, more challenging to ID, display a dark patch of dots on their throat; otherwise they're green-backed and have gray underparts, like most female hummers.



Male Anna's Hummingbird. Photo by Ryan Sanderson, from the Macaulay Library

Steve and I ventured south of Tucson to visit the [Paton Center for Hummingbirds](#), located in Patagonia, Arizona. Originally a private property owned by a couple who established a refuge for birds, the Paton Center now belongs to Tucson Audubon. This property is alive with all kinds of bird activity! There are numerous feeders of all sorts set up in various areas, as well as a small pond, many brush piles, and an impressive number of large cottonwoods. The 1.4-acre center also includes a riparian woodland corridor, along Sonoita Creek. There are chairs, benches, a shade structure, and — best of all — a daily Audubon volunteer to help with ID challenges.

The star attraction on the day we visited was a Violet-crowned Hummingbird. As you can guess, you can (if you are lucky) catch a glimpse of a flash of amethyst above the black tipped orange bill and pure white throat and belly of this lovely creature. Common in Mexico, Violet-crowns venture to only a few locations in the U.S., and Paton is one of its favorites. I can understand why the Violet-crowned hangs out there.



Violet-crowned Hummingbird. Photo by David Lariviere, from the Macaulay Library

Paton offers a peaceful, unhurried opportunity to sit and watch an amazing variety of birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. If you're dreaming about spring, I suggest you check out their hummingbird feeder [webcam](#).

— Wendy Richards, Wandering Bird Club President

Editor's note: Hummingbird activity at the webcam, according to the Paton Center's website, seems to peak in the late afternoon (Mountain Standard Time, two hours earlier than EST).

Bob's Perch

I think February might be called the month of awakening. Just three weeks ago the earth seemed gray and cold and mostly silent, with snow that lingered far longer this year than any other in recent memory. Now I'm sitting on the porch with the temperature near 70, surrounded by the sound of Song Sparrows and Cardinals and Eastern Phoebe joined by the occasional Carolina Chickadee and White-throated Sparrow. They've been around all winter, but they're much more willing to announce their presence now than even a week or so ago.

Each morning and evening for the last several days has been announced by the sound of Screech Owls in the woods not far away. Last week there was a Barred Owl

calling one night, and in the morning a Black-capped Chickadee identified himself most clearly in song. The days are longer, the sun warmer, the snow gone (but not forgotten), and small bees are moving among the witch hazel flowers.



Barred Owl. Photo by Blair Dudeck, from the Macaulay Library

This late winter season is also the time for the Great Backyard Bird Count, the GBBC, a joint effort of several large birding organizations across North America. Last weekend we were able to introduce some Natural Bridge State Park visitors to flocks of Cedar Waxwings, including one with red on the tips of its tail feathers, along with Titmouse and Chickadees and Woodpeckers – the usual winter residents. At allaboutbirds.org, the Cornell Lab tells us that “Cedar Waxwings with orange instead of yellow tail tips began appearing in the northeastern U.S. and southeastern Canada in the 1960s. The orange color is the result of a red pigment picked up from the berries of an introduced species of honeysuckle. If a waxwing eats enough of the berries while it is growing a tail feather, the tip of the feather will be orange.” There were also large numbers of American Robins getting drinks from Cedar Creek. Even on a cold and windy day when the birds were mostly lying low, it was a fine couple of hours in the park.

On Monday of the GBBC I found a pair of Fish Crows on Big Spring Rd. near Midland Trail, and a Belted Kingfisher and a pair of Common Mergansers along Kerrs Creek. Mine were just two of the more than 200,000 eBird lists submitted during the four-day event, along with 210,000 individual sightings recorded through the [Merlin App](https://www.merlinapp.org/) from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. This juxtaposition between technology and the personal experience of nature really is quite remarkable. It offers both the joy of those personal observations and the nearly effortless accumulation of data that brings the potential for a broader understanding of the life that surrounds us. Merlin has the power to make each of us a pretty good birder, offering reliable IDs using pixel patterns from photos or spectrographs from bird songs or the deductive powers that have always guided us toward a correct ID. (How big is it? What colors and markings are notable? Where do I see it and what is it doing?) Its ability to help us along the path toward recognition and understanding of the natural world is truly magical.

—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.

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