



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

**Calendar**

**Mon., Sept. 12, 6:30 p.m.** — Program: "Birds of Maine" by Dick Rowe \*

**Sat., Sept. 17, 10 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.** — Hawk Watch Open House at Rockfish Gap \*

**Sat., Oct. 1, 8:30 a.m.** — Bird walk: "Birding 101" at Jordan's Point Park \*

\* [see article below](#)

I cannot endure to waste anything so precious as autumnal sunshine by staying in the house. So I have spent almost all the daylight hours in the open air.  
— Nathaniel Hawthorne, American novelist (1804-1864)

**A Note from our Club President:**

**Ten Years and Counting...**

Welcome to the official beginning of the Rockbridge Bird Club's tenth year! After a summer break, your Bird Club's leaders are revving back up to offer programs, field trips, and opportunities to become more familiar with birds and the issues that affect their survival. As always, we welcome your input – comments, stories and support.

As you read the articles included in this newsletter, I hope you'll be inspired to share what you learn and take action that will help the birds we all love. Whether it's providing comments concerning the need for a permanent place for seabirds to breed or adding native plants to our yards, we all need to pull together to assure that birds thrive into the future.

I spent some at this year's Rockbridge Community Festival talking with folks about birds and sharing the Raptor Board on loan to us from Hanging Rock Raptor Observatory in Union, WV. This is an interactive display where the object of the game is to match the name of a raptor species to its photo. If the guess is successful, buttons on the board light up. This was a great way to draw folks in and begin a discussion. Kids jumped at the chance to ID an eagle or an owl! One young girl identified a Red-shouldered Hawk, to her mother's surprise. Usually the adults had to pull the kids away. A young woman who had been a biology major in college aced the game.

Several women who had recently retired to our county stopped by the exhibit. One excitedly talked about the Purple Martins coming to the birdhouse on her property. Another who moved here from the Rocky Mountains expressed concern about the decline of birds; she hoped our club was actively pursuing ways to protect them. Helping birds prosper into the future is one of the reasons we started this club ten years ago: thanks for joining in your Club's efforts.

— Wendy Richards, President

## "Birds of Maine" by Dick Rowe at 6:30 p.m. Monday 12 September



Come to the Piovano Room at the Rockbridge Regional Library for the Club's first presentation of the year! Dick will illustrate his presentation with photos he took last summer on a birding trip to Maine, highlighted by a boat tour of Machias Seal Island.

The island, claimed by both the U.S. and Canada, houses a research station and is a breeding sanctuary for Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills, Common Murres, and other species. Access to the island is limited, but guest birders are able to use photo-blinds that allow for very close observation of the birds.

As most of our readers know, Dick is a VMI biology professor and our Club ornithologist — and a dedicated photographer of birds.

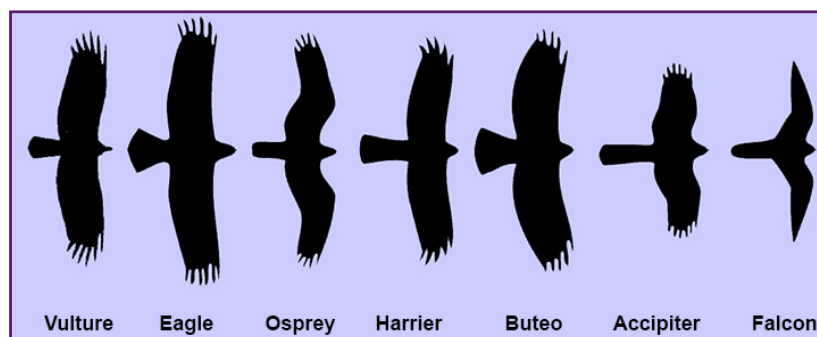
*Here's one of Dick's pictures of an Atlantic Puffin in Maine.*

## Raptor Migration Time: Hawk Watches at Rockfish Gap and Harvey's Knob \* & Rockfish Gap Open House on September 17 \*

Raptors migrate in the fall along the Blue Ridge flight corridor, and we're fortunate to have two Hawk Watches within reach — [Rockfish Gap](#) on Afton Mountain, and [Harvey's Knob](#), south along the Parkway, which has fewer numbers but spectacular views. Peak numbers occur in mid to late September, though different species pass through at different times throughout the fall. At both Watches, you'll find that volunteers keeping the count will gladly help identify the migrants.

A special event is Rockfish Gap's annual Open House, held this year on Saturday, September 17, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Drop in any time, and bring the kids! There will be interactive displays and food vendors, and the Wildlife Center of Virginia will give live animal presentations at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Organizers suggest bringing a lawn chair, hat, sunscreen, and binoculars (but no pets). For directions and more information, go to the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch on Facebook or [@rockfishgap](#).

From the Rockfish Gap website, here are silhouettes of raptors (and vultures) by group; and you'll find individual species, as seen flying overhead, pictured [here](#).



## **Birding for Beginners — and others — at Jordan's Point Park on October 1**

Everybody's welcome at the Club's first "Birding 101" walk of the year. Meet at 8:30 a.m. on Saturday, October 1, in the pavilion at Jordan's Point Park, for a stroll of about 90 minutes. Leaders Wendy Richards and Becky McKenzie invite both inexperienced and experienced birders to join them, as well as those who need pathways that are more accessible.

The date is in peak migration period, so you may see birds passing through on their way south as well as year-round locals.

Be sure to wear sturdy shoes and bring binoculars. In the event of rain, the walk will be postponed. For more information or a weather update, contact Wendy Richards (540-319-0318 or richardsw@wlu.edu).



*Female Belted Kingfisher. Left, photo by Charlie Bruggemann; right, by Angie Anderson. Both from the Macaulay Library*

Note: A Kingfisher was recently reported along Jordan's Point. You'd be lucky to have a good view of one perched like this; you're more likely to get a not-close glimpse of one in flight over water — and hear its "rattle," a delight in itself.

## **Update: Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2**

Rockbridge birders enthusiastically joined many Virginians in the 2015-to-2020 effort to observe bird breeding behaviors and submit their observations to the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2 (VABBA2) project. Data collection amounted to the biggest citizen science project in the history of Virginia — 5.5 million field observations were made, on over 200 breeding bird species!

The VABBA2 is now in Year 2 of the five-year data compilation and analysis phase, with online publication anticipated at the end of 2025. A committee comprised of representatives from the Virginia Society of Ornithology, the Department of Wildlife Resources, and Virginia Tech's Conservation Institute have worked hard to develop publication plans. The final product will be a website accessible and understandable to conservation groups, policy makers, and the general public, "providing critical information to help develop informed policies and to direct active management and conservation efforts where they are most needed" (quoting VSO). See more details at this [VSO webpage](#).

Thanks to your donations, our small bird club has contributed \$1550 towards this work, critically important for the conservation of birds in Virginia. \$800 of that goes towards sponsorship of a "species account" for the Black-and-White Warbler — "an interpretive narrative illustrated with photographs, maps, tables and charts" (VSO). For sponsoring our mascot, the Rockbridge Bird Club will be recognized in the publication.

As we know, birds are in trouble, as verified in [State of the Birds 2019](#).



Publication of the VABBA2 may be one of the best ways for us to help birds. As the publication effort continues its fundraising campaign, please consider donating [directly to the VABBA2](#), or by earmarking a donation through the Rockbridge Bird Club.

—Laura Neale, Conservation Chair

## **An Unusual Nighttime Bird Sighting**

Lexington resident Ann Hopkins writes of a hummingbird experience she had — at 1 a.m. one night:

"While walking my little dog, and while wearing a head lamp, I spotted a little hummingbird feeding in the petals of my "naked ladies" flowers on the edge of my driveway. At first, my headlamp picked up an iridescent little dot jumping around the flower area. As I grew closer I could see that the "dot" was actually the bird's eye, and I thought what I was watching was either a very very large moth or a hummingbird. As I watched and got closer it became apparent that it was a hummingbird. I actually saw the beak go down into the center of the flower and the wings spinning as they do. The bird went from flower to flower, dipping its head down into each blossom center."

Various reliable sources note that hummingbirds rarely feed at night, and when they do, it's usually because of artificial lighting. Ordinarily, when night comes they sleep! — or, rather, they go into a hibernation-like state called torpor, thus saving energy. And sometimes while in torpor they hang upside-down. That would be something to see, too.

Ann's research on encountering a hummingbird at night turned up this: "Native America lore says it is a sign of good luck and that a positive person may come into my life! In any event, I feel blessed that I saw this little one last night."



**From the editor** to the reader: please send a note about a bird experience that was meaningful to you for whatever reason (email address below). It doesn't have to be unusual or spectacular to be of interest to others.

Here's a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird, feeding by day.

*Photo by bellemare celine, from the Macaulay Library.*

## **Virginia's Largest Seabird Colony Needs a Permanent Home**

You may remember when VDOT paved over South Island, the long-time nesting site of about 20,000 migratory seabirds, in the course of expanding the Hampton Roads Bridge Tunnel. Advocates for birds — many of you included — urged action. Funds were found, and the Department of Wildlife Resources (then Game and Inland Fisheries) created a temporary new habitat on the Fort Wool island — in time for the migrants' return in the spring of 2020. And when the birds came back, they took notice of the new circumstance and settled in to nest, in even bigger numbers than before.

But that was always understood to be a temporary solution. Fort Wool itself is a state and national historic landmark, and the island was, until converted for the birds, a park.

Now the Department of Wildlife Resources is working with the Army Corps of Engineers on plans to build a permanent nesting island, using material dredged by the Corps, and to relocate the birds by the end of 2025. According to DWR Deputy Director Rebecca Gwynn, the infrastructure bill passed by Congress could pay 65% of the project's estimated \$11 million cost. The two agencies are conducting a feasibility study on the use of dredging for establishing seabird habitat, the Hampton Roads island in particular.

**Time to speak up again!**

**Short notice: send an email by Monday 5 September**

Email Gina M. Dotolo, US. Army Corps of Engineers, [gina.M.Datolo@usace.army.mil](mailto:gina.M.Datolo@usace.army.mil), citing the Hampton Roads Beneficial Use of Dredge Material Feasibility Study.

Say that you support building an island in Hampton Roads/Norfolk Harbor as a permanent site for the Hampton Roads seabird colony.

If you want to add more detail, see [this AudubonVA page](#).

**...Back to Maine**

*Photo by Dick Rowe of birds roosting on Machais Seal Island*



**IT'S THE BEGINNING OF THE CLUB'S 2023 FISCAL YEAR!  
PLEASE 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**

President, Wendy Richards\*  
Vice President, Bob Biersack  
Secretary, Joyce Cambron  
Treasurer, Jan Smith  
Program Chair needed

Field Trip Chair, Wendy Richards\*  
Conservation Chair, Laura Neale  
Publicity Chair, Bonnie Bernstein  
Membership Chair, Alexia Smith  
Club Ornithologist, Dick Rowe

Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith. Logo by Jennifer Cox  
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