



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

Calendar

Sat., Nov. 5, 8:30 a.m. — Birding 101: a short walk at Jordan's Point *

Thurs., Nov. 10 — Seed & suet order pick-up at Farmers Coop *

Sat., Nov. 12, 8:00 a.m. — Birding at Boxerwood *

Mon. Nov. 14, 6:30 p.m. — Program: Bob Schamerhorn, "Webfooted Waterfowl" *
preceded by the Annual Meeting *

Sun., Dec. 18 — Lexington Area Christmas Bird Count

* see article below

On a bare branch a crow is perched – autumn evening

— Bashō (1644-1694), Japanese haiku master

Birding 101 on Saturday, November 5

Curious about the basics of birdwatching? Want to get birding tips while at an easily accessible spot? Interested in helping your children learn about birds?

On Saturday, November 5th, 8:30 AM, members of the Rockbridge Bird Club will be leading a short walk-and-talk around Jordan's Point Park in Lexington. We'll start at the pavilion to share ideas about what birds we might see and hear, bird activity we might expect, birdwatching etiquette, and various resources (e.g., binoculars, phone apps, books) to help us with our identification.

Individuals of all ages and experience levels are invited to join us. Wear sturdy shoes. Bring binoculars if you have them.

For additional information, please contact me at beckymckenzie128@gmail.com or 540-461-0419. Hope to see you there!

—Becky McKenzie, walk coordinator

Don't forget to pick up your seed on November 10!

Just a reminder to those who purchased bird seed and suet during our seed and suet sale last month....

The drive-through pick-up will be on Thursday, November 10, in the parking lot of the Rockbridge Farmers Co-op (645 Waddell Street – corner of S. Main and Waddell Street) from 10am to Noon and again from 4-5:30 p.m. Volunteers will load your purchases into your vehicles as you drive up.

If for any reason you are unable to pick up your order on November 10, please notify Bonnie Bernstein to make other arrangements (bonnie.bernstein@gmail.com or 540-460-9147).

Thanks to all those who participated in this year's fundraiser. We raised more than \$2,000 for Boxerwood!

Second-Saturday Birding at Boxerwood: Nov. 12 at 8:00 a.m.

We'll meet in the Nature Center parking lot (963 Ross Road) for a two-hour stroll. Everybody's welcome, including first-timers and families! Dress for the weather, wear sturdy footwear, and bring binoculars. In the event of rain, the walk will be cancelled.

We plan to continue Boxerwood bird walks on the second Saturday of each month through spring, perhaps with different starting times as the seasons progress.

For more information about the upcoming walk, contact Second-Saturday coordinator Bonnie Bernstein: 540-460-9147 or bonnie.bernstein@gmail.com.

**"Webfooted Waterfowl" by Bob Schamerhorn, 6:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 14,
at the Rockbridge Regional Library**

Soon winter will bring migrating water birds to the lakes, rivers, and wetlands of our area: Bob's program will include portraits of these migrants as well as of resident waterfowl, in his signature mix of photography, video, and sound.

The program will take place in the Piovano Room, where social distancing may be difficult, so masks are recommended.

Bob Schamerhorn is an award-winning photographer with nearly fifty years of experience. In his youth, he was sponsored three years in a row to Nature Camp; at Virginia Tech, he studied art and design. Bob says his hope is "to educate and inspire the conservation of nature by capturing and sharing its beauty." He considers himself "an enthusiast, not an expert!"



Wood Duck. Photo courtesy of Bob Schamerhorn

Annual Meeting: election and treasurer's report

Election

The Executive Committee, acting as nominating committee, is proposing an unusual slate this year — pending possible nominations from the floor at the Annual Meeting (Monday, November 14, before the program). Here it is:

President: vacant

Vice President: vacant

Secretary: Joyce Cambron

Treasurer: Jan Smith

And here's the reason: a small group has held most of the planning and decision-making positions in the Rockbridge Bird Club since its beginnings ten years ago, and they would now like to share the workload and responsibilities with other members who see value in continuing the Club's work.

As a first step, the current leadership proposes to try a system of "management by committee", with individuals taking turns or otherwise sharing in the leadership role, rather than have any one individual primarily responsible for Club activities.

In addition to the officer candidates listed above, the Executive Committee includes Bonnie Bernstein (Publicity), Bob Biersack (website), Becky McKenzie (Facebook), Laura Neale (Conservation), Wendy Richards (Field Trips), and Alexia Smith (Newsletter Editor & Membership).

With your support, we'll move forward with this somewhat unorthodox structure and see how well it works.

Your part in this experiment

Please consider volunteering in some area of Club activity! If you have skills or interest in any of the areas mentioned in the paragraph above (about Executive Committee members), or if you'd like to help line up programs for Club meetings, email rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com, and we'll connect you with the person to work with. Thank you!

The Treasurer's report will be presented at the Annual Meeting.



Ravens: intelligent social animals, like us

Providing Additional Bird Habitat—Easy!

We can always expand our bird-habitat-friendly yards by adding new features. I would suggest that it's a wonderfully endless endeavor! Planting natives is important for providing foods such as fruits and bugs, but there are additional ways to provide cover. The Virginia Department of Forestry's brochure "[Brush Piles for Wildlife](#)" describes a couple of methods to actually construct a good solid pile. Their pitch is that it's better than burning the brush; as some of us remember, it used to be common to burn leaves and brush to rid the yard of vegetative debris. Nowadays the choice might be to let plants return to the ground, enriching the soil with organic compost, rather than being bagged in plastic (yikes) and transported (yikes) to the dump (yikes).

An easy way to build a brush pile is to just pile up brush until you can't reach the top, and about as wide. Bigger branches that create spaces between layers are good hideaways for Carolina Wrens and wintering sparrows; when a predator shows up, they have an easy escape (though a hungry hawk can either stand on the pile and try to get closer, or find a nearby perch and wait out the little birds.) Over time the brush pile becomes home. And over longer time, it starts to sink... easy-peasy: add more brush, or let it return to the ground, and start another and another. There is no limit to the number of brush piles!

Brush piles also provide birds and other wildlife with good winter shelter from winds and precipitation. Probably bugs and decomposers are in there, eating the dead wood and being bird food.

My guess is that the greatest deterrent to bird lovers adding brush piles may be some version of "What is beauty?" As we all know, "beauty is in the eye of the beholder." What some find messy and poorly maintained, others embrace. How about some nice cleared places to satisfy that need for order, while making the bold choice to create a brush pile as well?

It took my vision of beauty some education and time to adapt to outdoor spaces that are, well, what some folks would call neglected. More habitat, more birds. And the birds really need our help now, and even in our own little yards we can make a difference.

—Laura Neale, *Conservation Chair*



Editor's note: You can make a bigger & better brush pile than this! But even this one gives a Carolina Wren a chance to hide in full sight. Photo by Samuel Belley, in the Macaulay Library.

From Wendy: Bird Apps Make Me Buzzy

I admit I've been slow to embrace birding apps. To me, bird watching was a chance to get away from screens. Armed with binoculars and bird book, I scanned the sky and treetops for movement. I listened over and over to birding CDs as I drove back and forth to work. This repetitive activity, when combined with seeing actual birds sing, slowly resulted in my learning the songs of some common birds.

The first time I was birding with someone who pulled out an iPhone and used the Merlin Sound ID and said that he thought it was amazingly accurate, I was dubious. I knew about the free Merlin Bird ID app developed in 2009 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, an interactive smart-phone tool to help people identify birds. Last year Sound ID was added to Merlin. When you choose this feature, it will listen for any nearby bird song or call and compare it to the extensive collection of recordings in the Cornell Lab's Macaulay Library — and the names and photos of suggested species will pop up on your screen.

In May, while birding in West Virginia with a friend, I decided to try out Sound ID. We took a woods trail, and, much to our delight, Merlin suggested we were hearing Northern Parula, Magnolia Warbler, American Redstart, Black-and-white Warbler, and Red-eyed Vireo. My trained ear recognized all but the Magnolia. So: was it there? Is Merlin 100% accurate? Probably not, but it comes pretty close and it's a great tool.



Magnolia Warbler: were you there? Photo by Annette Daughdrill, in the Macaulay Library

Since that morning in West Virginia, I've used Merlin numerous times, especially in my yard. In mid-September, as mixed flocks of migrants were coming through on their way south, I decided to take my usual walk around our farm. As I set out, I turned on Merlin Sound ID, and, in addition to common species, a Pine Warbler came up. I thought it was probably a Chipping Sparrow, a species with a similar call, so I walked back to our garden where I often see those — and all of a sudden there were migrants everywhere I looked. There in the blueberries was a Common Yellowthroat, and on a branch in the old apple tree was a Chestnut-sided Warbler enjoying the morning sun. And, sure enough, I did eventually find the Pine Warbler as I circled the house. Believe me, I was buzzing as I hurriedly added species to my morning eBird report!

—Wendy Richards

Dues-&-Donations Season

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!



Pine Warbler. Photo by Ryan Schain, in the Macaulay Library



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

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
Website managed by Bob Biersack
Facebook page managed by Becky McKenzie