



December 2023 Newsletter
of the
Rockbridge Bird Club,
encouraging
the enjoyment, knowledge, &
conservation of birds in the Rockbridge Area

Calendar

Sat., Dec 9, 8:30 a.m. — Second Saturday Birding at Boxerwood *

Sun., Dec. 17 — Christmas Bird Count *, followed at **5:00 p.m.** by tally potluck at Boxerwood *

Sat., Jan. 6 — Field trip: Birding western Rockbridge with Bob Epperson, 1/2 to 3/4 day; more information to come

* see article below

This is the solstice, the still point of the sun, its cusp and midnight, the year's threshold and unlocking, where the past lets go of and becomes the future; the place of caught breath.

- Margaret Atwood, novelist, poet, conservationist, and birder

Second Saturday Bird Walk at Boxerwood
December 9 at 8:30 a.m.

We'll meet at the Boxerwood parking lot and spend a couple of hours in the Garden's bird-friendly habitats. This monthly event is open to everyone, beginning and experienced birders alike; we wander the trails and share the joy of finding who's here.

As always, wear appropriate footwear and bring binoculars. In the event of a heavy rain the walk will be canceled. For more information, including weather updates, contact Bonnie Bernstein at bonnie.bernstein@gmail.com.

Join the Christmas Bird Count & contribute to science

The Lexington area CBC will be held on Sunday, December 17th. This will be the 86th consecutive Lexington area count (in 1936 no count was held) and overall our 97th. Last year, we counted 5,670 individual birds and 76 species. If you'd like to participate in the counting, please let me know at RoweRA@vmi.edu. You don't have to be an insane birder (it's helpful but not necessary) to assist with the count.

Our count circle is centered on Big Spring, with a 7.5 mile radius. It extends roughly to Decatur Road north of Lexington, the dam at Lake Merriweather on the northwest, Lake Robertson on the west, the intersection of Kyger Hill and Collierstown Road on the south, and to just east of I-81 and Rt 60. All counting is done inside the circle.

As a participant, you can cover an area on your own or be a member of a team/group covering an area (for those of you who are new to CBC or are not confident of your bird ID skills, this is a good way to participate), or you can count birds at your home bird feeder. If you'd like to cover a particular area, let me know (including who will be with you and where you'll count). If you'd like to join a team, let me know and I'll put you in contact with a "team leader." If you'd like to do a feeder count, let me know and I'll send you the rules for the feeder count.

The CBC is the nation's longest-running citizen science bird project — and it continues in ongoing pandemic times, with appropriate safety precautions. Nationally, the CBC/Audubon Society has asked that 1) for groups in the field, appropriate social distancing be maintained, with masks being optional and at the discretion of the group leader, and 2) only members of a "pod" travel together in a car. Locally, we will have a post-count tally/potluck at Boxerwood, which is hosted by the Club and has become a tradition.

— Dick Rowe

CBC Tally Potluck ... and Secondhand Gift Exchange

The Club is delighted to resume our traditional tally potluck at Boxerwood this year following the Christmas Bird Count on December 17. We'll gather in Munger Lodge from 5 to 7 pm to compare sightings and enjoy each other's company — a lovely way to kick off the holiday season.



Club ornithologist Dick Rowe will once again call the day's tally. Interested birders are welcome to attend whether or not they've participated in the count.

The Bird Club will provide tableware, soup and chili, wine and beverages. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share! And if you'd like to participate in our merry secondhand gift exchange, please also bring a used (but not abused) bird-related item, wrapped in something recycled, that you'd like to pass on to another bird lover.

Those who want to minimize their exposure to a group are welcome to wear masks and join us when we begin the tally at about 6:00.

Planning to attend? If possible, please let us know so that we have an idea of how many tables to set and food to fix. Email bonnie.bernstein@gmail.com.



Hermit Thrush, a possible sighting on the CBC. Photo by Dick Rowe

Clean Feeders, Healthy Birds

Are you feeding birds this winter? New York Audubon offers this advice for cleaning your feeders regularly – at least every other week –to prevent cross-contamination or growth of deadly mold that makes birds sick:

“Start with emptying the feeder, making sure to dispose of excess seed in the trash if there are any signs of illness or mold. Scrub the feeder with warm, soapy water, making sure to focus on perches and seed access holes. Next, soak the feeder in a solution of 1 part bleach to 9 parts water for about 15 minutes before rinsing it thoroughly with water. Allow this to dry completely before refilling the feeder and putting it back up.

"Other ways to clean a feeder include boiling it in water or soaking it in a solution of 1 part white vinegar to 1 part water, especially when cleaning the feeder more frequently.

"While keeping your feeders clean, be sure to keep the areas around them clean as well! Regularly removing accumulated droppings and seed debris beneath feeders also helps to prevent the spread of illness and mold growth.”

[Click here](#) to read the full article.

Eastern Golden Eagle

Many publications have featured articles this year celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act. Among the Virginia birds currently being managed for recovery under the ESA, great progress has been achieved with the reintroduction of the Red-cockaded Woodpeckers to Piney Grove Preserve and the Big Woods Wildlife Management Area in Sussex County. And while there seems to be hope for the Piping Plover, and a tenuous future for the Red Knot, everything I read suggests a dismal

outlook for the Black Rail. As for the Bachman's Warbler: it was removed from the federally endangered species list due to extinction... Apparently its song was akin to that of the Northern Parula.

Many citizens are heartened by the regular sighting of Bald Eagles, a species whose recovery under the ESA was so successful that it has been removed from endangered/threatened status. While that's a great story, there's another eagle for whom Virginia is a seasonal home: the Golden Eagle is generally associated with western spaces, but there's a small population that migrates through Virginia and sometimes overwinters in some of our western counties. Here, persistent threats and a slow reproductive rate coupled with a small population are raising red flags among conservationists. On November 15, the American Bird Conservancy filed a petition with the USFWS requesting a Threatened or Endangered listing for the Eastern Golden Eagle under the ESA.

On the state level, the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR) Wildlife Action Plan lists the Golden Eagle as a Tier 1 species of "Critical Conservation Need," where at least some management strategies can be implemented with existing resources.

From what I've read, achieving federal protection for a proposed species can take years. Should the Eastern Golden Eagles be listed, then federal resources may become available to help with support for the existing population. Once protection is achieved, it can take many years of management for a successful outcome. According to Becky Gwynn, Deputy Director of DWR, "It took us multiple decades to reverse the [downward trend of the] Bald Eagle population to the point where it could be down-listed from endangered to threatened and then, finally, to the point where it could be de-listed."

Want to see an Eastern Golden Eagle?

When late-fall winds are blowing out of the Northwest, head over to Hanging Rock Raptor Observatory in West Virginia or to Highland County (each a couple of hours away) and you'll have a chance of seeing one. The Bird Club sponsors spontaneous weather-dependent eagle field trips — cold and blustery is best! And let's keep our eyes peeled in Rockbridge: occasionally a Golden is spotted right here.

— *Laura Neale, Conservation Chair*



Adult Golden Eagle. Photo by Bryan Calk, from the Macauley Library



Gadwall, another possible CBC sighting. Photo by Dick Rowe

Second Saturday Boxerwood Bird Walk Report, November 11

Twelve of us wandered the trails at Boxerwood in the cold fog while most of the birds hunkered down. Looking up we did make out a flock of at least 26 Cedar Waxwings flying from treetop to treetop. In contrast to my hard-to-ignore frozen fingers, Bonnie Bernstein's words offer a different perspective: "I loved yesterday's walk — the cold mist and the sense-surround of birds warbling and calling. So nice to hear White-throated Sparrows again!"

Another notable and note-producing species was a Hermit Thrush, spotted sitting on top of a distant tree emitting an unfamiliar one-note call. Bob Biersack scoped out its spotted chest. Sightings of a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and a group of five Dark-eyed Juncos added to the list of species returning for the colder months. We were able to identify 19 species in all.

—Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair

Leadership Changes in Your Bird Club

The Executive Committee has undergone some major changes in leadership roles this past Fall. A big hole opened up when founding member Alexia Smith announced that she needed to step down from serving on the committee. Alexia has served the club in many ways, some you may not even be aware of. She has at various times taken on the roles of President, Secretary, and Membership Chair, and, most importantly, she has steadfastly been our Newsletter Editor. Alexia's commitment to clear, accurate, meaningful, and insightful communication has been at the heart of our success as a bird club. Her consideration of each and every one of you has kept the

club mindful of the most effective communications. As Membership Chair she has insured that new and continuing members are thanked in her innovative, warm style. Alexia has coordinated some of our most meaningful programs, such as the only zoom presentation we offered: she arranged for author Jonathan Meiburg to speak about his obsession with Striated Caracaras, which he chronicled in his book *A Most Remarkable Creature: the hidden life and epic journey of the world's smartest birds of prey*. Those who listened, like me, were hooked and bought the book. Her role has been fundamental to our club's success. With warmest gratitude, we recognize Alexia for her foundational role in reviving the Rockbridge Bird Club, and for serving as its prize-worthy newsletter editor. Thank you, Alexia.

Also, Joyce Cambron has resigned as Secretary. She had volunteered to take on that role in a surprise and welcome announcement, and competently and conscientiously provided a helpful record of ExCom business. Creating accurate and succinct minutes in the midst of a lively discussion at meetings is a true art, and Joyce performed this service in a stellar way. Thank you, Joyce!

As a response to these gaps in our leadership roles, new general board members Kip Brooks and John Maluski stepped up to serve. Kip will be our new Secretary and John will be our Membership Chair, bringing enthusiasm and new ideas. We wholeheartedly thank Kip and John, and invite you to welcome and thank them.

— *From the Executive Committee*

Note: don't forget to pay your dues (it's easy: see below) — then go to page 7 to see a bird looking back at you!



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 (vacant)
Vice President (vacant)
Kip Brooks, Secretary
Jan Smith, Treasurer
Program Chair (vacant)

Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair
Laura Neale, Conservation Chair
Bonnie Bernstein, Publicity Chair
John Maluski, Membership Chair
Dick Rowe, Club Ornithologist

Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith. Logo by Jennifer Cox
Website managed by Bob Biersack
Facebook page manager needed



Red-shouldered Hawk. Photo by Dick Rowe