



ROCKBRIDGE BIRD CLUB

Encouraging the enjoyment, knowledge and conservation of birds in the Rockbridge Area

Sept-Oct 2025 Newsletter

CLUB CALENDAR – *it's packed!*

- Sept 13, 8:00 am – 2nd Saturday Birding at Boxerwood
- Sept 19, 5:00 pm – Happy Hour meetup at Heliotrope
- Sept 26, 8:00 am – 4th Friday Birding at McCormick Farm
- Oct 11, 8:00 am – 2nd Saturday Birding at Boxerwood
- Oct 13 to 27 – Annual Seed & Suet Sale order period
- Oct 14, 7:00 pm – Presentation: “Birding in Arizona” by Dick Rowe
- Oct 18, 11:00 am – Bird Sit with OAR at Boxerwood
- Oct 31, 8:00 am – 4th Friday Birding on Buena Vista River Walk

Is not this a true autumn day? Just the still melancholy that I love – that makes life and nature harmonize. The birds are consulting about their migrations, the trees are putting on the hectic or the pallid hues of decay, and begin to strew the ground, that one's very footsteps may not disturb the repose of earth and air, while they give us a scent that is a perfect anodyne to the restless spirit....If I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking the successive autumns.

— GEORGE ELLIOT, *George Eliot's Life, as Related in her Letters and Journals*

Birding at Boxerwood on Second Saturdays



A Cape May Warbler photographed by Baron Schwartz at Boxerwood last Fall.

Birding at Boxerwood, scheduled for the second Saturday of each month, resumes September 13. These member-led walks are a great introduction for beginning birders, and an opportunity for “regulars” to track local phenology.

As we stroll Boxerwood's fields and woodlands this Fall, we'll be on the lookout for species migrating south and those returning to winter in Rockbridge, including the White-throated Sparrow, Hermit Thrush, and Winter Wren.

Walks begin in the nature center parking lot at 8am and run approximately two hours. Bring binoculars if you have them and wear sturdy footwear.

For more information or notice of rain cancellations, visit Rockbridge Bird Club on Facebook or contact Bonnie (540-460-9147).

Happy Hour at Heliotrope – make new birder friends!

Let's drink to the snow birds heading south, the ones migrating back, and the residents that stick around all year – including most of us!

We'll meet up at Heliotrope on Friday, September 19 at 5pm, grab a table, and fraternize for an hour or two. No program, walk or agenda – just an informal get-together to meet new friends and catch up with old ones.

Of course, birder bragging is allowed, so bring your personal eBird stats if you must – and photos!



Fourth Friday Walk at McCormick Farm on Sept 26

Wendy Richardson, Field Trip organizer



Located on the northern edge of Rockbridge County, McCormick Farm was donated to Virginia Polytechnic Institute in 1954 and designated a National Historic Landmark a decade later. The farm, ponds and trails are run by the Agricultural Experimental Station of Virginia Tech and open to the public.

As we begin a new Rockbridge Bird Club year (Sept-June), in addition to Second Saturday walks at Boxerwood, we plan to hold Fourth Friday walks at other nearby locations, beginning this month.

Our first Fourth Friday location is McCormick Farm, historic family farm of inventor Cyrus Hall McCormick, whose 19th-century patented improvements on the mechanical reaper led to the modern combine harvester.

There are two ponds located at the Farm, one near the museum and parking area and the other at the

end of an easy half-mile walking trail known as the Marl Creek Trail. Walking the trails, we will have an opportunity to identify resident and migrating species. Fall migration will be in full swing by the end of September, so we may be lucky to find a species that has dropped down to take a break at the varied habitats that this spot offers. On the ponds we may see herons and other water birds.

You may join club members either at our normal meeting location in the Lexington Food Lion parking lot at 7:15 am to carpool or at 8:00 am in the McCormick Farm parking lot. Plan for a 2-3 hours walk with a return to Lexington by noon. There is a Porta-John in the lower parking lot. The walk will be canceled if it is raining heavily. For more information or weather updates, contact Wendy (540-319-0318 or richardsw@wlu.edu).

130 Species in 6 Days: A Photo Tour of Arizona with Dick Rowe on Oct 14



Join us for a presentation by Club Ornithologist and bird photographer Dick Rowe on his trip to southeast Arizona in May. The program is scheduled for Tuesday, October 14 at 7pm in the Community Room at Kendal.

Dick focused his camera on birds in lakes, grasslands, mesquite scrub, desert shrublands, oak canyons, and the San Pedro River riparian zone. His travelog includes species from each habitat, including flycatchers, sparrows, warblers, swallows, vireos, shorebirds, quail, woodpeckers, hawks, hummingbirds, and finches.



A Roadrunner near the San Pedro River.

Bird Sit at Boxerwood on Oct 18 with OAR

On October 18, club members will hold a Bird Sit, a birding format promoted by Audubon that is accessible to all, including birders with mobility challenges. The program will run from 11am to 1pm, with a bag lunch in the middle.

The idea evolved after we received a request from Terri Bsullak, who often participates in our monthly Boxerwood walks, for a wheelchair-friendly birding program for members of her organization, Outdoor Adaptive Recreation (OAR).

Terri herself navigates the field and woodland paths in a powered wheelchair, but some members of her group use manual chairs or canes that won't fare well on Boxerwood's natural terrain. Even Terri requires an occasional assist when the trails are muddy or rutty.



Members of OAR on the Chessie Nature Trail.

Here's how our Bird Sit will work: Rather than walking about in search of birds, participants will sit together in the field, binoculars poised, willing late migrants and winter residents to come to us while we listen, watch and wait. RBC members will offer tips on how to identify birds by ear as well as by eye, and describe the birds we are likely to see as they fly over the meadow or alight on nearby trees and shrubs.

RBC members are encouraged to participate. Bring binoculars and a bag lunch – and something to sit on! The activity will be canceled for rain. For more information, please text or call Bonnie at 540-460-2697.

Buena Vista River Walk on Oct 31

Laura Neale, Field Trip organizer



Join our second Fourth Friday outing with an early saunter along the Buena Vista River Walk.

We'll meet at 8:00 am at the Glen Maury Park entrance (bathrooms available). From there we'll follow the River Walk, which runs atop the flood wall, birding downstream along the river, edging trees, and meadow. We'll return around 10 am, following the path along canal-like ditching, perhaps reaching the higher flood wall for good views of the river.

This will be a "we'll see what we can see" outing. It may be a bit early for ducks, but we will see birds. Steady rain will cancel. Please text or call Laura at 540-460-9237 with questions.

Hawk Watches peaking at Rockfish Gap, Harvey's Knob

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.

Both watches get underway in August and continue through November. Peak numbers occur in mid- to late September, due to the very large numbers of Broad-winged Hawks.

This marks the 50th season of continuous counting at Rockfish Gap, conducted on the grounds of the Inn at Afton, just off exit 99 on Interstate 64, east of Waynesboro. The watch is supported by three nearby bird clubs: Augusta, Piedmont and Rockingham. The site is easily accessible and offers a 180° panoramic view north over Rockfish Gap, west over the Shenandoah Valley, and east over the Piedmont Region.

Harvey's Knob Hawkwatch is located at milepost 95.4 on the Parkway. From Peaks of Otter, drive south on the parkway for about 10 miles. Although it is a much smaller operation, it too offers spectacular views. The site also provides interpretive signage on hawk-watching and identification tips for novice hawk-watchers.

For a spell of hawk watching, take along binoculars and/or a spotting scope, a chair, sunscreen, drinks and snacks, and a hat – and on staying a while, in good company. You can also keep up with daily raptor data for both sites on [HawkCount](#).



The Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch has an extensive [website](#) that includes visitor information and photos.

FIELD NOTE

Eurasian Collar Doves: Everywhere But Here

by John Pancake



Photograph of a Eurasian Collared-dove taken by Dick Rowe in Little Rock, AZ – not Rockbridge.

Rockbridge County has lots of great birds, but this one you haven't seen here. Nobody has.

The bird is the Eurasian Collared-dove. It should be here. It has been spotted up and down the Shenandoah Valley—Rockingham, Augusta, Botetourt, Roanoke and Pulaski counties. Collared-doves are seen regularly all over the state. So be on the lookout. Someday they will show up in Rockbridge. Maybe you'll be the first to see one! If so, get a picture.

One way to find them is to listen for the call. It has the same high lonesome quality as the

Mourning Dove's, but with a distinctive three-note phrase, sometimes rendered as *hoo-HOOOO-hoo*, or as my friend Bob Ake has it: *Chi-CAAA-go*.

The birds are comfortable around people, often nesting in suburbs or small towns. I see them most often on power lines. At first glance, they look a little like a Mourning Dove, but bigger, and more robust. They're also much lighter and sport a squared-off tail – unlike the Mourning Dove's pointed one. They are also distinguished from the "modo" by a black slash on the back of the neck—the collar.

The birds build messy nests in trees. Both the male and the female incubate the eggs. The females take the night shift. The male relieves them at about 8 in the morning and covers the eggs during the day.

Collared-doves have spread across the globe like fire ants. They originally called China and India home but expanded across all of Europe in the last century. In the 1970s, about 50 birds escaped during a pet shop burglary in the Bahamas. Soon, they hopped over to Florida. Since then, they've colonized as far as Alaska. They started showing up in earnest in Virginia about 2001.

The bird's scientific name is *Streptopelia decaocto*. The generic name means "collared dove," as you might expect. The species name is Greek for "eighteen." Why 18? Glad you asked. In Greek mythology, a young maid worked hard all year and was paid a measly 18 coins. She begged the gods to let the world know how stingy her mistress was. Zeus changed her into a dove so she could bemoan her plight all day, crying: "de-CAOC-to! de-CAOC-to!"

Click here to listen to the [Collared-dove's song](#).

Click here to listen to the similar [Mourning Dove song](#).

Seed & Suet Fundraiser ordering from Oct 13-27

Rockbridge Bird Club is revving up to launch our annual Seed & Suet sale to benefit Boxerwood, our go-to hotspot for local birding.

The fundraiser begins October 13, in time to welcome winter birds back to your yard and provide them with a reliable source of food for another long winter.

Again this year, our offerings will come from Lizzie Mae's Birdseed, a family-owned supplier in Ohio that purchases seed from small Midwest farms. Rockbridge Farmers Co-op, our facilitating partner (thanks, Susan Kirby!), will receive and store our seed, and host a drive-through pick-up in their parking lot on November 6.



Photo by Julia Robinson

RBC members and previous seed sale customers will receive a link to product information and an order form via email on October 13. You'll have a choice: you can order online and bring payment when you pick up your order, or you can print the order form and send it with a check to Boxerwood. **Order forms must be received online or by mail no later than October 27.**

Why do we love this fundraiser? It's a *win-win-win* for the birds, bird lovers, and Boxerwood!



For more information about the Rockbridge Bird Club, visit www.rockbridgebirdclub.org and find us on [Facebook](#). Contact the Club by email at rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com, or call John Maluski (304-488-0037).

RBC COORDINATING COMMITTEE

John Maluski, Chair and Membership

Kip Brooks, Secretary
Jan Smith, Treasurer
Dick Rowe, Club Ornithologist
Wendy Richards, Field Trips

Laura Neale, Conservation
Bonnie Bernstein, Publicity
Lisa Gay-Milliken, Social Media
Bob Biersack, Webpage