



April 2015 Newsletter

of the Rockbridge Bird Club, encouraging the
enjoyment, knowledge, and conservation of
birds in the Rockbridge Area.

Calendar

Unless otherwise noted, program meetings are held at 7 pm in the Old Courthouse meeting room, in downtown Lexington, and informal gatherings are held in the Munger Lodge at Boxerwood, on Ross Road.

Wednesday, April 8th, 7 pm – Program: Bluebird Ecology by Pete Hamel*

Saturday, April 18th, 7:30 am - Field trip: Greenfield *

Saturday, April 25th, 7:00 am - Field trip: Brushy Hills *

Saturday, May 2nd, 7:30 am - Bird walk at Boxerwood Gardens

Friday-Sunday, May 8th-10th - Virginia Society for Ornithology Annual Meeting, at Wintergreen Resort*

Saturday May 9th, 7:30 am - Field trip: Apple Orchard Mountain

Wednesday, May 13th, 5:00-7:00 pm – Second Annual Spring Picnic at Boxerwood

Saturday, May 16th - Field trip to Summers property, Cold Mountain

* *See article below*

Field Trips and Programs

*** A Talk on Bluebird Ecology, Wednesday, April 8th at 7 p.m.**

At the Club meeting in the Old Courthouse Meeting Room in Lexington, Blue Ridge Parkway Ranger and local resident Peter Hamel will talk about the Eastern Bluebird—its range and habitat, behavior, and life cycle—and the protocols for monitoring bluebirds and other cavity nesters during the breeding season.

Hamel, a local resident and Rockbridge Master Naturalist, traces his keen interest in birds back to outings with his father, well-known wildlife biologist and ornithologist Paul Hamel. In his turn, “Ranger Pete” helped launch the “Birds for Thirds” program at Waddell School, bringing

third graders out to monitor nest boxes located on the Woods Creek Trail—one of many activities in the countywide Bluebird Conservation Project, in which Hamel has been a key participant.



Bluebird: Photo by Dick Rowe

*** *Saturday, April 18th: Field Trip to Greenfield Pond***

John Pancake and Barry Kinzie will lead a two-mile walk around the pond, where there is a good chance of spotting early migrating warblers as well as wetlands birds. Meet in the Lexington Food Lion parking lot at 7:30 a.m. to car pool to Greenfield, near Daleville in Botetourt County.

*** *Saturday, April 25th: 16th Annual Brushy Hills Bird Walk***

Meet at Town Spring/Brushy Hills Trailhead at 7:00 a.m. for a walk of about two hours, sponsored by the Bird Club and the Friends of Brushy Hill. Leaders will be Paul Cabe, Washington and Lee ornithologist and biology professor, and his eleven-year-old son Lock, a keen-eyed bird watcher. To reach the trailhead from Lexington, drive to the end of Ross Road (2.3 miles from the city limits) and turn right on Union Run Road. Continue 0.6 miles to the Brushy Hills Trails sign and Town Spring, a low stone building on the right. Parking is on the left.

*** *Virginia Society of Ornithology Annual Meeting, May 8 – 10th***

It's not too late to sign up for the annual VSO gathering, held this year at nearby Wintergreen: April 8 is the deadline for lodging on site, and registration is due April 30. Events include field trips, exhibits, scientific paper sessions, and a keynote address by Scott Weidensaul about Project SNOWstorm, the effort to track and learn more about

snowy owls. And you'll meet birders from across the state. More information: <http://www.virginiabirds.net/VSO-Annual-Meeting.html>

Conservation Note: Helping Out the American Kestrel in Virginia

What do American Kestrels need for bringing up a healthy family? A pesticide-free open area (pasture, for instance) where they can find safe food to eat and a few perches for hunting, plus an appropriate nesting cavity—all increasingly hard to find. But if you've got the habitat, the Virginia Society of Ornithology's American Kestrel Nest Box Project can supply a handsome and well-made nest box designed especially for Kestrels.

When Patti Reum described this project at our Club gathering on March 11, several of those present immediately signed up for nest box consideration. Folks who receive boxes ordinarily contribute \$50 toward the project and are encouraged to monitor the site; in addition, donations of any size are needed and welcome. Patti & the all-volunteer "Kestrel Strike Force"

will be evaluating candidate sites in our area in the next couple of months. If you're interested in offering a possible site or otherwise contributing, contact Patti at pareum@gmail.com.

According to www.allaboutbirds.org, declines in kestrel populations stem from "continued clearing of land and felling of the standing dead trees these birds depend on for their nest sites. The American Kestrel is also losing prey sources and nesting cavities to so-called 'clean' farming practices, which remove hedgerows, trees, and brush. An additional threat is exposure to pesticides and other pollutants, which can reduce clutch sizes and hatching success. For kestrels in North America, a larger problem with pesticides is that they destroy the insects, spiders, and other prey on which the birds depend."

Nest box programs, according to Patti, have proven to be effective in bolstering populations. The Strike Force's goal, she said, is to put up boxes in suitable habitat throughout Virginia. For more on the project, go to <http://ebird.org/content/va/news/virginia-society-of-ornithology-american-kestrel-nest-box-project/>. Support the Kestrel Strike Force!

—Alexia Smith



Male American Kestrel. Photo by [Darin Ziegler](#), April 2008, from allaboutbirds.org

The President's Perch: April Fools?

I have learned a little of the rhythms of the seasons here in the last couple of years, but the details of what to look for (listen for, really), and when, are still sketchy for me. So was I fooled on Wednesday – April 1 – when I walked with the dog along the stream and heard a couple of songs that were new, at least, new since last fall? One was clearly a warbler, but the

patterns and pitches of the different types aren't cataloged in my brain at all yet, so no reliable ID from me . . .

I had just about decided that I was imagining this new discovery when another and more familiar song came from somewhere along the stream bank. This was a Louisiana Waterthrush, and we'd had at least two living on the stream last year, so I was pretty sure I knew what I was hearing. But was that really it? I look at the various listserves around the valley, and people are pretty good about FOY reporting (First Of the Year, I gather), but I hadn't seen any reports of these – was I just mistaken about this, too? Had nature found its own April Fool? Today's walk persuades me that I was right, and I'm glad to welcome them back!

So there will be lots of opportunities to welcome returning migrants throughout the month. Check the descriptions above about our outings to Greenfield on April 18 and Brushy Hills on April 25. And remember that there is Birding at Boxerwood on the first Saturday of each month; the next will be on May 2, starting at 7:30.

May is warbler migration season, and there will be lots of opportunities to see and hear warblers with some of our best guides and teachers. On May 9 we'll visit Apple Orchard Mountain with Dick Rowe, and we're very happy that Bruce and Nancy Summers have agreed to host the Club again this year at their property on Cold Mountain on May 16. Stay tuned for further details.

—Bob Biersack, Club President



For more information about the Club visit our website at www.rockbridgebirdclub.org

Contact the Club by email at rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com or call Bob Biersack, 540-463-1942, or Laura Neale, 540-261-1909.

Join the Club by making out a check for \$15 per household to Rockbridge Bird Club and sending it, along with your address, email address, and phone number, to Betty Besal, 120 Chavis Avenue, Lexington, VA 24450. Thank you.

Club Officers

President, Bob Biersack

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