



ROCKBRIDGE BIRD CLUB

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

April 2025 Newsletter

CLUB CALENDAR

April 8, 6:45 pm – Program, Vic Laubach on Using Birding Apps

April 12, 8:00 and 9:00 am – Birding at Boxerwood (plus family walk)

April 13, 8:00-10:00 am – Birding at Green Pastures with Master Naturalists

April 26, 7:00 am – BV to Vesuvius field trip on the BRP with Dick Rowe

On soft spring midnights, the air is alive with the flight notes of unseen warblers and vireos, thrushes and orioles, sparrows and tanagers, filtering down through the moonlight like the voices of stars.

— SCOTT WEIDENSAUL, *Living on the Wind: Across the Hemisphere with Migratory Birds* (North Point Press, 1999).

Live demo of birding apps with Vic Laubach on April 8

Looking to quickly identify birds in the field, track your own birding activity, and share observations with other birders and researchers? Join Victor Laubach for a live demo on how to use popular software applications on a smart phone to “enhance your birding experience.”

The interactive program is scheduled for next Tuesday in the Piovano Room at Rockbridge Regional Library starting at 6:45 pm with a social gathering followed by the presentation at 7:00.

Vic will share his experience using eBird and Merlin, free apps created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. He'll show how he uses eBird to record and manage his own bird sightings, and then demonstrate how the Merlin app uses eBird data to help identify birds, especially by their songs and calls. The presentation will be more of an introductory "workshop" on the basics of both of these popular birding apps.

Vic is Vice President of the Augusta Bird Club and Coordinator of the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch in Afton. An avid birder, he has been using the eBird and Merlin apps since they were introduced by the Cornell Lab in 2002 and 2014, respectively. He currently has 5,807 eBird checklists and 711 species sightings worldwide, including 4,275 checklists and 267 species sightings in Augusta County alone.



Birding for families at Boxerwood on April 12



Eastern Towhee photographed by Baron Schwartz while "Birding at Boxerwood" in March.

Boxerwood walks are regularly scheduled on the second Saturday of each month and led by Bird Club members. This particular Saturday program is a double-header. We'll hold our monthly walk beginning at 8 am. Then an hour into that walk, a few members will break away to meet Jess Sullivan, the Early Education Coordinator at Boxerwood, and lead a special walk geared for families with children.

What can we expect to see and hear? Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Eastern Towhees, and many of the other migrants and year-round residents that breed in Rockbridge. In early April, birds are in full breeding plumage and full song as they strive to attract mates.

Both walks will begin and end in the nature center parking lot and run approximately two hours. Bring binoculars and wear sturdy footwear. Boxerwood will have binoculars available for the family walk.

For more information, including possible rain cancellation, visit the Rockbridge Bird Club on Facebook or contact Bonnie Bernstein (540-460-9147 or bonnie.bernstein@gmail.com).

Look for spring migrants along the Blue Ridge Parkway with Dick Rowe on April 26

by Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair

On Saturday, April 26, Club Ornithologist Dick Rowe will lead us on a driving trip along the Blue Ridge Parkway from the Buena Vista entrance off Route 60 to the Vesuvius exit at Route 56. Dick scouts this route often and knows the places where warblers, vireos, grosbeaks and other migrants hang out.

Car-pooling is encouraged to limit the number of vehicles that will be stopping along the route to look and listen. To join the car-pool, meet at 7:00 am at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot. Alternatively, meet the group on the parkway at the pull-off just south of the BV entrance at 7:30 am.

The trip will be canceled in the event of heavy rain. For more information or weather updates, contact Wendy Richards at richardsw@wlu.edu or 540-319-0319. Hope to bird with you then and there!



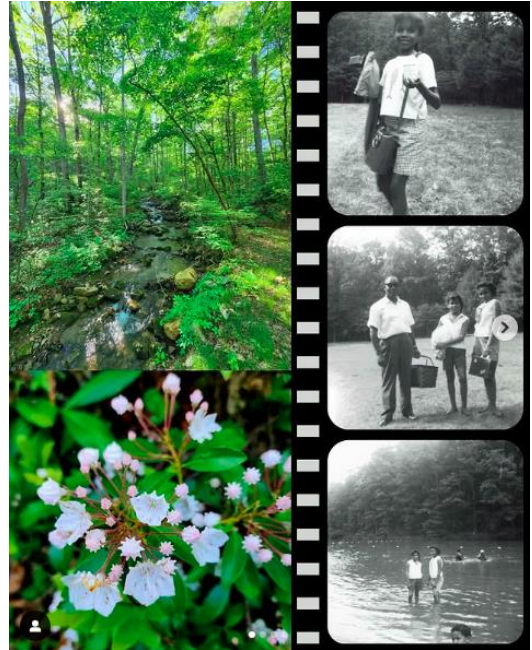
Pine Warbler photographed by Dick Rowe.

Birding at Green Pastures with VMNs on April 13

Volunteers with the Alleghany Highlands chapter of Virginia Master Naturalists are holding a “bioblitz” – a one-day species survey – at Green Pastures Recreation Area on Sunday, April 13.

The day starts off with birding led by Bob Biersack. Everyone is welcome. Birders will meet at the entrance gate at 8:00 am. and spend a few hours recording their sightings.

Green Pastures, located within the George Washington National Forest at Clifton Forge, was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression. It was the first and only USDA Forest Service recreation site open to families of color in Virginia during the Jim Crow era. The area featured a lake with sand beach, a bath house, picnic shelter, toilets, playing fields, hiking trails, walking paths, and parking areas. Green Pastures was restored and reopened in 2021, and is now managed by Douthat State Park.



For more information, contact Bob (703-772-9373). Directions are on the [Virginia DCR site](#).

MRMS librarian gets kids birding – with help from RBC



Maury River Middle School librarian Lisa Gay-Milliken out birding with students in the Earth Keepers afterschool program co-sponsored by Boxerwood Nature Center.

Lisa Gay-Milliken, librarian for Maury River Middle School (and a new member of the RBC executive committee), was recently awarded a grant for a project she is calling the MRMS LOT (Library Of Things).

LOT includes kits that students can check out to encourage their various hobbies and to impart the values of sharing and sustainability. One of these “things” is a birding backpack modeled on those that our Bird Club has provided for circulation at each branch of the Rockbridge Regional Library.

Lisa is inviting guests speakers to share their knowledge about each LOT topic and help introduce students to each kit. Club members Bonnie Bernstein and John Maluski were the first guests to visit with a group of middle schoolers. They demonstrated “birding basics” and talked about their experiences birding in and around Rockbridge.

Louisiana Waterthrush, Harbinger of Spring

by John Pancake



Louisiana Waterthrush photographed by Dick Rowe.

The song is unmistakable but complex: some downward slurred whistles and then a jumble of notes. [Listen here.](#)

It's not quite twilight on March 18. Somewhere downstream in a thicket beside the swirling Maury, a Louisiana Waterthrush has returned. After such a hard winter, it's good to hear this confirmation of springtime. I have been listening for it because Bob Biersack heard one a couple days earlier.

The Louisiana Waterthrush is, of course, not a thrush but a wood

warbler, though one of the drabest. It breeds not just in Louisiana, but throughout the eastern United States. It does like water, though—generally clean, rushing mountain streams. In our area, it is common up to at least 2,000 feet. It's easy to hear but surprisingly hard to see. A shy bird.

If you see it, how would you know? The bird has a very peculiar walk, as described by ornithologist Pete Dunne: "The whole back of the bird swings rhythmically as it walks—an idiosyncratic behavior shared only by the Northern Waterthrush. Forages rapidly on the ground.... Generally walks, sometimes sidesteps, along branches. Almost never stationary. Even when not foraging, the bird bobs with the single-mindedness of a metronome... swings its posterior in an exaggerated circle, a movement that replicates the swinging posterior of a camel."

I haven't seen many camels, but I'll take Mr. Dunne's word on that.

The Louisiana Waterthrush feeds mainly on aquatic and terrestrial insects. Cornell University's website says it eats larvae or nymphs of caddisflies, mayflies, midges, soldierflies, craneflies, lacewings, stoneflies, butterflies, moths, aphids, dragonflies, damselflies, beetles (of many types), along with millipedes, woodlice, cicadas, scorpions, spiders, crayfish, earthworms, minnows, frogs, and salamanders. Its appetite for aquatic insects means its presence is a healthy indicator for streams.

Its closest kin are the Ovenbird and the very similar Northern Waterthrush (which passes through but doesn't breed here).

Louisiana Waterthrushes are among the first migrants to return. The birds now arriving have completed a tough journey—from the West Indies or Central America. Despite having to survive storms and a long migration, a waterthrush might come back year after year. One study found a third of waterthrushes return to the same area to breed with the same mate for consecutive years. The oldest known Louisiana Waterthrush was 11 years and 11 months when last seen (in New Jersey).

The sharp-eyed Rev. J.J. Murray (Birds of Rockbridge County, 1957), who didn't miss much, never saw a Louisiana Waterthrush before April 2. That makes Bob Biersack's record from mid-March pretty clear evidence of how our climate is changing.

Avian Flu Update

by Laura Neale, Conservation Chair

Avian flu has been prominent in the news in the past few months primarily because it is the driving cause for an uptick in egg prices. Historically, outbreaks of the virus also trigger fear of birds in general, including poultry, caged pets, zoo birds, waterfowl, and feeder birds.

According to the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR), a “highly pathogenic H5N1 virus has been circulating in wild birds in North America since late 2021, causing sporadic mortality events in wild birds and infections in domestic poultry and dairy cattle.” The most alarming recent outbreaks have occurred in geese, scavengers, and seabirds, and may have spread as these birds migrated in the fall.

Audubon reports that infections in songbirds remain uncommon,” and recommends regular feeder cleaning as a protective measure. DWR has posted [guidelines for feeder cleaning](#) on its webpage and also requests that you contact their Wildlife Hotline (855-571-9003) if you note any of the following:

- Five or more dead vultures, waterfowl, shorebirds, or seabirds in the same area within five days.
- Sick or dead eagles, hawks, owls, or turkeys, excluding carcasses found on the road.
- Ten or more dead wild birds of any other species in the same area within five days.

When handling dead birds, wear rubber gloves and a mask, and either bury the carcass or double-bag the bird and put it in garbage. Wash your hands and disinfect your shoes.

Should Virginia DWR issue alerts about the spread of avian influenza, the bird club will share the news with our email list.



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 Laura Neale, 540-261-1909.

RBC Officers

President/Vice President (currently, responsibilities rotate among committee chairs)

Kip Brooks, Secretary
Jan Smith, Treasurer
Program Chair (rotating)
Wendy Richards, Field Trip Chair

Laura Neale, Conservation Chair
Bonnie Bernstein, Publicity Chair
John Maluski, Membership Chair
Dick Rowe, Club Ornithologist

Newsletter Editor: Bonnie Bernstein

Logo Design: Jennifer Cox

RBC Website Manager: Bob Biersack

WANTED: A Facebook Page Manager!