



June 2014 Newsletter

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

Calendar

Program meetings are held at 7 pm in the Old Courthouse meeting room, in downtown Lexington. Informal gatherings are held at 5 pm in Munger Lodge at Boxerwood, on Ross Road. Field trips are half day unless otherwise noted.

Saturday June 7th at 7:30am – birding hike on the Appalachian Trail *

Wednesday September 10th at 7 pm - Program: Dick Rowe, Chincoteague

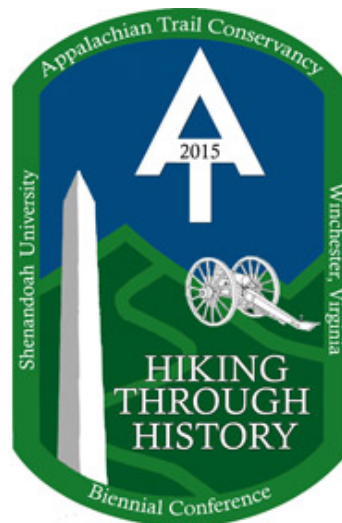
Friday - Sunday, September 12th-14th - Virginia Society of Ornithology fall field trip: Chincoteague

Wednesday October 8th at 7 pm - Teta Kain, “Feeding Wild Birds”

**See article below*

* **A birding hike on the Appalachian Trail**

Saturday, June 7, we'll hike the Appalachian Trail from Salt Log Gap to the North Fork of the Piney River and return. The route passes along the Wolf Rocks ridgeline, where views are magnificent and birds often abundant. The length out and back totals about 7 miles, but the distance covered can be adjusted to accommodate our bird encounters; return will be mid-afternoon. This event is co-sponsored by our Club and the Natural Bridge Appalachian Trail Club and requires preregistration: for more information and to register, please call Alexia Smith at 463-4010 or Bruce Summers (NBATC hike leader) at 464-1790.





Memories of Field Trips

Above: A view of warblers on Apple Orchard Mountain, as seen without binoculars. Lad Sessions took this photo on the Club's May 3 field trip to Apple Orchard.

Left: Birders' gear on the Summers's porch, after a walk in their mountain woods on a rainy morning (binocs and cameras are indoors, out of the weather, along with the birders). Photo by Lad Sessions, May 10.

June Bird Note: the Brown Thrasher (Toxostoma rufum)

You may glimpse the Brown Thrasher just as it flies low to hide in a shrub, a long-tailed flash of toasty brown; mostly it forages out of sight, on the ground below dense cover. But the male does sing from exposed perches, loud and clear, and then you'll see him in typical singing pose, tail pointing down and beak skyward. What you'll hear is a beautiful complex string of musical phrases, some copied from other birds' songs, each phrase typically sung twice before the music moves on. The Brown Thrasher has one of the largest repertoires of any North American songbird: an individual male uses well over 1,000 different phrases, possibly even improvising or learning new song types!



Photo by Dick Rowe

Our thrasher (there are several other, western species) winters in the far south of its eastern U.S. range and arrives here in late March or early April to breed and spend the summer. Many migrants pass on through, a small percentage breeding as far north as southern Canada.

Brown Thrashers eat mostly insects and other arthropods, along with some fruits, seeds, and nuts. They typically feed on the ground, sweeping their long, slightly curved bills through the leaf litter and soil with quick, sideways motions. But they sometimes also forage in clusters of dead leaves on trees, eat berries right off the bush, glean seeds from plant stems, and even catch insects in the air.

Though Brown Thrashers are still fairly common, they are, like so many songbirds, declining in numbers. According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, between 1966 and 2010 populations declined throughout their range by approximately 40% percent. Farm pesticides appear to have a large impact on Thrashers and other

ground-feeding insectivores. Habitat loss is another problem, as farm hedgerows have been cleared and forests allowed to grow back. Moreover, Thrashers often die in collisions with television towers, during migration, or with cars, since roadsides often provide their preferred shrubby habitat.

To end with a couple of whimsies: The thrasher's genus name, *Toxostoma*, comes from the Greek: *toxo*, meaning bow or arrow, and *stoma*, meaning mouth. Long sharp beak? And the Birds of North America website has a single poetical report of a thrasher, like some sprite in a fairy tale, "drinking dew from vegetation."

—Alexia Smith

Information for this Bird Note comes from the following websites: Dick Rowe's Birds of Rockbridge,

<http://www.vmi.edu/fswebs.aspx?tid=41325&id=4294972715&libID=4294972712>; [Birds of North America](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/bna), <http://bna.birds.cornell.edu/bna>; and www.allaboutbirds.org.

**This will be our last newsletter until August/September.
Enjoy the summer!**



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

Contact the Club by email at rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com or call Wendy Richards, 540-463-5214, or Laura Neale, 540-261-1909.

Join the Club by making out a check for \$15 or more to Rockbridge Bird Club and sending it, along with your address, email address, and phone number, to Betty Besal, 104 Shake Rag Road, Lexington, VA 24450. Thank you.

Club Officers

President, Wendy Richards

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Treasurer, Betty Besal

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Club Ornithologist, Dick Rowe

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