



May 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.

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

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*

May 30th - Virginia Society for Ornithology (VSO) Piney Grove Field Trip*

June 6th-12th – VSO Spring Field Trip to Blacksburg*

* *See article below*

* **Field Trips and Other Events**

Potluck Picnic at Boxerwood May 13

The Club will host its spring potluck dinner at Boxerwood on Wednesday, May 13, from 5:00 to 7:30. We hope you'll join us—children and guests welcome, too—to share your birding (and other) stories and enjoy the spring beauty of the garden. The potluck will be held at the timber-frame pavilion located near the driveway to the Lodge.

The Club will be providing cutlery, plates, and beverages. Please let Betty Besal know if you plan to join us or have any questions about the picnic—bbesal5@gmail.com or 460.6738. Hope to see you there!

Saturday, May 2: Boxerwood Bird Walk

Meet Kerry Kilday at 7:30 a.m. in the parking lot for the regular first-Saturday Boxerwood bird walk, lasting about two hours. If you have questions, or in case of doubtful weather, please call Kerry at (561) 389-9612. Directions are at www.boxerwood.org.



Veery: Photo by Dick Rowe

Saturday, May 9: Apple Orchard Mountain in the Jefferson National Forest

Meet in the Lexington Food Lion parking lot behind McDonalds at 6:30 a.m. to carpool; alternatively, meet the group at 7:30 a.m. at the Sunset Fields pull off on the Blue Ridge Parkway (mile marker 78.4). From there, Dick Rowe will lead a walk of about two miles up the Apple Orchard Mountain access road, in search of warblers, Veeries, and others.

Saturday, May 16: Spring Birding chez Summers in the Blue Ridge

Bruce and Nancy Summers invite members of the Club to come birding on their forested slopes near Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area in Amherst County. Meet leader Kieran Kilday at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot at 7:30 a.m. to carpool to the Summers' home, about a half hour's drive from the meeting point. Be sure to wear sturdy shoes or boots for walking on forest trails. To help with planning, please let Kerry know if you'll be coming: (561)389-9612 or kjkilday@gmail.com.

Saturday, May 30: Virginia Society of Ornithology's Piney Grove Field Trip

This is a rare chance to look for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, nestlings, and nest sites at The Nature Conservancy's Piney Grove Preserve, thanks to access provided by the Center for Conservation Biology. The rendezvous is at 5:15 A.M. at the Virginia Diner in Wakefield; numbers are limited, so register early. For more information, visit <http://www.virginiabirds.net/index.html>.

Friday afternoon to Sunday morning, June 12-14: VSO Summer Field Trip centered in Blacksburg

This event's centerpiece is the all-day-Saturday New River Valley trip: stops include Glen Alton, where Blackburnian Warblers, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Northern Parula, Blue-headed Vireos and Brown Creepers may be seen; and Kelly Flats, for, among others, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Scarlet Tanagers, Acadian Flycatchers and singing Hermit Thrushes. Well-known guides Bill Akers and Jerry Via will lead the field trips. For the complete schedule, host hotel, and other information, go to <http://www.virginiabirds.net/index.html> and scroll down.

June 6-14: The 2015 Breeding Bird Foray

You may remember when our Club hosted birders from around Virginia for the VSO Breeding Bird Foray in 2013. This year the Foray will be in nearby Franklin County, with evening get-togethers at Ferrum College. If you're interested in participating for a day or two, or more, and/or would like more information, please contact Clyde Kessler at ckessler@vt.edu.

Clyde informs us that "target species" this year include the Summer Tanager, because the local breeding population has declined greatly since the 1970s; and the Blue-headed Vireo, because there is a lowland population, without documented nesting records, along with the higher-elevation population. By taking part in the Survey, you can add to the knowledge of our state's birds—and enjoy the Foray locale, birds, and bird-lovers.

Conservation Note: Springtime, Yard Work, and Birding

Our grass has been growing lustily this spring in spite of the below normal temps---as have the weeds and everything else. Now is a fine time to evaluate yard work and priorities and bird-friendly areas, and maybe take a look at our outdoor surroundings with new eyes.

We Americans have a love affair with grass, of the sort found on groomed and carpet-like golf courses. I think we've been indoctrinated from birth with an ideal esthetic for our yards: what I call the "European estate" or "city park" look dominates outdoor living spaces. Though the relationship between Americans and lawns is a rich subject for exploration (and revision, I wish), for now a simple suggestion is that we might all do the birds and ourselves a favor by reducing our mowing yardage.

Although creating mixed beds of perennials, ornamental grasses, shrubbery, and small flowering trees (remembering that natives are best for pollinators and birds) is always beneficial, it's a big project. One might also consider just letting some portion of yard grow out. Just let it go, and see what happens. Or you might reduce the frequency of your mowings for a section of your yard, and let the grass and other plants bloom and go to seed and get looking like your lawn mower is partially broken. Have you ever watched sparrows eating grass or weed seeds? It's free bird food! Taller grasses, and weeds, also provide nesting and hiding places. One might dedicate a circular island randomly, or a plot alongside a back shed or a group of woody plants, to "wildlife management." Why not try it, and explain to your neighbor what's up. Creating a bit of wild bird habitat is also one easy way to reduce consumption of gas.

There are other ways to improve our yards for wildlife that also require one to put on a different pair of spectacles, and to look at our outdoor spaces in a different way. Just think like a bird! We have a brush pile in our front yard (it gets burned as a bonfire every 2 or 3 years). The birds love it. Winter visitors like Juncos and White-throated and Song Sparrows use it for shelter, and as cover when the forest hawks come looking for a meal. It's a desirable singing perch for Mockingbirds, finches, and Rufous-sided Towhees, and always seems to be a busy spot.

I read an article in a birding mag recently about a birder who left a row of dying white birch trees remain standing in her yard. They were full of bugs... and feasting birds! We are all well trained in the practice of removing anything dead in our yard to both prevent disease spread and keep things looking tidy. I suggest trying to let your yard get a bit messy. Growing, maturing, and rotting vegetation has a lot to offer the birds. Let's look at our outdoor living areas as opportunities for increasing bird habitat. Though we all enjoy the special magic of freshly mown grass, try giving up a bit of lawn, and of time spent with the mower, for the birds.

The Club newsletter welcomes your submissions! These could be birding observations, thoughts, or travel stories; bird conservation news; photos—or some bird-related surprise. Please send items to alexia@rockbridge.net.

Thank you. —Alexia Smith, Editor



—Laura Neale

The President's Perch

They say (I'm never sure who 'they' are – someone? somewhere?) – they say you aren't fluent in a language until you dream in it. I have no experience with this, so I don't really know, but I've been thinking about it lately as I walk in the woods. It may not be so much about *dreaming* as it is about *thinking* in a new language – reaching the point where you're no longer mentally translating words or phrases into English before you understand them.

So much of birding is about listening and understanding, and those of us who are relatively new to this sometimes feel like we're in a foreign country when we start to listen to different

songs and calls. I've often walked along with knowledgeable birders just hoping they would stop every so often and talk about what they're hearing. It isn't something they do naturally – when you ask, you can almost see them stop and think before they begin pointing and naming different species.

I think the reason this doesn't come naturally is because they've reached the point of fluency: they don't mentally translate the sounds around them as they walk, they just know who's out there, and only think to point out new or unusual birds, especially during migrating season.

Just think of your own trips outside these days: do you still mentally stop and think to yourself, "there's a Titmouse" – "that's a Cardinal" – "a Towhee" – "a White-throated Sparrow"? These are a few of the common residents and winter birds we hear all the time, and as we become more familiar with them, they almost fade into background noise. Of course we hear them and we just know what they are, but, for precisely those reasons, they don't stand out.

Every year I think I add a few to my fluency list – often because they are favorites or special indicators of the season – so now when I'm out with the dog in the morning, the Louisiana Waterthrush and the Wood Thrush and the Scarlet Tanager and the Oven Bird have joined the ranks of the "known" even as I still listen more closely and feel some new joy when they first appear. It's just a beginning, of course, as I'm reminded when I claim to hear a Blue-headed Vireo and someone reminds me that it could be a Red-eyed or a Yellow-throated, and I'm pretty much back to square one.

I try to keep this progress in mind as I work through some of my bird song apps trying to get ready for warblers. . . and I quickly find myself back in a foreign land. . .

—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

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