



September 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.

Sat. Sept. 5, 7:30 a.m. -- Birding at Boxerwood *

Wed. Sept. 9, 7:00 p.m. -- Program by Jim Nix on birds of Laos and Cambodia *

Dates TBA -- Impromptu field trips *

Wed. Oct. 14, 7:00 p.m. -- Program by Clair Mellinger on tracking Saw-whet Owl migration

Weds. Nov. 11, 7:00 p.m. -- Program

And saves these dates in 2016

Weds. Feb. 10, 7:00 p.m. -- Program

Weds. Apr. 13, 7:00 p.m. -- Program

* *See article below*

Field Trips and Programs

*** Saturday, Sept. 5th: 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. This Saturday launches the second year for this event! If you have questions, or in case of doubtful weather, please call Kerry at (561) 389-9612. Directions are at www.boxerwood.org

Do you recognize this native flower? See the “President’s Perch” for its identity and its association with a bird we’re seeing now in Rockbridge County.



* **Wednesday, Sept. 9th: Birds of Laos and Cambodia**

Jim Nix of the Albemarle Bird Club will make a presentation on this topic at our meeting, 7 p.m. at the Old Courthouse Meeting Room. Says Jim: "I have been an avid birder for thirty years. I had my first opportunity to do some tropical birding in Costa Rica in 1988 and have been hooked ever since. There have been many more trips to the tropics since that life-changing experience, but nearly all have been to Mexico and Central and South America, leaving an entire hemisphere of birds unexplored.

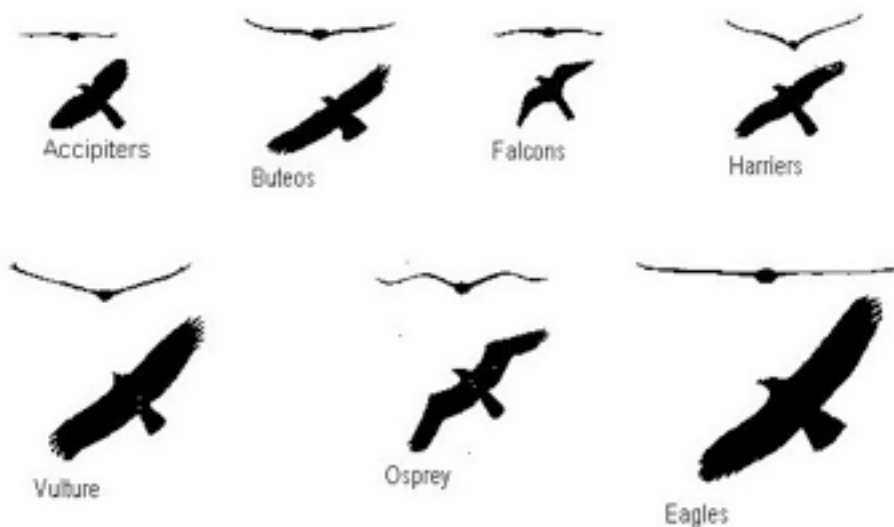
"A Birdquest trip to Laos and Cambodia in February 2014 offered an opportunity to see families of birds I had never even heard of -- like munias, minivets, ioras and treepies -- while exploring two exotic, seldom-visited countries. The trip was exhausting, but the birding was spectacular and the countries beautiful and fascinating. Of the nearly 300 species we encountered, only a dozen or so regularly occur in North America. Laos and Cambodia have only recently become accessible to birding groups, so new discoveries continue to be made; we saw several species only recently described plus a number that are rare and critically endangered. And we even added one new bird to the Cambodia country list!"

Impromptu Field Trips

Alert Club members will be watching for weather conditions auspicious for bringing migrants into our area, so be on the alert for emails announcing impromptu field trips! If *you* would like to instigate a birding expedition, please send date, meeting time, and itinerary to rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com for forwarding to Club friends and members.

Where to See Migrating Raptors

Two nearby Hawk Watches are underway, tracking the migration of raptors that fly south along the Blue Ridge to their wintering grounds. Rockfish Gap, at the Inn at Afton along I-64, has the higher raptor counts (<http://www.rockfishgaphawkwatch.org>); Harvey's Knob, on the Blue Ridge Parkway at about the Botetourt-Bedford County line, is favored by many for its scenic and quiet location—no interstate (<http://bijame.googlepages.com/home>). Anybody is welcome to go by and spend some time with the regular watchers, picking up ID tips, chatting and waiting for the next birds to show up... and witnessing this annual marvel. Maybe you'll become a regular!



Kerry Kilday notes that the peak of Broad-winged Hawk sightings tends to be around September 17th, a Thursday this year, making the weekends on either side of that date good bets for seeing Broad-wings. You may also see an Osprey or two, a Bald Eagle, Sharp-shinned Hawks—or perhaps

some migrating Monarch butterflies.



Conservation Note: Advocating for Bird Survival

Bird populations are shrinking as human activities continue to expand. I naively tend to think that everybody cares about birds, but as resources diminish and the world seems to shrink, economics and human needs—or perceived needs—are assumed to be the number one priority. So it requires a pro-active populace to promote measures that will maintain and boost bird populations, though many people don't realize that. Bird lovers need to speak out, and let our leaders know how we feel!

With this in mind, the Rockbridge Bird Club supports conservation actions brought to our inbox by the American Bird Conservancy and the Audubon Society. Here are some actions that the Executive Committee has endorsed:

- Legislation has been introduced in Congress to reauthorize the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act (NMBCA) until 2020. Over the past decade over \$50 million in grant money has funded projects impacting over 3 ½ million acres in 47 states and 36 countries. Virginia's 1st District Representative Rob Wittman is a co-sponsor. We support the NMBCA.
- An odd twist occurred this spring when an amendment was introduced to a House appropriations bill that would withdraw funding for enforcement of the Neotropical Bird Treaty Act. We oppose that.
- We support the Federal Bird-Safe Buildings Act, designed to help prevent the deaths of millions of birds by including bird-safe building materials and design features in federal buildings. Virginia 9th District Representative Morgan Griffith is one of the bill's co-sponsors.

In Canada, the Boreal Songbird Initiative launched a campaign this spring, in conjunction with Ducks Unlimited that calls for protecting 50% of the boreal forest. The campaign highlights the importance of the boreal forest to migratory birds: billions of birds, comprising over 325 species, breed in the boreal forest; over a billion of them, such as White-crowned Sparrows and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, migrate to the U.S. to spend the winter. According to the Initiative, "modern conservation science contends that at least half of an ecosystem should be protected from development to preserve its ecological health and biodiversity." This "50/50 approach" to boreal conservation is endorsed by scientists from around the world and by many "green" companies in such fields as energy, timber and paper, finance, and publishing. We support the protection of boreal forest and the birds that breed there. See <http://www.borealbirds.org/>.

To learn more about bird conservation issues and to add your voice to the debates, see the American Bird Conservancy action page at <http://abcbirds.org/get-involved/take-action/> and Audubon's at <http://www.audubon.org/takeaction>.

—*Laura Neale*

The President's Perch

Welcome to autumn! I used to think that the end of summer meant a kind of melancholy – the end of warmth and color and life, at least for a while. More and more now, though, I look forward to this change – the faded, almost weary colors of the trees and flowers (and also the birds, as breeding plumage fades) and the cool night air. I think as I age I can relate to these changes a little more, in a comfortable and hopeful way.

Just letting things happen has become a kind of theme here, and the progress of summer this year has given us new examples of the often-surprising results. We didn't feed birds this summer; leaving them to fend for themselves in the (hopefully) more natural landscape we've been encouraging.

Even the hummingbirds were on their own, and we'd always had at least one feeder for the hummers in the past. So, of course, we had more Ruby-throated Hummingbirds this year than I've



ever seen. Sitting on the porch in the morning or evening we would sometimes see six or more at one time – perching on tree branches or chasing one another or feeding, mostly on the orange jewelweed that has infiltrated the shrubs in front of the house. Its one of those annuals that you don't typically have just a little of; when it comes, it's quickly there in bulk, with a steady background noise from the native bees and birds collecting nectar. It's not just jewelweed that draws these birds, though. Laura Neale tells me that the native honeysuckle she has (at left) is also really effective at supporting them.

Coral honeysuckle (Lonicera sempervirens) 'Major Wheeler'.

Photo by Laura Neale

The jewelweed seed pods are exploding now and the flowers have started to fade a bit, so I expect we'll start to lose the hummers pretty soon; but maybe keeping them attuned to the natural rhythm of the season will help them head south at the best time for their wellbeing.

P.S. Another example of the challenge of birding late in the season: as I was getting ready to write this today, I looked out the kitchen window at a couple of beautiful and unfamiliar birds with bright eye lines and almost-orange breasts mottled with dark spots and small flashes of red just beneath the wing. Some time with Sibley and the Audubon app brought me to an immature Rose Breasted Grosbeak – not something exotic, but still amazing to see and in some ways more satisfying, knowing that it will be around in its more familiar plumage when the colors and warmth return next year.

—Bob Biersack, 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

Secretary, Alexia Smith

Program Chair, Sarah Burleson

Publicity Chair, Bonnie Bernstein

Membership Chair, Adrienne Bodie

Vice President, Laura Neale

Treasurer, Betty Besal

Field Trip Chair, Vacant

Club Ornithologist, Dick Rowe

Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith & produced by Jan Smith. Please send feedback & news items to alexia@rockbridge.net