



ROCKBRIDGE BIRD CLUB

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

November 2025 Newsletter

CLUB CALENDAR

Nov 6, 10 am-Noon

and 4-5:50 pm – Seed Sale pick-up at Rockbridge Farmers Co-op

Nov 8, 8:30 am – 2nd Saturday Birding at Boxerwood

Nov 21, 8:30 am – Friday Birding at Locher Tract

Dec 9, 7:00 pm – Christmas Bird Count planning session

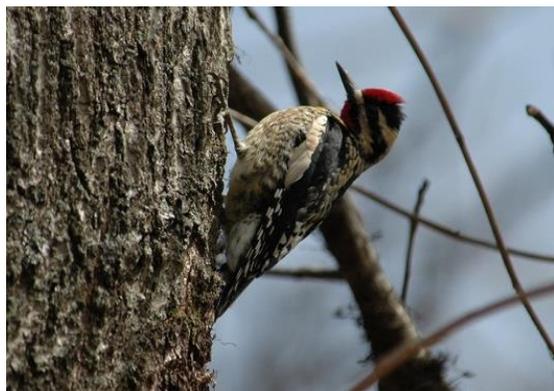
Dec 13, 8:30 am – 2nd Saturday Birding at Boxerwood

Dec 20, 5:00 pm* – Christmas Bird Count & Potluck Tally* at Boxerwood

Shall I not rejoice also at the abundance of the weeds whose seeds are the granary of the birds?

— HENRY DAVID THOREAU, *Walden*

Birding at Boxerwood on 2nd Saturdays



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker photographed by Dick Rowe.

Birding at Boxerwood continues on the second Saturday of each month. Our next two walks, scheduled for Nov. 8 and Dec. 13, will start at 8:30 am, giving the birds and the birders an extra half hour to wake up and warm up.

Target species for early winter include Hermit Thrush, White-throated Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Winter Wren. Boxerwood birders spotted their FOS (first of the season) White-throat and Sapsucker on our October walk.

Birders meet in the nature center parking lot for a two-hour stroll through the field and woodlands. Bring binoculars, wear sturdy shoes, and dress for weather. For more information or weather cancellations, check Rockbridge Bird Club on Facebook or contact Bonnie (540-460-9147 call or text).

Friday Walk at Locher Tract on Nov 21

Wendy Richards, Field Trip organizer

Join us as we explore Locher Tract, one of Rockbridge County's gems. The 378-acre tract is located in the Jefferson National Forest across the river from Natural Bridge Station, offering riverfront, wetland and forest views along two trails. We'll be on the lookout for Wood Duck, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Swamp Sparrow and Hermit Thrush in these varied habitats.



Wood Ducks photographed by Dick Rowe.

Birders will meet at Locher Tract at 8:30 am. Follow directions on Google Maps to "Balcony Falls Trailhead." Or from Natural Bridge Station, take Arnold's Valley Road to cross the James River. Then make the first left and follow James River Road past Jellystone Park to the very end. We will meet at that parking lot.

Wear sturdy shoes, bring binoculars, and dress for the weather. For more information or weather cancellations, check Rockbridge Bird Club on Facebook or contact Wendy (richardsw@wlu.edu or 540-329-0318).

Middle School Bird Club Takes Flight!

Lisa Gay-Milliken, MRMS Librarian and Bird Club Advisor



A new after-school club at Maury River Middle School has generated a buzz that rivals the flutter of tiny wings! MRMS Bird Club launched in September and has quickly become a hot spot in the school library for students eager to explore the feathered residents of their local environment.

Club members kicked off the school year by diving into the world of the speedy and mesmerizing Hummingbird. Their first project was to make nectar (a simple sugar-water solution) and hang two hummingbird feeders outside the library windows. The results were instantaneous and thrilling! The very next day, students were amazed to see hummingbirds zipping up to the feeders. It was an inspiring start to the club.

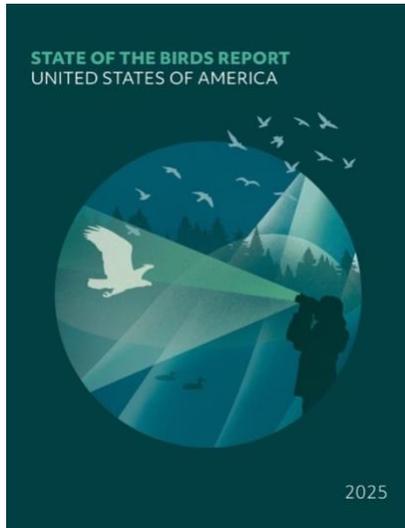
Next, the club shifted its focus to common backyard birds. They learned about different species, then hung feeders filled with black oil sunflower seeds—an avian favorite. They'll be keeping an eye out for species that come snacking.

Club activities aren't limited to feeder watching, though. Students also take bird walks around the school property. They go in pairs, one student using binoculars and the other using the Merlin app on an iPad. This innovative approach helps them to identify birds not only by sight but also by their calls and songs.

The MRMS Bird Club is about more than ornithology; it's also about conservation and sustainability. In their most recent activity, students made their own bird feeders from recycled wood, gaining practical skills while continuing to expand the resources available to the birds on their campus.

CONSERVATION NOTES

Laura Neale, Conservation



Rockbridge Bird Club has taken several actions in the past few months to voice our support for governmental decisions that will benefit birds.

Following guidance from the American Bird Conservancy and Audubon, we wrote our representatives to encourage maximum funding for bird conservation efforts, oppose the use of crop chemicals harmful to birds and wildlife, and urge Senators to co-sponsor the [REUSE Act of 2025](#). This legislation would address the 2,000 truckloads of plastic waste being dumped into waters each day with directives to explore strategies for replacing *refuse* with *reuse*.

We signed onto a letter encouraging Tower Operators to follow compliance instructions provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the FAA. Bird collision fatalities number a staggering 7 million each year. Since 2017, some 4,500 of 13,900 tower operators have modified their lighting practices, resulting in a 70% reduction in mortality.

We also signed onto a [letter](#) encouraging passage of a Farm Bill. While the letter praises the proposed continuation of some funding for agencies integral to birds, it decries cuts that have been devastating to many agencies and personnel who have been stewarding our wildlife for decades. Those facing topline cuts include U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, EPA, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and U.S. Geological Survey, which manages the American Breeding Bird Surveys. The letter also expressed opposition to several riders, including:

- Sec. 116: No ESA listing for Greater or bi-state sage grouse
- Sec. 117: No funding to carry out the Draft Resource Management Plan Amendment for Draft EIS for Greater Sage-Grouse
- Sec. 134: Blocks ESA rules relating to economic consideration during listing, unoccupied critical habitat, historical baseline, and the blanket 4(d) rule undermining government processes
- Sec. 136: Blocks implementation of BLM Conservation and Landscape Health Rule
- Sec. 429: Increases biomass energy production in National Forests
- Sec. 453: Prevents states from being able to protect themselves from toxic chemicals when the federal agency has fallen short

Meanwhile, the [State of the Birds 2025](#) reports ongoing declines in our bird populations primarily driven by habitat loss. Noteworthy in the Report are examples showing that successes can be achieved when conservation practices are implemented. In our own Sept/Oct *Virginia Wildlife* (a bimonthly magazine published by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources), there is an article discussing the latest Wildlife Action Plan and the benefits to biodiversity when making habitat improvements for key at-risk species. The upshot: we can make a difference in the future of many species if we prioritize our stewardship of their homes.

There are 100 million birders in the USA! Let's work in our own yards and communities for bird lives, and let our elected leaders know we support all measures that will protect birds.

FIELD NOTES FROM SEPT-OCT

A Meadowlark and more at McCormick Farm/September 26

Six of us gathered for a morning stroll at McCormick Farm. Morning fog lifted, the sun came out, and so did the birds.

We recorded 36 species including an immature Red-headed Woodpecker, which captivated us as it flew from tree to tree above our heads. Scanning the dense understory, we glimpsed warblers, and looking up, we had a clear view of an adult Bald Eagle gliding along. A quest to see an Eastern Meadowlark paid off due to patience. It was a fun and productive walk.



OAR Bird Sit at Boxerwood/October 18

Members of Outdoor Adaptive Recreation (OAR) joined several RBC members for a Bird Sit in the field at Boxerwood on October 18.

As participants looked through binoculars, they spotted nine species: Black Vulture, Turkey Vulture, American Kestrel, Northern Mockingbird, American Crow, Carolina Wren, Blue Jay, White-throated Sparrow, and Boxerwood's ubiquitous Northern Cardinal. They also had a close-up view of a Northern Flicker – a dead bird that Wendy Richards found on the road on her way to the nature center.



Buena Vista River Walk/October 24

"We should come here again!" was the consensus for six birders who trekked along the River Walk on a chilly October morning to see what they could see and hear what they could hear (despite some noisy weed whacking by city landscape workers).

Among the 30 species sighted were Rock Pigeon, Bald Eagle, Yellow-rumped Warbler, American Kestrel, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, White-throated Sparrow, and a flock of European starlings. The highlight – watching a Belted Kingfisher sail along the Maury.



REMINDER: Seed Sale Pick-Up this Thursday!

Rockbridge residents purchased 7,660 pounds of bird seed and 558 pounds of suet during last month's fundraiser – another record-breaker! Our club donates all the proceeds – this year, more than \$2,800 – to Boxerwood, a local hot spot for birding year-round.

If you're one of the more than 100 customers who placed orders, remember to pick up your seed in the Rockbridge Farmers Co-op parking lot this Thursday (November 6) from 10am-Noon and again from 4-5:30pm. Volunteers will be on hand to load the seed into your vehicle. **Those who placed orders online, please bring payment in cash or a check.**

If you are unable to pick up your order on Thursday, contact Bonnie (540-460-9147 or bonnie.bernstein@gmail.com) to arrange alternative plans.

Look for a special **Christmas Bird Count** edition of the RBC Newsletter on December 1 celebrating *100 years of counting in Rockbridge!*

This special edition will include a feature by former count organizer Robert Paxton tracing the history of our local CBC, and a report on recent trends by current CBC organizer, Dick Rowe.



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 John Maluski (304-488-0037).

RBC COORDINATING COMMITTEE

John Maluski, Chair and Membership

Kip Brooks, Secretary
Jan Smith, Treasurer
Dick Rowe, Club Ornithologist
Wendy Richards, Field Trips

Laura Neale, Conservation
Bonnie Bernstein, Publicity
Lisa Gay-Milliken, Social Media
Baron Schwartz, Webpage