



# ROCKBRIDGE BIRD CLUB

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

## Jan-Feb 2026 Newsletter

### CLUB CALENDAR

- Jan 10, 9:00 am** – CANCELED 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday Birding at Boxerwood
- Jan 31, 9:00 am** – Birding at Greenfield Lake (Daleville)
- Feb 13-16** – Great Backyard Bird Count
- Feb 14, 9:00 am** – 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday Birding at Boxerwood (and GBBC!)
- Feb 28, 9:00 am** – Birding on the Buena Vista River Walk

*Twenty minutes from my house, through the woods by the quarry and across the highway, is Hollins Pond, a remarkable piece of shallowness, where I like to go at sunset and sit on a tree trunk. Hollins Pond is also called Murray's Pond; it covers two acres of bottomland near Tinker Creek with six inches of water and six thousand lily pads. In winter, brown-and-white steers stand in the middle of it...from the distant shore they look like miracle itself, complete with miracle's nonchalance.*

— ANNIE DILLARD, *Teaching a Stone to Talk*

### Pond Hopping with Roanoke Valley Bird Club on Jan 31

Wendy Richards, Field Trip organizer

On the last Saturday in January, our club will partner with our neighbors to the south. Alyce and Tim Quinn, knowledgeable birders from the Roanoke Valley Bird Club, are leading a trip to Greenfield Lake in Botetourt County for their club and have extended an invitation to birders from Rockbridge.

We'll spend most of the morning birding at Greenfield Lake, actually a wetland pond formed by a beaver-dammed creek. Greenfield is host to notable species of waterfowl including Red-necked Grebes, Tundra Swans and Snow Geese. We'll move on to Murray's Pond in Hollins before returning to Lexington.



*A Northern Shoveler at Greenfield Lake in December.  
Photo by Lisa Gay-Milliken*

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Birders from both clubs will meet at the Botetourt Center at Greenfield (57 S. Center Drive in Daleville) at 9 am. If you are driving on your own, take Exit 150B off I-81 and follow signs to Rt. 220 North. After approximately 4 miles, turn left at the entrance to the Greenfield Education and Training Center, across from the entrance to Ashley Plantation. Park in the second lot on the right.

Carpooling is encouraged. To carpool from Lexington, meet at 8 am in the Lexington Food Lion parking lot. In the event of inclement weather, the trip will be canceled. For more information or weather updates, contact Wendy ([richardsw@wlu.edu](mailto:richardsw@wlu.edu) or 540-319-0318).

## Calling all bird lovers!

### Bird at Boxerwood for the Great Backyard Bird Count on Feb 14



Boxerwood walks continue on the second Saturday of the month. Our next walk just happens to fall on Valentine's Day – and Valentine's Day just happens to fall in the middle of this year's [Great Backyard Bird Count](#) (GBBC).

The GBBC is a participatory-science project sponsored by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, National Audubon Society and Birds Canada. Between February 13-16, participants around the globe will spend time in their favorite places counting birds, and then report their counts via eBird, providing scientists with a snapshot of bird populations before their next migration. Our Boxerwood sightings will be part of the GBBC.

Join birders in the parking lot at 9 am for a two-hour jaunt. Bring binoculars, wear sturdy shoes, and dress for weather. Walks are canceled for rain or snow. You can check our Facebook page for a weather update or call/text Bonnie (540-460-9147).

## Buena Vista River Walk on Feb 28

Club members who trekked along the Buena Vista River Walk in October are heading back to this "very birdy" location on the last Saturday in February to sight waterfowl, kingfishers, and other over-wintering birds. Join us!

A well-maintained up-and-back gravel path runs atop the flood wall overlooking the Maury and offers lovely views of the river. We'll also bird along the riparian buffer.

Walkers will meet at 9 am at the Glen Maury Park entrance. The outing will be canceled for rain or snow. Check Facebook or text/call John Maluski (304-488-0037) to confirm.



# How Birds Survive Winter

Adapted from [Audubon Magazine](#) and [Susan's Thursday Morning Notes](#)

From fluffing up to hunkering down, birds that don't migrate south for winter have developed adaptations and survival strategies for staying warm and energized in harsh weather conditions. You may observe some of these behaviors as you're bird-watching from your window or out in the field.

**Shivering.** By shivering, birds generate extra heat from circulation and muscle movement.

**Donning Layers.** Bird feathers are structured to keep birds warm and dry. A base layer of downy feathers traps body heat and keeps out frigid air. Oil producing glands allow birds to preen a water-repellent coating on their outer feathers. Birds in colder climates may also put on a heavier coat of plumage.

**Fluffing Up.** Puffed-up birds are a familiar sight when temperatures plummet. By fluffing, they create air pockets between their feathers that trap heat, maximizing their natural insulation.



*A Dark-eyed Junco fluffs up its feathers for better insulation. Photo by Julia Robinson.*



*Bluebirds huddling together for warmth. Photo from the [Palomar Audubon website](#).*

**Huddling Together.** It's common to see a row or cluster of fluffy bluebirds or sparrows in winter. They are sharing heat to stay as warm as possible.

**Hunkering Down.** Birds seek shelter from winter winds. Small birds take cover in dense trees or shrubs. Tree crooks, cavities, and manmade structures are also places of refuge for birds of all sizes.

**Adding Ounces.** Many eat more to increase their insulation and build up energy stores. For smaller birds like chickadees and finches, fat can account for

more than 10% of their winter body weight and helps sustain them when food is scarce. Keeping feeders full helps birds avoid depleting these reserves.

**Caching In.** In fall, chickadees, nuthatches, and woodpeckers fly back and forth from feeders, carrying away seeds and nuts to hide, or cache, for later, when food is scarce. A single chickadee can store up to 80,000 seeds—and remember where they all are!

**Tucking Away.** Birds' scaly feet are mostly bone and sinew, and built to withstand cold. Some large waterfowl tuck one leg into their feathers for warmth while balancing on the other. Smaller birds crouch for coverage.

**Saving Energy.** Small birds such as kinglets and chickadees can drop their body temperature and go into controlled hypothermia to save energy.

## CONSERVATION NOTES

### The Second Virginia Breeding Atlas Is Now Online

Reprinted from the [Department of Wildlife Resources website](#):

*Virginia has one of the highest bird diversities among states in the Eastern US, thanks to its geographic position, topography and climate. The Second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas is a project to document the current geographic distribution and status of the Commonwealth's breeding birds.*

*The Atlas is one of the largest avian survey projects in Virginia, both in terms of geographic coverage (the entire Commonwealth) and the number of species surveyed (over 200 breeding species). In order to implement this ambitious project, the DWR partnered with the Virginia Society of Ornithology (VSO) and the Conservation Management Institute at Virginia Tech (CMI), along with a legion of citizen science volunteers across the Commonwealth. With over 1,400 volunteers participating, the Atlas is Virginia's largest citizen science project to date.*

*The overarching goal behind the Atlas is to provide Virginia's citizens and conservation partners with information that can be put to good use for avian conservation. With an estimated 3 billion birds lost from the United States and Canada since 1970, such information is more important now than ever. Improved understanding of where our bird species currently occur, in what numbers, and how their distribution within Virginia has changed over the past quarter century will enable us, collectively, to more efficiently target conservation efforts and actions on the ground. It will also provide us with a data set on Virginia's bird distribution and abundance against which we can make future comparisons.*



*The Black-and-white Warbler, our club symbol, was also our sponsored species for the Atlas. Photo by Dick Rowe. RBC logo art by Jennifer Cox.*

#### **A footnote from Laura Neale, Conservation chair:**

Rockbridge Bird Club donated to this effort by sponsoring the Black-and-White Warbler account through the Virginia Society of Ornithology's Sponsor-a-Species program. But our more significant contribution to the Atlas was the donation of many volunteer hours in the field by RBC members.

Follow this link to the [Atlas](#).  
Follow this link to ["our" bird](#).

## Preventing the Spread of “Finch Eye” at Your Feeders



Those of us who participate in FeederWatch, a project of Cornell Lab of Ornithology, are asked to report if we see birds that are infected with House Finch eye disease, or *mycoplasma conjunctivitis*.

This avian disease was first observed at feeders in our region in 1994 and has since affected other wild bird species from coast to coast, including American Goldfinch, Evening Grosbeak, and Purple Finch.

As described by the Cornell Lab, *“Infected birds have red, swollen, runny, or crusty eyes; in extreme cases the eyes become swollen shut or crusted over, and the birds become essentially blind. Birds in this condition obviously have trouble feeding. You might see them staying on the ground, under the feeder, trying to find seeds. If the infected bird dies, it is usually not from the conjunctivitis itself, but rather from starvation, exposure, or predation as a result of not being able to see.”*

Data from FeederWatch participants is helping scientists track the spread of the disease and study its impact on birds. Meanwhile, here are ways we can all slow or prevent the spread of “Finch Eye” at our own feeders:

- Space seed feeders widely to avoid crowding.
- Clean feeders every two weeks with a 10% bleach solution. Remove moldy hulls that build up around the seed openings or in the tray.
- Let feeders dry completely before refilling and rehang them.
- Also clean bird baths, and rake under the feeders to remove old seed, hulls, and droppings.

If you do see a sick bird at or near your feeders, empty the feeders and clean them with a 10% bleach solution. Let them dry completely before refilling them with fresh seed and rehang them. Increase cleaning to once a week for the remainder of the season.

## Dues are due!

*John Maluski, Membership chair*

It's January 2026 and we all get busy at the start of a new year forgetting whether or not we have renewed memberships. So, consider this as a gentle reminder that the Rockbridge Bird Club has started a new year as well. If you want to help support our ongoing programs, now is the time to consider either becoming a member or renewing your membership.

Annual dues are \$15 per household – a bargain! Donations above that amount are, of course, gratefully accepted. Your membership contribution helps pay for excellent programs, educational projects, and more.

To join or renew, please make your check payable to Rockbridge Bird Club and send it along with your email address to Jan Smith, 564 Big Hill Rd, Lexington, VA 24450. Or you can give your dues to an Executive Committee member at one of our upcoming events. Thank you, and I hope to see some of you at our upcoming programs!

## Cedar Waxwings

by Robert Francis (1901-1987)

*Four Tao philosophers as cedar waxwings  
chat on a February berry bush  
in sun, and I am one.*

*Such merriment and such sobriety—  
the small wild fruit on the tall stalk—  
was this not always my true style?*

*Above an elegance of snow, beneath  
a silk-blue sky a brotherhood of four  
birds. Can you mistake us?*

*To sun, to feast, and to converse —  
and all together — for this I have abandoned  
all my other lives.*



For more information about the Rockbridge Bird Club, visit [www.rockbridgebirdclub.org](http://www.rockbridgebirdclub.org) and find us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/rockbridgebirdclub). Contact the Club by email at [rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com](mailto: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