



October 2016 Newsletter

of the

Rockbridge Bird Club

encouraging the enjoyment, knowledge,
& conservation
of birds in the Rockbridge Area

"If I had to choose, I would rather have birds than airplanes." —Charles Lindbergh

Calendar

Unless otherwise noted, programs are held in the Old Courthouse meeting room, downtown Lexington.

Sat., Oct. 1, 8:00 a.m.—Boxerwood Bird Walk *

Mon., Oct. 17—Bird Seed Sale orders due! *

Fri., Nov. 4—Bird Seed Pick-up day *

Weds., Nov. 9, 7:00 p.m.—Program: Fletcher Smith, of the Center for Conservation Biology, about his research on Whimbrel migration. Our Annual Meeting * will be held at this time as well.

Weds., Feb. 8, 7:00 p.m.—Program, subject TBA

Weds., Apr. 12, 7:00 p.m.—Program, subject TBA

*see article below

Monthly Birding at Boxerwood: October 1

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot for the first-Saturday Boxerwood bird walk, lasting about two hours. Directions are at www.boxerwood.org.

Impromptu Field Trips

Be on the lookout for a possible field trip in October. If one is planned we'll send out a notice later in the month.

Annual Bird Seed Sale: It's time to order!



NancyCastillo photo

High-quality seeds for the birds at your feeder and support for Boxerwood Nature Center—these are the benefits of our annual Bird Seed Sale, organized by Bonnie Bernstein and co-sponsored by the Rockbridge Farmers Co-op. The menu includes black-oil sunflower seeds, thistle (nyjer), gourmet mixes, cracked corn, and suet cakes. Look for product information and order forms on the Boxerwood [webpage](#), and be sure your order is received, whether online or by mail, no later than Monday, October 17. Your order will then await you at the Rockbridge Farmers Co-op on Friday, November 4, 10 am to noon and 4 to 6 pm.



Photo by Nancy Castillo

Annual Meeting on November 9

Election season is upon us, and that includes our Club. At the November 9th Annual Meeting, we'll vote on a proposed slate of officers to serve for 2 years, beginning January 1, 2017. The slate includes: President—Alexia Smith; Vice-President—Laura Neale; Secretary—Bob Biersack; and Treasurer—Betty Besal. As always, nominations from the membership are welcome. If you would like to serve or know someone who would like to assist with club leadership, please let our President, Bob Biersack, know by October 9.

We'll also be voting on a change in bylaws, changing our fiscal year from the calendar year to September 1 to August 31, retroactive to September, 2016. More details can be found in the [September newsletter](#). And this change means...

Now's a good time to join or renew your membership for 2017

Household dues are \$15, with an additional donation most welcome. Please make out your check to Rockbridge Bird Club and send it, along with your address, email address, and phone number, to Betty Besal, 120 Chavis Avenue, Lexington, VA 24450.

Conservation Note: My Cat Indoors??

Here's what the [Humane Society](#) says: "It's a myth that going outside is a requirement for feline happiness. Playing regularly with a cat and providing them with entertaining toys can easily satisfy their stalking instinct, keep them stimulated, and provide the exercise they need to stay healthy and happy. It also keeps local wildlife safe!"

Naturally, it's the wildlife concern that got me to this topic. Of the estimated 2.4 billion birds killed each year by cats, many are killed by pet cats who are allowed outdoors (the rest by feral cats). Even well-fed cats remain hunters, it's generally

agreed. And birds are at higher cat-risk around your home if you have feeders and birdbaths, as cited [here](#) by American Humane.

But many highly reputable animal-welfare organizations advocate keeping cats indoors for the cats' own sake! This is due to the many dangers cats face outdoors, including automobile traffic, serious or potentially fatal diseases, parasites like ticks and fleas (which may then also infest home and humans), human cruelty to animals, wild predators like coyotes & raccoons, and poisons like antifreeze & rodent poison. American Humane [lists these hazards](#) in greater detail. Finally, according to all the information I've seen, indoor cats simply live much longer than outdoor cats.

So how do you keep a cat healthy and happy living indoors? The groups mentioned above and many others assert it's do-able (just Google "cats indoors"), and all have similar lists of what to provide for your cat:

- A variety of toys, rotated into play every few days &/or hidden for the cat to find
- A scratching post
- Climbing places
- Perches at window sills, for sunbathing and watching the out-of-doors
- Hiding places, like cardboard boxes or paper grocery bags
- Play time with you every day
- Perhaps another companion, such as another cat or even a dog
- "Kitty grass" (available in pots from pet stores) to chew on.

What about the cat who's been accustomed to going outdoors its whole life? According to [PAWS](#), "...even the most confirmed outdoor cat can eventually be convinced of indoor comforts," though with some cats it may take time and patience. One suggestion is to keep your cat indoors longer each day as the weather gets colder, so that by winter's end the cat may be a convert to indoor living. In any case, surely your *next* cat will be an indoor cat.

All this is easy for *me* to say, as I don't have *any* sort of cat!

But we bird-lovers are animal-lovers, and I'll bet we all greatly appreciate the efforts of [Cats Unlimited](#) and the [Rockbridge Animal Alliance](#) to find homes for cats and to encourage and provide neutering. My hope is that they'll abandon their support of TNR, or trap-neuter-return (see article in our [September newsletter](#)), in favor of educating cat-owners about the importance of keeping cats indoors. The two groups are sponsoring a TNR seminar on October 16. Please read up on TNR, look for information on the seminar [here](#), and consider attending, in order to learn more and to ask questions.

—Alexia Smith



Magnolia Warbler
Photo by Dick Rowe

The President's Perch

I'm writing this month from Meyersdale, Pennsylvania, along the Greater Allegheny Passage bike trail. It's 140 miles of former railroad right-of-way that has been converted to a beautiful bike path—think of Goshen Pass, but for more than 100 miles along several different rivers, from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Maryland.

I can't say that I've seen many special birds over the last three days, but there have been a few good moments. There was the song of a Magnolia Warbler this morning, and several Yellow-billed Cuckoos. The usual woodpeckers, and smaller birds in mixed flocks moving higher in the trees, were also pretty common. There have been surprisingly few ducks or other water birds, but the water is fast moving, and that might be a deterrent.



Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Photo by Dick Rowe

The importance of this locale is in more than sounds and sightings, though. In the twentieth century, this area was a center of heavy industry and habitat destruction. The rivers within twenty miles or so of Pittsburgh were lined with steel mills and other industrial sites, fed by a constant flow of coal trains coming from the mines further south and east, leaving the rivers and their surroundings blighted and mostly barren.

Over the last few decades, though, the industrial pollution has receded and the rivers and forests have recovered. For the first time in seventy-five years there are river otters to be found. Large wooded corridors are now accessible to migrant and resident birds alike. As we learn more about environmental changes likely to come as the climate warms, these uninterrupted pathways to the north may become more critical to the preservation of birds forced to find new breeding grounds or migratory routes in eastern North America.

Just in the last few miles, as we head south toward Maryland, we've also encountered rows of giant windmills on several of the ridges nearby. I'm asking as many people as I can about their experiences with these devices and whether people

here are keeping track of their impact on birds moving along these routes, understanding that we may see similar structures near us soon.

Changes come from many directions, with many known consequences and other uncertain ones for all the creatures who share these areas. The changes I've seen here in the last few days have mostly been hopeful—a needed dose of good news.

—Bob Biersack



For more information about the Club, visit our website at www.rockbridgebirdclub.org. Find us on Facebook, where you can “like” us and post your photos.

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 or more 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
Vice President, Laura Neale
Secretary, Alexia Smith
Treasurer, Betty Besal
Program Chair, Sarah Burleson

Field Trip Chair, Wendy Richards
Publicity Chair, Bonnie Bernstein
Membership Chair, Adrienne Bodie
Club Ornithologist, Dick Rowe

Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith
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