



## April 2016 Newsletter

of the

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

### Calendar

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

Sat., Apr. 2, 8:00 a.m.—Boxerwood Bird Walk \*

Weds., Apr. 13, 7:00 p.m.—Program: Virginia's Breeding Birds, by Sergio Harding and Dr. Ashley Peele \*

Sat., Apr. 23, 7:00 a.m.—Bird Walk in Brushy Hills \*

Fri., Apr. 29 - Sun., May 1— Virginia Society of Ornithology's Annual Meeting, hosted by the Roanoke Valley Bird Club \*<http://www.virginiabirds.net/VSO-Annual-Meeting.html>

Sat., May 7, 8:00 a.m.—Boxerwood Bird Walk \*

Sat., May 7, 6:30 a.m.—carpool for Apple Orchard Mountain field trip (picnic afterwards) \*

Sat., May 7, noon—potluck picnic at Smith Mountain Lake: all members and friends welcome. \*

\*see article below

### April 13 Program on Virginia's Breeding Birds

How do volunteer bird watchers contribute to scientific knowledge about bird populations? At our April 13 meeting, two speakers will address this question: Sergio Harding, a biologist with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) and Dr. Ashley Peele, an avian ecologist with the Conservation Management Institute (CMI) in Blacksburg

Harding will talk about the North American Breeding Bird Survey, a long-term, large-scale monitoring program to track the status and trends of North American bird populations. Begun in 1966, when concern about bird populations was focused on pesticide effects, the survey is now used to model the possible consequences of changes in land use, climate, and other stresses on bird populations.

Now VDGIF is partnering with the Virginia Society of Ornithology to launch the second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas, a five-year survey focused on bird species breeding in a given area. Here again, researchers hope to gain increased understanding of how bird communities are responding to changes—in particular, since the first Atlas, conducted in the late 1980s. Dr. Peele is Atlas coordinator.

Rockbridge bird lovers may come away inspired to help out with these citizen science efforts!

## Field Trips

### Monthly Boxerwood Bird Walks: April 2, May 7...

Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking lot for the first-Saturday Boxerwood bird walk, lasting about two hours. Kerry Kilday will be leading in April and May. If you have questions, or in case of doubtful weather, please call Kerry at (561) 389-9612. Directions are at [www.boxerwood.org](http://www.boxerwood.org).



*Blue-headed Vireo. Photo by Dick Rowe*

### Additional May 7 events: Field Trip and Picnic

Those who want a half-day trip up to the Blue Ridge will meet at 6:30 a.m. in the Lexington Food Lion parking lot to carpool to Sunset Fields for a walk along the slopes of Apple Orchard Mountain. And however you spend your morning, everyone is invited to the potluck picnic at noon that day at Cave Mountain Lake. Look for more details in the May newsletter; meanwhile, SAVE THE DATE!

### Conservation Note: More Hedgerows!

Ever since I can remember, my father avowed the importance to wildlife of hedgerows along fence lines. When my brother took over our family farming operation, my father grumbled as these corridors of wildlife habitat narrowed, and pasture and crop acreages crept up. All the critters that feed on field and meadow pests need a home, and they use these corridors to live and travel within the safety of trees and bushes, grasses and forbs. Somewhere amidst the Green Revolution, feeding the world, and the accompanying corporate expansion into agriculture, hedgerows started seriously disappearing.

Nature lovers lament the loss of hedgerows, which were the norm for centuries. When you raze all the vegetation along a fence line, or a clump of woody plants, animals too lose lives and homes. The resident birds can move. But they may not be able to find an unoccupied space, or a spot of equal quality for food and shelter. Finite space dictates that there are going to be losers.

We have finally reached the point where the disappearance of one kind of resident in particular is gaining the "world's" attention (that is, the human world's): we have been so successful at eradicating our vegetated waysides and our plant-eating pests that we have achieved a major loss of our insect pollinators—fundamental for the production of food for us. So let us all join the native-plants people, the butterfly and insect lovers, and the hedgerow lovers, and start planting for birds, bees, and wildlife—and ourselves.

The Piedmont Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society published a great brochure in 1994 pitching hedgerows: [http://vnps.org/download/VNPS\\_Brochures/hedgerow.pdf](http://vnps.org/download/VNPS_Brochures/hedgerow.pdf) By now, you realize that these desirable hedgerows are not the city-style sheared evergreens that mark boundaries between homes. These are rich swaths—or any free-form areas—that include a hodge-podge of plants offering food and shelter to wildlife. Imagine in a corner of your yard, or along the border with your neighbor, a loose thicket with trees such as Elderberry, Dogwood, Sassafras, and Cedar, and shrubs like Spicebush, Black Haw, and Winterberry. Let the Pokeweed grow, and plant a Trumpet Vine and a few native grasses. Don't forget the nectar sources for bees! Asters, Goldenrod, Milkweed, and Wingstem are just a few of the many choices. Google "pollinators" and find numerous helpful links. Here is one place with loads of fun info: <http://www.pollinator.org/guides.htm>. The pollinators your plantings attract will be responsible for fruit and seed set, and the birds will come and will love you!

—Laura Neale



*Do you know this bird? See Bob's story on page 4. Photo by Dick Rowe*



## The President's Perch

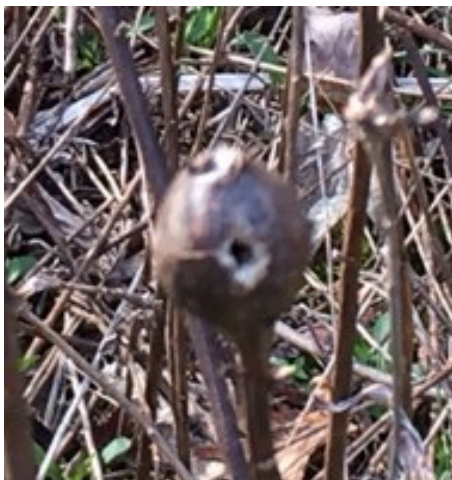
The Louisiana Waterthrushes came back to the stream last week. They're small but striking warblers with bold eye lines and a rich cream color on the breast among the streaks of brown.

I think I first heard them on March 24th, but already I'm not positive about the date. It seems early for "my" Waterthrushes, but I'm not really sure; Dick Rowe, on his website about Rockbridge County birds, says "they are one of the early arriving warblers, with an arrival date of 28 March 2009, and sightings are common by 15 April." The human ability to move knowledge from inside the limits of genetic givens and brain synapses to a place where others can understand and use it is a pretty big advantage—when it's actually done, which isn't very consistent in my case. (We'll hear more about the importance of keeping records and how we might contribute to important information-gathering at April's meeting.)

Anyway, the Waterthrushes are back. This is the third year I've heard them, but it's also just the third or fourth year that I've known the song, so they've probably been coming here long before I have. I do think of them as mine – I'm happy to hear them again in the spring and curious to follow their movements up and down the stream as the year progresses.

The truth is, though, these are among the most elusive birds I've come to know. I think I've actually seen one on the property only once. Though their song is strong and distinctive, they hide in the understory along the stream and are really hard (for me) to find. Arthur Bent reminds me (by way of his 1953 volume on the life history of wood warblers) that they walk as much as they fly, and you know them for sure when you see them bob as they walk. Bent quotes a Dr. Skutch describing their song this way: "chirp, chirp, chirp, his song began boldly; then, as though he were suddenly confused in his recitation, broke into a lisping and incoherent garble impossible to paraphrase in human sounds. Such is always the character of their song; they have never learned the end of it."

Their independence from human beings is somehow reassuring to me. Having feeders active throughout the winter can convince you that the resident birds really are dependent on you for their survival, and I find that a little disconcerting. It's also (happily) mostly incorrect, I think, though the winter survival rates are surely higher with increased availability of seed.



Jan gave me an example of natural resourcefulness when she showed me the galls that some bug creates on the dried stems of Goldenrod. Probably three out of four of these that I've seen on walks this winter had small round holes where a bird had pecked into the gall to find the larva inside. This was especially good news for me since "weeds" like Goldenrod are common in neglected fields and along unkempt fences, thereby vindicating my general laziness.

—Bob Biersack

*Editor's note: Sounds like Bob is a candidate for the Hedgerow Prize.*



*Goldenrod galls with holes made by birds to extract the larvae inside.  
Photo by Bob Biersack*

**The Club newsletter welcomes your submissions!** Send a photo, or a story about your trip, or a conservation concern, or anything else bird-related to [alexia@rockbridge.net](mailto:alexia@rockbridge.net). Thank you.

—Alexia Smith, Editor



For more information about the Club visit our website at [www.rockbridgebirdclub.org](http://www.rockbridgebirdclub.org)

Contact the Club by email at [rockbridgebirdclub@gmail.com](mailto: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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Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith, with format by Jan Smith. Logo by Jennifer Cox.