



February 2017 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. Field trips meet at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot.

Sat., Feb. 4, 8:00 a.m.—Boxerwood Bird Walk *

Weds., Feb. 8, 7:00 p.m.—Program: Jerry Via, “Migration Olympics” *

Sat., Feb. 18, 7:00 a.m.—Field Trip to Augusta County birding spots *

Sat., Mar. 4, 1:00 p.m.—Nest Box Building Workshop at Boxerwood (registration deadline: Feb. 10) *

Weds., Apr. 5, 7:00 p.m.—Program: Katie Fallon on Vultures (note change of date)

*see article below

When you have clay in your hands, it's hard to avoid making birds.

[Eva Zeisel](#) (Hungarian-born American industrial designer, 1906–2011)

First-Saturday Birding at Boxerwood: February 4

Meet Kerry Kilday at 8:00 a.m. in the Boxerwood parking lot for an outing of about two hours. If you have questions please call Kerry at (561) 389-9612. Directions: <http://boxerwood.org>

“Migration Olympics” at 7 p.m. Wednesday, February 8

At our next meeting, ornithologist Jerry Via will present a program on the extraordinary navigational abilities of birds that migrate through our area. He'll focus on the Neotropical migrants that breed in our woodlands and spend winters in the tropics, including their means of navigation, endurance records revealed by new technology, and some of the problems that climate change may pose for migrating birds. The meeting will take place in the Old Courthouse meeting room.

Jerry holds a doctoral degree in zoology from Virginia Tech, where he spent his career teaching and doing research on the ecology and natural history of birds. Club members who heard his lively talk at the most recent Virginia Society of Ornithology Annual Meeting were eager to host him here.

Augusta County Field Trip February 18

Meet at 7:00 am at the Lexington Food Lion parking lot for a field trip co-sponsored with the Augusta Bird Club and led by long-term expert birder Allen Lerner, who will take us to some of his favorite birding spots in Augusta County. We'll rendezvous with Allen and Augusta folks at 8:00 am at the Food Lion on N. Coalter Street and, depending on the birds

we see, tentatively plan to be back in Staunton around noon and in Lexington by mid-afternoon.

Allen plans a visit to Swoope, with stops at several ponds and an active eagle nest. We'll also walk the trail at Augusta Wetlands, which is handicap accessible. Species Allen expects to see include White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Brown Creepers. Possible sightings include Bald Eagle, Savannah Sparrow, Eurasian Collared Dove, Green-winged Teal, Black Duck, and Northern Pintail. And we have a chance of seeing a Snow Goose or Ross's Goose, mixed in with Canada Geese.

Bring water, snacks, and binoculars. Dress for the weather, including appropriate footwear for walking. If it's raining on the 18th, we'll try to go on the 19th; we'll contact you with any updates. For more information please contact Allen Lerner (540-280-3423; birdergonewild@yahoo.com), or Wendy Richards (540-463-5214; richardsw@wlu.edu).

Northern Pintail
Photo by Dick Rowe



Build a Birdhouse at Boxerwood on March 4

Would you like to provide local breeding birds with a safe, snug, well-ventilated place to nest this spring? You're invited to participate in a workshop at Boxerwood on Saturday, March 4, to construct nest boxes and predator guards.



photos courtesy of Bonnie Bernstein

Peter Hamel, park ranger on the Blue Ridge Parkway and a volunteer nest monitor, will give a trail talk about the life cycles of bluebirds and other cavity-nesting birds at 1pm. Nest box and guard making will follow from 1:45-4:00pm.

A workshop fee of \$20 payable at the door will cover the cost of a kit containing the materials to construct one side-opening nest box and an entry-hole guard (pre-cut lumber, hardware, and hardware cloth). Volunteers will provide tools and assistance.

Participants must register by Friday, February 10 to reserve their kits. To register, call or send email to Bonnie Bernstein (bonnie.bernstein@gmail.com; 460-9147). Please provide your name and indicate the number of kits you would like to reserve.

The workshop is sponsored by the Rockbridge Bluebird Conservation Project, Rockbridge Bird Club, Alleghany Master Naturalists, and Boxerwood.

— Bonnie Bernstein

From a Club member, a message about “BirdNote”

I’m sure most of you are aware of BirdNote, a two-minute radio segment each day. It is broadcast on NPR, but there is also a web link. If you haven't seen/heard it, I would highly recommend it! It is a delightful way to start your day, with a wide variety of topics... all about birds.

[This link](#) is about some of the birds that Susan and I lived with for our ten years in the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas. In fact, on our small 1/3-acre lot we had every one of the birds heard here (except for the Northern Beardless Tyrannulet), with some as residents and nesting on site. Enjoy!

— Danny Hoehne

The editor welcomes your contributions! Please email alexia@rockbridge.net.

Danny Hoehne also has the following query: “Do any of you have a successful Purple Martin colony? I've had them before (10 years ago, in Alexandria) and have done considerable research, planning to put up a gourd rack next month. I just have a few specific questions.” Please call Danny at 540-430-5080.

Field Trip Report: a scenic, wintry day

Highlights of the Rockbridge Bird Club trip to Lake Moomaw on February 28 included blustery winter winds, paired Hooded Mergansers floating the Jackson River, and a trip to the top of Little Alleghany Mountain in misguided hopes of accessing Bath Pumped Storage’s Upper Reservoir (no public access).



Ring-billed Gull. Photo by Guy Lichter, allaboutbirds.org

Though the day turned sunny by the time of our arrival at Coles Point on Lake Moomaw, the only birds on our side of the lake were Ring-billed Gulls—nice to see floating such that we could easily identify them. Far, far across the water along the opposite shore swam

small flocks of birds whose identification was hampered by waves and a shimmering mirage. We ultimately decided that we were looking at Horned Grebes—which would have been a thrilling pleasure if we'd been able to enjoy closer views. Another distant flock was identified by the tell-tale glimmering teal-green heads: Common Mallards. Northern lake sightings included skittish flocks of Common Mergansers—spectacular males with gleaming white bodies and emerald green heads—and immature Bald Eagles swooping overhead in and out of view.

Leaving Lake Moomaw, we headed up Back Creek to the lakes below Bath County Pumped Storage Station where we found—Canada Geese and Eastern Bluebirds. We then drove to the top of Little Alleghany Mountain and enjoyed distant views of scenery—not birds. The day was beautiful, and western Alleghany and Bath counties offer the feel of a remote mountain region. However, the waterfowl have not been numerous in the region this year, probably due to milder winter weather to the north. Why fly south when you can remain closer to your summer breeding grounds?

Spending the day with fellow bird enthusiasts, driving back roads and along the clear and fast-flowing waters of the Jackson River, and watching the gorgeous display of male Hooded Mergansers on the river with their mates all contributed to making a great outing.

—Laura Neale

Bob's Perch: further reflections on that wintry day

We had a chance, during the last weekend of January, to discover again—thanks to the trip, described above, that Wendy and Laura organized to Lake Moomaw and beyond—how easy it is to move from Lexington to genuine wilderness.



*Pair of Hooded
Mergansers.
photo by Dick Rowe*

We got the first taste of remoteness when we came upon a group of Hooded Mergansers as we crossed over the Jackson River. The striking coloring and broad heads of both males and females really stood out against the blue-green water, shoreline grays, and forest background.

Lake Moomaw was a large expanse of open water – unusual in late January, when usually at least some ice would cover parts of the surface. The morning was crisp and the winds were steady and seemed to be always in our faces, making it feel much colder.

We quickly learned that the way to find birds on the white-capped water was to watch for light-colored spots that didn't move and disappear as the wave crests did – not always easy. Those Ring-billed Gulls were close enough to see clearly in binoculars. But the group of birds on the water near the far shore we couldn't identify quickly. We were lucky to have two scopes with us, and while they made for a big improvement, there was still lots of discussion and checking of field guides before we settled on a tentative identification—we seemed to be looking at Horned Grebes.

They were hard to identify because they were so far away, and it was impossible to get close enough to improve the views. This was *their* world and we were just visiting – not entitled to “special” treatment, as life doesn't revolve around humanity in these remote places. Far more at home were the two immature Bald Eagles who drifted with the wind along the edges of the water.

This morning, back in the comforts of human habitat, there was the surprising sound of a Screech Owl in the forest behind our house, even a couple of hours after the sky had lightened: a hopeful reminder that we can live together so long as we respect the characteristics of landscape that different species need.

—Bob Biersack



For more information about the Club, visit our website at www.rockbridgebirdclub.org and find us on Facebook.

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.

Share your bird experiences on Facebook & in the Newsletter

You can post photos of birds and bird outings directly to the Rockbridge Bird Club Facebook page, or send them to Becky McKenzie, beckymckenzie128@gmail.com, for posting. For the newsletter, send items to the editor at alexia@rockbridge.net.

Thank you!

Club Officers

President, Alexia Smith
Vice President, Laura Neale
Secretary, Bob Biersack
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. Logo by Jennifer Cox.

Website managed by Bob Biersack

Facebook page managed by Becky McKenzie