



March 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., Mar. 4, 8:00 a.m.—Boxerwood Bird Walk *

Sat., Mar. 11, 8:00 a.m.—Field trip, Glen Maury Park *

Weds., Apr. 5, 7:00 p.m.—Program: Katie Fallon on vultures

Sat., April 29th—Brushy Hills Bird Walk

Fri.-Sun., May 5-7—[VSO Annual Meeting](#) in Richmond

Sat., May 13th—Field Trip to Apple Orchard Mountain

*see article below

The bluebird carries the sky on his back.

— Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

First-Saturday Birding at Boxerwood: March 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>

Bird Walk in Glen Maury Park, Buena Vista, on March 11

Kerry will also be the leader for this reprise of his Glen Maury outing last spring. Meet at 8:00 a.m. in the parking area between the tennis courts and the Maury River. The walk will be approximately two hours – more if birds are plentiful. Kerry plans to drive up to the levee area afterward to ‘scope the river and welcomes others to join him there as well. For more information, or in case of doubtful weather, please call Kerry at (561) 389-9612.

Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2

We are entering Year 2 of the five-year [VABBA2 project](#). Rockbridge County contains, or shares with adjoining counties, 14 of the state’s 811 “priority blocks”—specified areas on a “sampling grid” of the Virginia map, intended to insure coverage of the diverse habitats in our large state. Local birders (plus one mystery volunteer) have adopted eight of the Rockbridge priority blocks. Species confirmed so far in these blocks include Canada Goose, Bald Eagle, Eastern Phoebe, Red-eyed Vireo, Tree Swallow, Gray Catbird, Indigo Bunting, Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, and Brown Thrashers, and, of course, those birds for whom we love to provide housing—Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and Carolina Chickadees.



Eastern Bluebird. Photo by Dick Rowe

Just the thought of Northern Cardinals, Northern Mockingbirds, Indigo Buntings, American Goldfinches, and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds constructing nests and producing baby birds makes me excited. Probably most folks have noticed that along with the early warm temps many birds have started singing their territorial and courtship songs. In fact, quite a few birds have been noted across the state engaging in early breeding behaviors, and atlassers are encouraged to begin their observations.

For those who would like to learn more about how to contribute to Virginia's premier bird conservation effort, State Co-ordinator Ashley Peele has scheduled several workshops around the state, as shown below. Please consider participating in this important project. If you enjoy watching the birds, you are qualified to participate!

—Laura Neale

Regional VABBA2 Training Sessions

This is a new program for our second Atlas field season, but one we hope will provide helpful guidance for volunteers, both new and old. Each session will consist of morning small group field trips/walks led by experienced Atlas volunteers, followed by a large group session on data entry, reporting priority species, accurate location plotting, etc. Drinks and snacks will be provided to registered participants. These events will be free, but please bring your own binoculars and laptops (if possible).

- Northern Atlas Training - Co-sponsored by the Fairfax County Parks. Location: Frying Pan Farm Park. Date: April 1st. Time: 8am-1pm. Link to register: <https://goo.gl/forms/gnKxoYX4yGUQXVu53>

- Central Atlas Training - Co-sponsored by the Monticello Bird Club in Charlottesville. Date: March 25th. Time: 8am-1pm. Link to register: <https://goo.gl/forms/DwOOGFUIWCOBdvD12>

- Western Atlas Training - Location and date still to be determined. Stay tuned!

- Eastern Atlas Training - To be held at the VSO Annual Meeting in Richmond, May 6th at 4pm. This will be an indoor session, focused on data reporting, location accuracy, etc. Please sign-up when you register for the meeting. Following link below for more meeting info.

- Mount Rogers Naturalist Rally - May 12-14, Konnarock. Dr. Peele and southwest regional coordinator, Dr. Steven Hopp, will be leading several Atlas field workshops as part of this event. These workshops will take place in the morning and afternoon of Saturday, May 13th. This rally is always a unique opportunity to experience this beautiful ecoregion with experienced naturalist guides, so register today at <http://blueridgediscoverycenter.org/mrnrl/>.

—from the [Atlas website](#)



Eastern Phoebe. Photo by Dick Rowe

Conservation Note: Rockbridge Bird Club signs petition

Our Club is a member of the American Bird Conservancy, the Western Hemisphere's bird conservation specialist. (You may remember the Conservancy's offering expertise on the impact on birds of the Rocky Forge wind-power development.) We recently signed on to the organization's "Together for Birds" petition, which urges the President & Congress to support the Endangered Species Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, the Environmental Protection Agency, and land management for birds and people. You'll find the petition text in ABC's press release [here](#).

Bob's Perch

A Phoebe woke me up this morning. It's funny how a simple declarative sentence can have such different meanings – depending, in this case, on time of year. In June I would say this with frustration: "a Phoebe waking me up again!" – probably at 5 a.m. On February 25, however, it's a thing of beauty, just one of many reminders of this frighteningly early spring. It's not so unusual to see a Phoebe on a fence or a low

branch throughout the winter, flipping its tail and looking around. The difference, of course, is the song, monotonous and kind of shrill but still exciting the first time you hear it.

This sense of change began for us a couple of weeks ago when the call of a Great Horned Owl became much more persistent from the wooded hillside across the road. Well into the morning it would call pretty regularly. There never seemed to be a response, but I'm not sure there should have been, since this might just be a claim of territory—reminding me that I'm the intruder here. It was joined a few days ago by a screech owl in the same general area but closer to the house. An interaction that might not end well for the little guy, I would think.

Everybody is in on the act now. Bluebird pairs with males in electric new plumage are claiming boxes more than a week before the new ones are going to arrive. Yesterday I heard Pine Warblers singing along the AT on Tinker Mountain near Roanoke. They might have been there through the winter, but every song feels new now (Chickadees, Titmice, etc. have been here all along, but they're singing with a lot more enthusiasm these days).



*Soon to be in on the act: Red-winged Blackbird.
Photo by Dick Rowe*

I've been reflecting here on our seasonal responses to bird sounds, and I'm thinking too about the impact of very small ecosystems on bird sightings: We have two feeders, one on each side of the house, maybe 70 yards apart. One is in a relatively open area with deciduous trees around but not much underbrush. The other is close to the Spruce and Hemlock trees, and there are some overgrown patches and fencerows nearby. That's where I have reliably seen Red-breasted Nuthatches this year, along with White-throated Sparrows and Juncos and other common winter birds. As I was preparing to declare that these guys never make it to the other side of the house even though the food source is the same, of course they did get there – far less often, though.

While this extreme example is silly, I admit, the larger point (habitat is important and sometimes critical) still applies. I happen to live in the only wooded corridor between North Mountain and House Mountain, giving cover and comfort to the variety of species that need to travel back and forth, hopefully adding to the genetic diversity and therefore health of the birds and others who make the passage. The trade-off, though, is that our Kestrel box at the edge of a five-acre field surrounded by forest isn't likely to have an occupant any time soon; that's just too small an opening for Kestrels. In the northern part of the County, though, there are reports this year of pairs checking out boxes overlooking big open fields. The fact that there's something for everybody here is what makes this region so interesting, and ultimately globally important.

— 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

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