



May 2022 Newsletter
of the
Rockbridge Bird Club,
encouraging
the enjoyment, knowledge, &
conservation of birds in the Rockbridge Area

Calendar

Sat., May 14, 7:00 a.m. — Bird Walk in Brushy Hills *

Spring has returned. The Earth is like a child that knows poems.

— Rainer Maria Rilke (Austrian poet, 1879 - 1926)

Bird Walk in Brushy Hills at 7:00 a.m Saturday 14 May

W&L ornithologist Paul Cabe will lead the Club's annual Bird Walk in the Brushy Hills Preserve on Saturday, May 14. We'll meet at 7 a.m. at the main trailhead, at Town Spring (1010 Union Run), for an outing of about two hours. We're likely to hear (and hope to see!) a variety of woodland species, including Scarlet Tanager, Ovenbird, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, and Worm-eating Warbler.

Be sure to wear sturdy footwear and to bring water, snacks, and binoculars. For more information, contact Alexia Smith, 540-460-0854 or alexia@rockbridge.net.

Reporting on the April 9th Bird Walk in Boxerwood

The morning was cool but thankfully not wet as eight of us met at Boxerwood for an early spring bird walk. Early spring is a transitional time, when winter birds such as White-throated Sparrows and less-common Purple Finches are still in our area, before heading north to breed, and the first migrants from the south are appearing.

We saw an Eastern Phoebe, a species that is uncommon here in the winter but a common sight in the breeding season. They often nest under the eaves of buildings. A recently-arrived male Eastern Towhee's "tow-hee" call sounded — and we spied him, noting his striking pattern of black hood and back, rufous sides, and white belly. Brown-headed Cowbirds (an unpopular species due to their breeding strategy of laying their eggs in other birds' nests) are back, their bubbly song unmistakable. Pairs of Tree Swallows were checking out the bluebird boxes, swooping and perching, letting the sun strike their deep-blue iridescent backs as they chattered away.

The real treat of the morning was finding an adult Great-horned Owl, with the help of a flock of boisterous crows who were obviously not pleased to have the large predator in their neighborhood. Hopefully Boxerwood's pine woods and other dense-vegetation areas have now become a Great-horned Owl family's neighborhood. This hope is encouraged by recent sightings there of both juveniles and adults of this remarkable species.



Great Horned Owl. Photo by Baron Schwartz

Here are the 31 species we were able to identify on the walk: Tufted Titmouse – 4; Northern Cardinal – 12; American Robin – 5; Red-bellied Woodpecker – 3; American Crow – 2; Mourning Dove – 4; Carolina Wren – 2; Eastern Phoebe – 1; Northern Mockingbird – 2; Blue Jay – 4; House Finch – 2; Song Sparrow – 8; Fish Crow – 1; White-throated Sparrow – 6; Northern Flicker – 2; Pileated Woodpecker – 1; Eastern Bluebird – 5; Carolina Chickadee – 4; Purple Finch – 4; Downy Woodpecker – 1; Eastern Towhee – 4; Tree Swallow – 10; Wild Turkey – 1; Canada Goose – 2; Brown-headed Cowbird – 5; Cooper's Hawk – 2; Great Horned Owl – 1; Black Vulture – 14; Turkey Vulture 2; Field Sparrow – 4; American Goldfinch – 1.

— Wendy Richards

A report on the April 16th River Road field trip, along the Maury

The weather was mild for this spring outing with mostly cloudy skies, cool temperatures, and little wind for most of the trip. These conditions kept the birds active throughout the morning, and allowed us to tally 59 species in a fine group effort. Target species that we found included the Common Merganser, Green Heron, Barn Swallow, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and the Yellow-throated Warbler, which was one of the most numerous species for the trip. Yellow-rumped Warblers were also abundant, and



Green Heron. Photo by Bob Epperson

displayed a wide variety of plumages as many of the birds were developing breeding colors. Wood Duck, Wild Turkey, Bald Eagle, White-eyed Vireo, Brown Thrasher, Cedar Waxwing, and Common Yellowthroat were also observed. The final stop for our five-mile roadside birding adventure offered a great view of the fields, river corridor, and mountains to the west, and provided our final bird, a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

Complete list on eBird [here](#).

— Bob Epperson, trip leader

Reporting on the Apple Orchard Mountain trip, April 30th

A small group of us began walking up Apple Orchard Mountain via Radar Road at 7:40 in the morning under an overcast sky. It hadn't started raining yet, and there wasn't any wind. Birdsong came from every direction — Wood Thrushes, Ovenbirds, Vireos (both Red-eyed and Blue-headed), Eastern Towhees, Black-and-white Warblers, American Redstarts, even a Barred Owl! It felt like early spring up there, as most of the trees were leafless and the white-flowering trees were serviceberry instead of the later-blooming dogwood. Due to the lack of leaves we were treated to great views of warblers, vireos, a male Scarlet Tanager, and a male Rose-breasted Grosbeak who were singing and strutting their stuff! We were awed by a close-up view of a male Canada Warbler who wore a very fine and symmetrical black necklace against its yellow chest.

We had the mountain road to ourselves until a caravan of cars appeared, moving slowly behind us. The three vehicles' occupants were college students from Virginia Tech and William and Mary. When they emerged to more closely scope out the birds,

they wanted to know what we were seeing and hearing. There was a lot of energy and enthusiasm for birds, salamanders, and the joy of being out in nature exchanged between our two groups. Special thanks go to Dick Rowe and his daughter Lucy for leading us on yet another memorable Apple Orchard Mountain bird walk. It couldn't have been better!



Canada Warbler. Photo by Dick Rowe

Here's are the 31 species we were able to identify: Wild Turkey, Barred Owl, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Blue-headed Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue Jay, American Crow, Common Raven, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Gray Catbird, Eastern Bluebird, Veery, Wood Thrush, American Goldfinch, Chipping Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Eastern Towhee, Brown-headed Cowbird, Ovenbird, Black-and-white Warbler, Hooded Warbler, American Redstart, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Canada Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

— Wendy Richards

And finally... Bob's commentary on a field trip

Have you ever seen a Yellow-throated Warbler? Ever since Bob Epperson led us on that birding trip along the Maury on River Road, I've been trying to remember if I've seen this striking bird before.

The trees are filled with beautiful migratory songbirds at this time of year, but this particular species isn't generally seen west of the Blue Ridge until you get to central West Virginia and Kentucky. They occupy a variety of woodland habitats in breeding season, and they tend to breed between the Piedmont and the coast or else in the southern and central Midwest. I guess the ones we saw followed the James through the mountains and found their way to the lower end of the Maury. According to Birds of the World, their breeding range is expanding, so perhaps we'll see more of them.



Yellow-throated Warbler. Photo by Bob Epperson

These birds seemed a little larger than many Warblers, with a striking contrast between the blue and grey and black of their backs and heads against a bright yellow throat. And there were LOTS of them near the Glasgow end of River Rd. There was also an Eagle and a Green Heron, many Blue-gray Gnatcatchers and Yellow-rumped Warblers and the other species you would expect, but for me the highlight of the morning was the sight and sound of the Yellow-throated Warblers.

— Bob Biersack

Editor's note: See pages 6 & 7 for more photos of birds seen on recent field trips.



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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 Jan Smith, 564 Big Hill Road, Lexington, VA 24450. Thank you.

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 Laura Neale, 540-261-1909.

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Tree Swallows, photo by Baron Schwartz, and Veery, photo by Dick Rowe



*Blue-headed Vireo and
American Redstart.
Photos by Dick Rowe*

