



February 2023 Newsletter
of the
Rockbridge Bird Club,
encouraging
the enjoyment, knowledge, &
conservation of birds in the Rockbridge Area

Calendar

Sat., Feb. 11, 8:30 a.m. — Second-Saturday Birding at Boxerwood *

Mon. Feb. 13, 6:30 p.m. — Program: Pete Myers, "Bird Bedlam on the Beach" *

* see article below

Second Saturday Birding at Boxerwood: February 11 at 8:30 a.m.

We'll meet in the Nature Center parking lot (963 Ross Road) for a two-hour stroll. Everybody's welcome, including first-timers and families! We'll hope to see, among a variety of species in the Garden's varied habitats, the Great Horned Owl that has taken up residence in the pines.

Dress for the weather, wear sturdy footwear, and bring binoculars. In the event of inclement weather, the walk will be cancelled. For more information, contact Second-Saturday coordinator Bonnie Bernstein: 540-460-9147 or bonnie.bernstein@gmail.com.

*Boxerwood's Great Horned Owl
Photo by Dick Rowe*



Program: Pete Myers, "Bird Bedlam on the Beach"
6:30 p.m. on Monday, February 13
in the Piovano Room of the Rockbridge Regional Library

"Life on the beach is never calm for a bird," says biologist and bird photographer Pete Myers. His program will focus on the lives of shorebirds that winter on the beaches of California – lives fraught with danger and turmoil, as revealed in his marvelous photographs. "The same stories can be witnessed all along Virginia's

beaches,” Myers notes. He’ll show us the bedlam that unfolds when western shorebirds compete to capture mole crabs, the food on which they depend for survival.

Myers earned a PhD in biological sciences at U.C. Berkeley, studying and photographing birds in Argentina, coastal California, and the Alaskan North Slope. Over time, his research interests shifted from birds to environmental health, and in 2002 he founded Environmental Health Sciences, a non-profit that advances public understanding of important issues in environmental health.

Birds remain his favorite subject, though; he says that when he’s focusing on birds, “using photography to capture and celebrate their unique beauty — it’s better than therapy!”



Photograph courtesy of Pete Myers

Birding Apps: Personal Choices

Birding apps offer a broad choice of opportunities for bird identification, list-making, or notes-taking, and for seeing where and what birds have been reported in an area. The attraction of apps is one’s ability to search and record data in the field without lugging field guides. Consulting an app while you’re birding offers the same advantages and drawbacks inherent in smartphone ownership in general — drawbacks such as looking at the screen instead of at the world and its creatures all around you.

Top field identification apps include **Merlin** (free), Cornell Lab’s multiple-use guide; **Audubon** (free); and **Sibley’s** (\$19.99). The first bird app I purchased, years ago, was a version of Ibird that I downloaded onto my iPad; but that app is now unpopular, as it requires an annual subscription starting at \$30.

I mostly use **Sibley’s**, because I prefer David Sibley’s renditions of birds over **Audubon’s** photos. Both apps have a comparison feature that allows you to look at similar birds, and both allow you to restrict possible birds to those in a specific state.

Merlin is in its own category: it offers four options on its homepage. The first is called **Start Bird ID** and allows one to answer a few questions about a mystery bird in

order to make an identification. I had never used it until last December, when we were zooming along a foggy southern Arizona highway and I saw an enormous bird sagging down a power line, and no place we could pull over or turn around. I pulled out my phone and answered all of the Merlin questions, and presto: I had just seen a wet Crested Caracara!



Crested Caracara: striding along, not wet. Photo by Mark Hughes, from the Macauley Library

The second **Merlin** option is **Photo ID**, which theoretically allows one to upload a photo of the bird for ID; I have no experience with that. The third option is the wildly popular **Sound ID**, where one can record nearby birds for instant — but not always correct — identification. This app has removed barriers for those who have felt overwhelmed by the challenge of learning and remembering what seems like an endless number of bird sounds (and actually *is*, in my experience, as birds don't always follow their own rules). It can be a valuable learning tool. For positive ID, it's important to either see or hear the bird yourself, rather than solely relying on Sound ID. Learning bird calls and songs is a lifelong endeavor; moreover, letting go of the need to identify a bird song and just embracing its beauty can be a freeing act.

The fourth Merlin option is **Explore Birds**, comparable to a field guide, with pictures and information.

Each of the apps described above offers you the option of keeping track of birds seen. However, using Cornell Lab's **eBird** app (free; you need to set up an account) offers you the opportunity to take part in the biggest citizen science project of all time: eBird contributions have provided a huge data trove that helps scientists help birds. At the same time, eBird also keeps track of your sightings so that they can be reviewed in numerous ways. Folks have life lists, year lists, county lists, etc., and eBird keeps all your numbers, for you to examine in a multitude of ways.

Another feature of eBird is that you can explore sightings in an area to see what birds have been seen when and where. There's another free app that also helps you learn which birds that have been seen in locations where eBird lists have been

submitted: **BirdsEye** lets you search for birds along various parameters anywhere in the world without having an eBird account.

Apps are like field guides, in that each has its strengths but somehow any given one is never quite enough. Here are two more guides useful for our area: **Raptor ID** (free), and **The Warbler Guide** (\$12.99).

We're hoping to have an apps tutorial session when the weather warms up, if folks are interested. [Email the Club](#) and let us know if you'd like to attend such a session.

— *Laura Neale*
Conservation Chair



Merlin, the bird. Photo by Dick Rowe

Annual Meeting Report: Election & Treasurer's Report

Election

Members present at the Club's Annual Meeting on November 14 voted in the proposed slate, with President and VP offices vacant. So the Executive Committee now consists of Joyce Cambron, Secretary; Jan Smith, Treasurer; Bonnie Bernstein, Publicity; Bob Biersack, Website; Laura Neale, Conservation; Wendy Richards, Field Trips; and Alexia Smith, Newsletter Editor & Membership. Individual ExCom members will share in the leadership role.

Election follow-up

The Executive Committee expressed the hope that some of you, Bird Club members and friends, will consider volunteering in some area of activity. A few possibilities include: posting announcements to the Club's Facebook page, arranging supper (and lodging if needed) for a speaker, lining up a venue for a program, helping with requests for club outreach to the community, and researching program possibilities.

To put it another way: what interests or skills do you have that you'd enjoy offering to the Bird Club?

Treasurer's Report for Fiscal 2022
(September 1, 2021 to August 31, 2022)

presented by Jan Smith:

Income	\$ 1,525.00	
Expenses	<u>\$ 2,172.23</u>	
Difference	\$ (647.23)	
Checking Account Balance		
Start of Year	\$ 2,499.01	
End of Year	<u>\$ 1,851.78</u>	
Difference	\$ (647.23)	
Membership: 51 household memberships		
Income Details		
Dues	\$ 705.00	46%
Donations	<u>\$ 820.00</u>	54%
	\$ 1,525.00	100%
Expense Details		
Donations to other groups		
VSO Breeding Bird Atlas	\$ 1,000.00	
Boxerwood	\$ 250.00	
American Bird Conservancy	\$ 250.00	
Ctr for Conservation Biology	<u>\$ 250.00</u>	
	\$ 1,750.00	81%
Organizational memberships	\$ 30.00	1%
Speaker costs (Ackerman & Meiburg)	\$ 350.00	16%
Other expenses (birdhouse repair)	<u>\$ 24.23</u>	2%
	\$ 2,172.23	100%
In-kind donations: website payments	\$ 51.97	

Fiscal Year 2023 started on September 1...

...and so has passed the one-third mark! Have you meant to join, or to renew or your membership? Dues are just \$15 per household; extra donations are always welcome, too. Your contributions make our public programs possible and enable the Club to support the best bird conservation efforts.

**Please scroll down to find out where to send your check
— and to see another photo.**

Thank you!



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.

Club Officers

President, vacant
Vice President, vacant
Secretary, Joyce Cambron
Treasurer, Jan Smith
Program Chair, vacant

Field Trip Chair, Wendy Richards
Conservation Chair, Laura Neale
Publicity Chair, Bonnie Bernstein
Membership Chair, Alexia Smith
Club Ornithologist, Dick Rowe

Newsletter edited by Alexia Smith. Logo by Jennifer Cox
Website managed by Bob Biersack
Facebook page manager needed



*Peregrine Falcon. Photo by Dick Rowe
(What do the master-predator Peregrine and the
opportunistic-feeder Crested Caracara have in common?)*