The Birds of the Greater Rockbridge County, Virginia Area

Loons and Grebes

Richard A. Rowe

Department of Biology
Virginia Military Institute

Accidental – A bird outside of its normal range (breeding or winter) or outside of its normal migration route
Rare – A bird that is within its normal breeding or over-wintering range or its normal migration route, but should not be expected to be seen in the area on a yearly basis
Unusual – A bird that is within its normal breeding or over-wintering range but is not reported on a regular basis in the county (1-5 sightings per year)
Common – A bird that is regularly seen within the area but may not be present in large numbers or may have a restricted distribution (Locally Common)
Abundant – A bird that is found in large numbers within the county but may have a restricted distribution (Locally Abundant)

Transient – A bird that is seen in the area during migration or as a wandering sub-adult
Year-round – A bird that is present in the area throughout the entire year and is usually a breeder
Summer breeder – A bird that migrates into the area and breeds during the summer
Winter migrant/resident – A bird that migrates into the area and over-winters and then leaves in the spring

Locations

BB = Brownsburg and Bustleburg area including Route 252
BQ = Barger's Quarry
BRP 1 = Blue Ridge Parkway between mileposts 28 and 45 (Route 56 and Route 60)
BRP 2 = Blue Ridge Parkway between mileposts 45 and 64 (Route 60 and the James River)
BRP AO = Blue Ridge Parkway and Apple Orchard Mountain (mileposts 76 to 78)
BS = Big Spring
CT = Chessie Trail
GP = Goshen Pass
KD = Kendal Retirement community
LEX = Lexington
LM = Lake Merriweather at Goshen Pass
LR = Lake Robertson
LT = Locher Tract
MF = McCormick's Farm
MR = Maury River
NM = North Mountain
OFRP = Old Farm Road Pond
PQ = Quarry at the Ponds
RB = Rockbridge Baths area
RC = Rockbridge County in general
SR = South River
WL = Willow Lake

Notes:
Cameron's Pond, which was located near the current Rockbridge County High School, drained naturally in 19??.

Womeldorf Farm ponds are located just outside of Lexington in the new, Pond's housing development.
Lake Robertson and Lake Merriweather were created after Murray published his account of the Birds of Rockbridge County.

Gaviiformes:

Loons

(All photos: Loons and Grebes)

Red-throated Loon (*Gavia stellata*):

Occurrence: Transient through the area during migration
Dates: 12 November 2009
Location: WL
History: There is only one, confirmed record of a Red-throated Loon in Rockbridge County. Alex Merritt found this individual at Willow Lake. The bird was subsequently photographed by Lucy Rowe. The loon arrived following a strong low pressure system that moved through the area. This system brought in a number of unusual species to Willow Lake.
Status: Rare and not expected in the county
Photo: Red-throated Loon (left) with Common Loon (right) at Willow Lake, 12 Nov 2009.
For additional photos: Red-throated Loon

Common Loon (*Gavia immer*):

Occurrence: Transient through the area during migration
Dates: November through May
Locations: WL, BS, BRP JR, LR
History: There have been several recent sightings of loons in the area. Dick Rowe saw one individual on the James River near the Appalachian Trail Foot Bridge on 31 March 2001 and Kieran Kilday saw one on the James River at the Blue Ridge Parkway on 17 April 2009. John Burleson sighted a loon on Big Spring Pond on 17 April 2007. A single individuals have been seen at Willow Lake by Dick Rowe on 22 May 2009, on 29 October 2011, and on 22 December 2011. A single bird was seen along the James River near the Locher Tract on 10 April 2011. Alex Merritt reported a flock of 24 individuals on Willow Lake on 12 November 2009 and nine individuals were seen on Willow Lake on 13 November 2009 by Lucy Rowe. Alex Merritt reported a single bird at Lake Robertson on 7 November 2010. These birds were associated with the passing of the remnants of tropical storm Ida through the area. One Common Loon was reported during CBC count week in 1933. Murray notes five records: on the Maury River in 1890, 8 May 1921, and 1923; and Woods Creek on 13 December 1932 and 7 January 1937.
Status: Rare and should not be expected to be seen in the county.
Photo: Willow Lake, 22 May 2009.
For additional photos: Common Loon

Podicipediformes:

Grebes

(All photos: Loons and Grebes)

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*):

Occurrence: Common winter migrant during late fall, winter, and spring
Dates: Earliest arrival – 1 October
Departure – 24 April
Locations: WL, MF, BS, LR, LM, BQ, MR, OLFP
History: Pied-billed Grebes have been reported on Willow Lake, Lake Robertson, the Maury River along the Chessie Trail, Lake Merriweather, Barger's Quarry pond, McCormick's Farm, and Big Spring. In 2012 a breeding pair was present on Old Farm Road Pond (6th breeding record for the Mountains-Valley region of Virginia). The pair with four young were discovered on 16 June. One to two individuals remained on the pond through the fall. There are numerous recent records of Pied-billed Grebes on Willow Lake with individuals arriving as early as 16 October and being seen on the lake as late as 24 April. Their presence during the winter is affected by the lake freezing over, as it did during the winter of 2010-2011. Birds have been reported on 30 November 2003 and 23 December 2003 on Willow Lake, 23 February 2004 on the Maury River, March 2010 on Big Springs, and 26 December 2009 at Lake Robertson (8 individuals). Pied-billed Grebes have been reported in 32 of 84 CBC with a high count of 14 individuals seen in 1998. Murray reports individuals seen from 30 August through 18 May.

Status: Uncommon during the winter and scarce when ponds and lakes freeze-over.
Photo: upper photo: Willow Lake, 5 April 2011; lower photo: Old Farm Rd Pond, 16 June 2012
For additional photos: Pied-billed Grebe

Horned Grebe (*Podiceps auritus*):

Occurrence: Winter migrant/resident
Dates: November through April
Locations: LM, BQ, JR, WL
History: There are twelve recent records of Horned Grebes in the area. An individual was observed on 13 February and 11 March 2003 at Barger's Quarry Pond and on 5 April 2005 on the James River near the AT Foot Bridge. An individual was present on Lake Merriweather on 11 February 2009, 18 March 2009, and on 30 March 2009. There are five reports of Horned Grebes on Willow Lake; 23 March 2009, 13 and 14 November 2009, 14 December 2010, and one to four individuals were present from mid March through early April 2011. Horned Grebes have been reported in 11 of 84 CBC. Murray reports 13 records from 5 October through 1 May with individuals seen in the Maury River, Lexington Reservoir, Woods Creek, and Cameron's and Womeldorf Pond.
Status: Uncommon and not expected in the county.
Photo: Upper photo: Lake Merriweather, 19 March 2009; lower photo, Willow Lake 17 March 2011.
For additional photos: Horned Grebe

Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*)

Occurrence: Transient during migration
Dates: 18 March 2009
Location: LM
History: Only one individual has been reported in the county. Alex Merritt located this individual on Lake Merriweather on 18 March 2009.
Status: Rare and not be expected in the county.
Photo: Lake Merriweather, 19 March 2009.
For additional photos: Red-necked Grebe