The Birds of the Greater Rockbridge County, Virginia Area

Storks, Cormorants, Bitterns, Herons, Egrets, and Ibis

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

<u>Locations</u>

BB = Brownsburg and Bustleburg area including Route 252
BC = Buffalo Creek
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 1936.
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.

Ciconiiformes:
Storks

Wood Stork (*Mycteria americana*)
Occurrence: Accidental
Dates: 25 July 1979 to 29 August 1979
Location: KC
History: A flock of seven to 19 birds was spotted on Kerr's Creek from late July through late August of 1979. A photograph showing 2 storks taken by Nell Bolen was published in the 8 August 1979 edition of the Lexington News-Gazette.
Status: Accidental and not expected.

Suliformes:
Cormorants

Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*):

Occurrence: Spring and fall transient on lakes and the Maury River but does not breed in the area.
Dates: Earliest arrival – 16 March 2011
Latest departure – 26 December 2008
Locations: WL, MR, LM, JR, BS
History: Cormorants can be seen along the James River (commonly seen along the James River from AT Foot Bridge to the Blue Ridge Parkway), portions of the Maury River, Willow Lake, Lake Merriweather, and Big Springs. The earliest record is 16 March 2011 with four individuals located on the Maury River south of Buena Vista. On 20 March 2011, 11 individuals were seen in the same location. Individuals are regularly seen from the last week of March until the fall with one late sighting of 12 November (2005). One individual was reported in 2001 and 2008 for CBC. Murray reports two individuals in 1924 and 1939 in Lexington.
Status: Common on the James River but less common on lakes and rivers in the county.
Photo: Willow Lake, 19 September 2008.
For additional photos: Double-crested Cormorant

Pelicaniformes:

Bitterns, Herons, Egrets, and Ibis

(For all photos: Storks, Cormorants, Bitterns, Herons, Egrets, and Ibis)

American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*):

Occurrence: Transient during migration
Dates: 8 April 2002, mid-April through mid-May and November
Locations: BRP at JR, RC
History: One individual was seen on 8 April 2002 along the James River at the Blue Ridge Parkway. From mid-April to mid-May 2003 an individual was in the Poplar Hill area near Lexington. Murray reports eight records in late March through mid-May, 4 November 1937 and 2 December 1954. One individual was reported in 1987 on the CBC
Status: Rare and not expected in the county.

Least Bittern (*Ixobrychus exillis*):

Occurrence: Transient
Dates: 16 May 2011 and 4 – 6 September 1948
Locations: LT and Cameron's Pond, which no longer exists.
History: There are only two confirmed reports in the area. Kieran Kilday located a Least Bittern at Locher Tract on 16 May 2011, and Murray reports one individual present from 4 to 6 September in 1948 on Cameron's Pond.
Status: Rare and not expected in the area.

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*):

Occurrence: Common, year-round resident in the area. Nesting rare.
Dates: Year-round
Locations: MF, WL, BS, MR, creeks and ponds throughout RC
History: Great Blue Herons are reported year-round in the area. They are seen along many of the creeks, rivers, and ponds in the area (reports from Woods Creek, the Maury River along the Chessie Trail, McCormick's Farm, Goshen Pass and the James River). In 2002 the first recorded nest was reported along South River near Nature Camp. The nesting tree appears to have been up-rooted by a flood. Great Blue Herons have been reported in 54 of 84 CBC and seen every year since 1979. Murray reports individuals seen throughout the year but no breeding records.
Status: Common and should be seen
Photo: McCormick's Farm ponds, 24 July 2011.
For additional photos: Great Blue Heron

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*):

Occurrence: Summer resident and transient
Dates: May through October
Locations: SR, WL, BRP at JR
History: One individual seen flying along the James River at the Blue Ridge Parkway on 4 May 2002 and two individuals were seen along the James River in 2006 (8 July at the James River and Blue Ridge Parkway and 6 August near the AT Foot Bridge). One individual was seen at Willow Lake 14 June 2008, another individual was reported on South River near the Maury on 25 July 2009, and a third individual was reported along Buffalo Creek on 2 October 2006. There is no record of Great Egrets nesting in the county and many of the sightings may represent post-nesting dispersal into our area.
Status: Unusual but may be seen along creeks and rivers or lakes during the summer.
Photo: South River near confluence with the Maury River, 25 July 2009.
For additional photos: Great Egret

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*):

Occurrence: Transient
Dates: June through September
Locations: Cameron's Pond, which no longer exists
History: Murray reports that Little Blue Herons are "fairly common" in the area. Individuals are reported from 17 June to 8 September, and a flock of 20 was noted. Bob Paxton reports that most of the Little Blue Herons seen in the area are likely to be juveniles that are moving away from summer nesting areas before migrating south for the winter. There have been no recent records for the area.
Status: Rare with no reports since 1992. Not expected in the area.

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Occurrence: Accidental
Dates: 7-8 May
Location: RC
History: A single Cattle Egret was located in the Wheatlan subdivision outside of Buena Vista by Anne and John Alerding. The bird was part of the fallout of birds in the area due to a strong low pressure system off the East coast. The bird remained in the area for 2 days.
Status: Accidental and not expected in the area
Photo: Wheatlan subdivision, 7 May 2013
For additional photos: Cattle Egret

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder
Dates: Earliest arrival – 12 April
Latest Departure – 2 October
Mid April through July
Locations: MF, WL, LR, MR, creeks and ponds in RC
History: Green Herons are seen locally along creeks and rivers as well as ponds and lakes. The earliest record is 12 April 2004, and individuals are seen commonly beginning in the first week of May. Individuals are reported throughout the summer and into August, September, and October (2 October 2006). One individual was reported for the 1971 CBC. Murray reports individuals seen from March through October.
Status: Common summer resident/breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: McCormick's Farm ponds, 19 July 2009.
For additional photos: Green Heron

Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*):

Occurrence: Transient
Dates: Early April through mid-May and August - September
Location: WL
History: There are three recent records for the county. All records are for juveniles found at Willow Lake. One individual was located on 12 September 2010, another individual was present from 1 Aug 2011 until 14 August 2011. The third record is for a single individual present at Willow Lake on 12 and September 2012. Murray reports eight records from five different locations in the area, but no specific dates or location were provided. One was reported in 1984 on the CBC.
Status: Rare and not expected in the area.
Photo: Willow Lake, 1 Aug 2011.
For additional photos: Black-crowned Night Heron

Yellow-crowned Night Heron (*Nyctanassa violacea***):**

Occurrence: Transient
Dates: May through August
Location: SR
History: An adult was present along South River from mid-August through mid-September, 2010. An adult was seen in the same area on 23 July of 2011 and again in late July and early August of 2012. Two sightings were reported by Murray. One individual on 26 July 1950 near

Lexington and one by Robert Paxton and Royster Lyle on 3 May 1953 on Cameron's Pond.
Status: Rare and not expected in the area.
Photo: South River, 1 August 2012.
For additional photos: Yellow-crowned Night Heron

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)

Occurrence: Accidental
Dates: late 1970's
Location: LEX
History: A small group of Glossy Ibis' was found in a temporary pond along RT 39 across from the current Virginia Horse Center.
Status: Accidental and not expected.

White Ibis (*Eudocimus albus***)**

Occurrence: Transient
Dates: 13 – 26 July, 2011
Location: SR and BC
History: A single juvenile was located on Buffalo Creek on 13 July 2011. The individual remained in the area for two days. This bird represents the first record of White Ibises in the county. On 21 July 2011, three juveniles were located on South River near the Maury River. The individuals were present through 26 July 2011. Reports were submitted to VARCOM on both sightings and were accepted as confirmed records. It should be noted that White Ibis were reported in some of the surrounding counties during the late summer of 2011.
Status: Transient and not expected
Photo: South River, 26 July 2011
For additional photos: White Ibis