The Birds of the Greater Rockbridge County, Virginia Area

Chickadees, Titmice, Nuthatches, Creepers, Wrens, Gnatcatchers, and Kinglets

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.

Passeriformes: Paradae

Chickadees and Titmice

(All photos: Chickadees, Titmice, Nuthatches, Creepers, Wrens, Gnatcatchers, and Kinglets)

Carolina Chickadee (*Poecile carolinensis*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident/breeder
Dates: Year-round
Location: RC
History: Carolina Chickadees can be found at all elevations in the county and are widespread. They have been reported in 75 of 84 CBC with an average of 57 individuals seen each count. The highest, recent count was 118 individuals reported in 2002. Murray reports nests with eggs present from 24 April through 29 May.
Status: Common, year-round resident/breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: Lexington, 27 February 2009.
For additional photos: Carolina Chickadee

Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident/breeder at higher elevations and in the western portion of the county.
Dates: Year-round
Locations: There are a number of recent records of Black-capped Chickadees. Most of the records are from the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Goshen Pass area, but in 2010 there was either an expansion of their range or a large winter migration. Typically, Black-caps are more common on the western edge of the county. Portions of Rockbridge County represent a hybrid zone between Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees. During 2010, Black-capped Chickadees were seen in large numbers throughout the area. The 2010 CBC recorded the second highest count, 62, for this species. Black-capped Chickadees have been reported on 60 of 84 CBC with an average of 12 individuals seen each count. Murray considered Black-capped Chickadees to be winter visitors to the area.
Status: Locally common (western portions of the county) year-round resident and breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: Goshen Pass, 23 January 2009.
For additional photos: Black-capped Chickadee

Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident/breeder
Dates: Year-round
Location: RC
History: A common, year-round resident of the area. The Tufted Titmouse has been reported on 82of 84 CBC with an average of 53 individuals seen each count. The highest, recent count was 176 individuals reported in 2006. Murray reports nests in early May.
Status: Common, year-round resident/breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: Lexington, 19 March 2008.
For additional photos: Tufted Titmouse

Passeriformes: Sittidae

Nuthatches

Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*):

Occurrence: Transient and winter resident
Dates: Early October through early April
Locations: BRP 1, BRP 2, GP, LR, LEX, RC
History: There are a number of recent records of Red-breasted Nuthatches. Red-breasted Nuthatches are most often seen in November and December which coincides with fall migration. They have been reported as early as 5 September 2009 along the Parkway and as late as 5 April 2006. They are found, commonly, along the Blue Ridge Parkway north of milepost 45 during late fall and winter. It is not uncommon to see them at lower elevations and visiting bird feeders. Red-breasted Nuthatches have been reported on 34 of 84 CBC with 23 individuals seen in 2001, but none were seen in 2008 or 2009. Their presence in the area is highly cyclical. Murray notes them as winter visitors present in the mountains from 12 September to 30 April.
Status: Unusual winter resident and migrant and could be seen in the area.
Photo: Blue Ridge Parkway near Whetstone Ridge, 3 January 2009.
For additional photos: Red-breasted Nuthatch

White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta carolinensis*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident/breeder
Dates: Year-round
Location: RC
History: White-breasted Nuthatches are a common, year-round resident in the area. They can be found throughout the county in forested and residential areas. White-breasted Nuthatches have been reported on 81 of 84 CBC. They have been reported on the CBC every year since 1962. Murray reports nest as early as 3 May in 1928.
Status: Common, year-round resident/breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: Blue Ridge Parkway near milepost 44, 3 January 2009.
For additional photos: White-breasted Nuthatch

Passeriformes: Certhiidae

Creepers

Brown Creeper (*Certhis americana*):

Occurrence: Transient and winter resident
Dates: Mid-November through early April
Locations: CT, BS, LEX, LR, GP, RC
History: Brown Creepers are common winter residents of the area. The earliest arrival date is 7 October 2010 and the birds are commonly seen beginning in the third week of November. They remain in the area as late as 10 April (2011). Brown Creepers have been reported on 60 of 84 CBC. Murray reports that Creepers are present in the area between 2 October and 26 April.
Status: Common winter resident and migrant and could be seen in the area.
Photo: McCormick's Farm, 17 October 2012.
For additional photos: Brown Creeper

Passeriformes: Troglodytidae

Wrens

Carolina Wren (*Thyothorus ludovicianus*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident and breeder
Dates: Year-round
Location: RC
History: Carolina Wrens are a common, permanent resident in the area. They can be found throughout the county and at all elevations. Carolina Wrens are commonly seen on CBC being reported in 82 of 87 counts with an average of 31 individuals seen each year. Murray reports eggs by 29 March. He notes that the "wren is not often seen above 2000 feet…", although I have numerous records (11) of individuals above 2000 feet in elevation.
Status: Common, year-round resident and breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: Goshen Pass, 1 June 2008.
For additional photos: Carolina Wren

Bewick's Wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*):

Occurrence: Expatriated from the area, but formerly summer resident/breeder
Dates:
Location: Formerly LEX, GP
History: Bewick's Wrens were common in the Appalachian region through the mid-1950s. By 1980, only a few restricted breeding populations were found along the Appalachian Mountain chain. Presently, Bewick's Wrens are no longer found in the area. Murray reports that Bewick's Wren is a fairly common summer resident with nests found in an area west of Lexington. Bob Paxton has commented that they were once fairly common but they are no longer present.
Status: No longer present.

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder
Dates: Early April through September
Location: RC
History: House Wrens are a common, summer resident in the area. House Wrens are commonly seen beginning by the third week of April (earliest arrival 8 April 2002) and can be found throughout the county and at all elevation. House Wrens have been reported six times on the CBC with the last record in 1994. Murray reports an

arrival date of 4 April and a departure date of 18 October. He notes that eggs have been found as early as 2 May and I have a record of young in the nest as late as 26 July 2007. Murray also notes two winter records, 23 December 1952 and 28 December 1952 to 3 January 1953.
Status: Common summer resident and breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: Blue Ridge Parkway near mile post 27, 26 May 2008.
For additional photos: House Wren

Winter Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*):

Occurrence: Winter resident and transient
Dates: Mid-October through May
Location: CT, LEX, SR, RC, LT
History: There are a number of recent records of Winter Wrens in the area. The earliest record is 18 October 2003 in Lexington and the latest occurrence is 31 May 1996 at the top of Apple Orchard Mountain. Typically, Winter Wrens arrive in the first week of December and remain in the area through mid-March. They are commonly seen and heard along the Maury River/Chessie Trail. Winter Wrens have been reported in 69 of 84 CBC with an average of 2-3 individuals seen each year. Murray reports a range of occurrence from 21 September to 4 May.
Status: Uncommon winter resident and migrant and could be seen in the area.
Photo: Locher Tract, 3 January 2012
For additional photos: Winter Wren

Sedge Wren (Short-billed Marsh Wren) (Cistothorus platensis):

Occurrence: Accidental or transient
Dates: May and October
Location: LEX (Cameron's Pond)
History: Murray reports two records of Sedge Wrens at Cameron's Pond from 2 May to 27 May 1935 and on 14 October 1935. There have been no recent sightings.
Status: Accidental and not expected to be seen in the area.

Marsh Wren (Long-billed Marsh Wren) (*Cistothorus palustris*):

Occurrence: Transient primarily during fall migration
Dates: Late August through November
Location: RC
History: Murray reports this bird as being a transient in the fall and uncommon. He notes occurrence dates of 25 August to 26 November. He provides no locality data or years for the sightings. There have been no recent sightings.
Status: Accidental and should not be expected in the area.

Passeriformes: Polioptilidae

Gnatcatchers

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila caerulea*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder
Dates: Early April through mid August-September
Locations: BRP 2, GP, JR, SR
History: Blue-gray Gnatchatchers are one of the early spring arrivals. They are commonly seen beginning in the first week of April and are reported through mid-August and into September. The earliest recent arrival date is 3 April 2003 and the latest recent record is 9 October 2009 near Rockbridge Baths. Murray reports arrival date of 1 April and a departure date of 19 September. Nesting occurs in early May.
Status: Common summer resident/breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: South River, 20 May 2010.
For additional photos: Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Passeriformes: Regulidae

Kinglets

Golden-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*):

Occurrence: Winter resident and migrant
Dates: Mid-October through early April
Locations: BRP 1, BRP 2, CT, GP, LM, LR, LEX, RC
History: Golden-crowned Kinglets are a common, winter resident in the area. They are often found in mixed feeding flocks with chickadees, titmice, and juncos. The earliest arrival date 13 October 2008 and the latest departure date is 15 April 2009. Golden-crowned Kinglets have been reported in 77 of 84 CBC with a yearly average of 35 individuals peak number of 266 reported in 1990. Murray reports occurrence dates of 4 October to 2 May for the area.
Status: Common winter resident
Photo: Willow Lake, 3 November 2012.
For additional photos: Golden-crowned Kinglet

Ruby-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus calendula*):

Occurrence: Common winter resident and transient
Dates: October through late April
Location: BRP 1, BRP 2, LEX, MF, GP, CT, LR, LM, RC
History: Ruby-crowned Kinglets are a common, winter resident in the area and are seen and heard more often in the spring, but they are not present in the area in large numbers. The earliest arrival date is 29 September 2010 along the Parkway near Irish Gap and the latest departure date is 30 April 2009 near Rockbridge Baths. They can be seen from mid-October through late April. Ruby-crowned Kinglets have been reported in 50 of 84 CBC with an average of 4 to 5 individuals seen each year. Murray considers Ruby-crowned Kinglets to be transients rather than residents of the area. He notes a fall occurrence between 19 September and 29 November and a spring occurrence between 3 March and 8 May. My records indicate that kinglets are in the area from October through April, but there is a peak in sightings from late March through mid-April.
Status: Uncommon though regular winter resident and migrant through the area and should be seen in the area.
Photo: McCormick's Farm, 6 November 2010.
For additional photos: Ruby-crowned Kinglet