The Birds of the Greater Rockbridge County, Virginia Area

Tanagers, Grosbeaks, Cardinals, and Indigo Bunting

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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
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: Cardinalidae

Tanagers, Cardinals, Grosbeaks, and Buntings

(All photos: Tanagers, Cardinals, Grosbeaks, and Indigo Buntings)

Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder although there have been no recent sightings
Dates: May through September
Locations: RC
History: Bob Paxton reports seeing Summer Tanagers on North Mountain during the 1980's, but there have been no sightings since that time. Murray reports that Summer Tanagers are found below 1400 feet in elevation and are locally common. He reports nests on 11 May 1953, 23 May 1847, 6 June 1931, 19 June 1934, 2 July 1932, and 10 July 1928. Murray notes that Summer Tanagers occur between 24 April and 27 September.
Status: Rare summer resident/breeder and not expected.

Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder
Dates: Mid April through September
Locations: BRP 1, BRP 2, BRP AO, GP, LR, LEX, RC
History: Scarlet Tanagers are a common summer resident of the area. They are most commonly found in the forests along the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Goshen Pass area. The earliest arrival date is 20 April at Brushy Hill outside of Lexington in 2003 and in the southern part of the county in 2009. By late April they are commonly heard along the Blue Ridge Parkway. The recent latest departure date is 1 October 2006 along the Appalachian Trail. Murray reports a range of occurrence between 21 April and 6 October with nesting occurring between 15 May 1931 and 30 June 1930.
Status: Common summer resident/breeder and should be seen in the area.

Photo: Blue Ridge Parkway at Yankee Horse Ridge, 3 May 2008.
For additional photos: Scarlet Tanager

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident/breeder
Dates: Year-round
Location: RC
History: Cardinals can be found throughout the county and at all elevations. Cardinals have been reported on 81 of 84 CBC with a yearly average of 124 individuals reported. The highest recorded count was 406 individuals in 1979 and the highest recent count was 331 individuals in 2004. Murray reports nests as early as 16 and 21 April. Additionally, he notes that Cardinals are found up to 2500 feet in elevation. I have found Cardinals on Apple Orchard Mountain on 2 May 2001 and 9 June 2000.
Status: Abundant year-round resident/breeder that should be seen in the area.

Photo: left photo, Lexington, female, 20 March 2008; right photo, male, Lexington, 19 December 2008.
For additional photos: Northern Cardinal

Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder and migrant through the area
Dates: Mid April to early October
Where to find it: Rose-breasted Grosbeaks breed at the higher elevations in the county. The earliest arrival date is 15 April 2005 in Goshen Pass with a late departure date of 2 October 2006. Murray reports that they are fairly common above 2500 feet with early arrival dates of 10 May 1949, 12 May 1928, and 13 May 1929.
Status: Common summer resident/breeder and should be seen in the area
Photo: Blue Ridge Parkway near milepost 37, 1 May 2010.
For additional photos: Rose-breasted Grosbeak

Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder
Dates: May through September
Where to find it: Blue Grosbeaks are found in shrubby-open field areas in the county. Breeding pairs have been reported along Jacobs Ladder Rd (2010) outside of Lexington, along the South River near its confluence with the Maury River (July and August of 2009), a pair with fledglings at the Ponds Housing development (July 2011), and a pair along Hyde Rd. near Brownsburg in 2012. A single or

pair of Blue Grosbeaks were found near Fairfield on 26 August, 30 August, and 26 September 2010. Murray considers that Blue Grosbeaks are an unusual summer resident in the area. He reports six records of Blue Grosbeaks in the county and nests found on 21 May and on 15 July 1948.
Status: Common summer resident/breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: Ponds Housing development, 20 July 2011.
For additional photos: Blue Grosbeak

Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder
Dates: Late April through early October
Where to find it: Indigo Buntings are most often found along edges of woods and can be found throughout the county. The earliest arrival date is 24 April 2007 and the latest departure date is 9 October 2010.

Murray reports an early arrival date of 18 April and a departure date of 14 October. Nests are found between 25 May and 2 August.
Status: Abundant summer resident/breeder and should be found in the area.
Photo: Blue Ridge Parkway; upper photo, male, 15 June 2008; lower photo, female, 15 May 2010.
For additional photos: Indigo Bunting

Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*):

Occurrence: Summer
Dates: 24 June through July
Where to find it: There are four records of Dickcissels in the county. A male was seen on 18 July to the end of the month in 2011 near Fairfield. In 2012, male was seen near Brownsburg on 24 June and a male was seen at Sky Farm near Lexington on 26 June. Subsequently, eight males, a female, and an immature male were found along Hyde Rd. near Brownsburg from 29 June through August. While their presence suggests the possibility of breeding individuals, there are no records to confirm this.
Status: Uncommon summer resident/visitor.
Photo: Hyde Rd. near Brownsburg, 11 July 2012
For additional photos: Dickcissel