The Birds of the Greater Rockbridge County, Virginia Area

Thrushes, Catbirds, Mockingbirds, Thrashers, Waxwings, Starlings, and Snow 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

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 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.

Passeriformes: Turdidae

Bluebirds, Thrushes, and Robins

(All photos: Thrushes, Robins, Catbirds, Mockingbirds, Thrashers, Starlings, Pipits, Waxwings, and Snow Buntings)

Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident/breeder
Dates: Year round
Location: RC
History: Bluebirds are a permanent resident of the area and have increased in number over the past 25 years primarily due to conservation efforts. Bluebirds have been reported in 73 of 84 CBC with a noticeable increase in reporting beginning in 1978. A high CBC count of 219 was reported in 2002. Murray notes a decline in bluebirds in the 1950s. He reports nests as early as 25 March in the area.
Status: Common, year-round resident/breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: Lexington, 26 December 2008.
For additional photos: Eastern Bluebird

Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder
Dates: Early May through September
Locations: BRP 1, BRP AO
History: Veerys are a common, summer resident of the higher elevations in the area. They are unusual below 3000 ft. They are heard and seen regularly along the Blue Ridge Parkway near Yankee Horse Ridge pull off (MP 35) and along the gravel road leading to the top of Apple Orchard Mountain. The earliest arrival date is 4 May 2002 on Apple Orchard Mountain, and they are regularly seen by the third week in May. The latest departure date is 13 September 2010 at the Yankee Horse Ridge pulloff on the Parkway. Murray reports that Veerys are found in two areas of the county, Thunder Ridge (Apple Orchard Mountain area) and Rocky Mountain along the Blue Ridge. He reports nests in mid to late June.
Status: Locally common summer resident/breeder.
Photo: Apple Orchard Mtn near mile post 76, 17 May 2012
For additional photos: Veery

Gray-cheeked Thrush (*Catharus minimus*):

Occurrence: Transient during migration
Dates: May and September
Location: GP, LT, RC, BRP
History: Dick Rowe located one Gray-cheeked Thrush along the Blue Ridge Parkway on 16 September 2012. Alex Merritt reports finding two Gray-cheeked Thrushes in Goshen Pass (Hunter Access Road) on 1 October 2009 and another individual at Locher Tract on 21 September 2010. Murray considered them to be a transient and rare in the area. He notes occurrences between 13 and 25 May and 18 and 25 September.
Status: Uncommon migrant through the area and not expected.
Photo: Blue Ridge Parkway, 16 September 2012
Additional photos: Gray-cheeked Thrush

Swainson's Thrush (*Catharus ustulatus*):

Occurrence: Transient during migration and rare winter resident
Dates: September through May
Locations: CT, GP, MF, BRP 1, BRP AO
History: Swainson's Thrush are migrants through the area with a few individuals remaining in the area throughout the winter. A group of about 20 individuals was located along the Blue Ridge Parkway near milepost 45 by Dick Rowe on 16 September 2012. A single individual was found at McCormick's Farm on 10 September 2011 by Dick Rowe. During the fall of 2010, a large group of 25-30 birds was found near Yankee Horse Ridge pull off (mp 35) along the Blue Ridge Parkway. I have six records; 12 February 2001 along the Chessie Trail, 13 February 2000 in Goshen Pass, 4 March 2002 in Lexington, 7 April 2000 along the Blue Ridge Parkway, 4 May 2002 and 23 May 1996 on Apple Orchard Mountain. Swainson's Thrush has been reported once on the CBC. Murray notes that they are fairly common in the spring with migration between 29 April and 26 May.
Status: Migrant and possible winter resident in the area and not expected.
Photo: Blue Ridge Parkway, 16 September 2012
Additional photos: Swainson's Thrush

Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*):

Occurrence: Winter resident and migrant
Dates: October through May
Locations: GP, BRP 1, BRP 2, CT, LEX, LR, RC
History: Hermit Thrushes are often seen during the winter in the area and during migration. In the fall, migrants pass through the area beginning in early October. There are 13 records from December, January and February. There are a few records during the late spring and summer (17 May 2000 and 19 May 2000 along the Blue Ridge Parkway and 28 June 2005 at Goshen Pass). They have been reported in 58 of 84 CBC with high counts 36 individuals seen in 2009 and 39 individuals seen in 2000. Murray reports Hermit Thrushes as transients that are present between 12 October and 27 April.
Status: Common winter resident and migrant through the area and should be seen during the winter.
Photo: Goshen Pass, 23 January 2009.
For additional photos: Hermit Thrush

Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder
Dates: Late April through mid-October
Locations: BRP 1, BRP 2, BRP AO, NM
History: Wood Thrushes are heard and seen in the deeper woods of the area especially along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Wood Thrushes arrive in the area in third week of April (earliest record 20 April 2009) and are regularly seen by the fourth week of April. Wood Thrushes have been reported as late as 10 October (2006). Murray reports a 19 April arrival date and a departure date of 9 October in 1953. He notes nests with eggs were found on 15 May.
Status: Common summer resident and breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: Blue Ridge Parkway, 23 September 2012
For additional photos: Wood Thrush

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident/breeder
Dates: Year-round with migrants entering the area during the winter.
Location: RC
History: Robins can be found in all areas of the county throughout the year. It is likely that some individuals are

permanent residents and that others migrate to the area to overwinter or breed. During the winter of 2003-04 a large flock of about 1000 birds could be found along the Chessie Trail. Large numbers of overwintering birds were reported for the CBC in 2000 (3,775 individuals), 2003 (8,782 individuals), and 2008 (2,233 individuals). On the 1976 CBC, 27,422 individuals were counted with most of these recorded by George Tolley in the Brushy Hill area. Robins have been noted in 65 of 84 CBC with an average 738 birds per year. Murray reports nests with eggs as early as 4 April.
Status: Abundant, year-round resident and breeder and should be seen in the area 27422
Photo: Lexington, 12 January 2010.
For additional photos: American Robin

Passeriformes: Mimidae

Catbirds, Mockingbirds, and Thrashers

Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder with a few individuals overwintering in the area
Dates: Early April through early October
Location: RC
History: Catbirds are common summer residents in the area and can be found throughout the county and at all elevations. An early arrival date of 6 April (1996) has been recorded and they are commonly seen by the fourth week in April. Catbirds are commonly seen through September and into October (late date of 6 October 2010). I have a record of a Catbird at Kendal on 12 January 2010. Catbirds were recorded four times on the CBC in 2008, 2005 and twice the 1970s. Murray reports an early arrival date of 17 April 1948 and a departure date of 15 October. He notes one winter record on 26 December 1942. Nests with eggs were found on 13 May.
Status: Common summer resident and breeder and should be seen in the area
Photo: Lexington, 12 January 2010.
For additional photos: Gray Catbird

Northern Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident/breeder
Dates: Year-round
Location: RC
History: Mockingbirds are a common throughout the county and can be found in open habitats including yards, fence rows, and edges of fields and pastures. While they are present, they are not common higher in the mountains where forest

predominates. They have been recorded in 81 of 84 CBCs with an average of 41 birds seen per year. In 1956, 209 individuals were counted. The high count in the past 20 years was 88 individuals in 2004. Murray notes nests with eggs as early as 20 April.
Status: Common, year-round resident and breeder and should be seen in the area
Photo: Lexington, 2 June 2010.
For additional photos: Northern Mockingbird

Brown Thrasher (*Toxostoma rufum*):

Occurrence: Summer resident/breeder
Dates: Late March through September
Locations: LEX, GP, LR, RC
History: Brown Thrashers arrive in the area in late March or early April (earliest arrival date 28 March 2007) and are regularly seen by the second week of April. They are present throughout most of the lower elevations in the county and especially along fence rows and thickets. One individual was reported along the Chessie Trail near South River on 17 November 2009 Thrashers have been reported on 13 of 84 CBC. Murray notes a 20 March to 7 October (1950) occurrence range. Murray reports that nests with eggs have been found on 13 May.
Status: Common summer resident and breeder and should be seen in the area
Photo: Lexington, 15 May 2008.
For additional photos: Brown Thrasher

Passeriformes: Sturnidae

Starlings

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident/breeder
Dates: Year-round
Location: RC
History: Starlings are a common, year-round resident in the area. Large flocks can be found in the fall and winter. Murray notes that the first recorded nest in the area was found in 1919 by C.O. Handley, Sr. (Starlings were introduced to the United States in New York City in 1890). Starlings have been noted in 83 of 84 CBC with an average of 1,484 individuals seen each year. The record high count was 10,079 individuals seen in 1993.
Status: Abundant year-round resident/breeder and should be seen in the area
Photo: Lexington, 4 August 2009.
For additional photos: European Starling

Passeriformes: Motacillidae

Pipits

American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*):

Occurrence: Transient during migration and winter resident
Dates: December through January or later
Locations: LR area, CT, BS, RC
History: American Pipits are not commonly seen in the area. They are birds of open fields that can be seen "running" across the ground. They are often seen with other birds such as White-crowned Sparrows and Song Sparrows. American Pipits have been reported on four CBC's (2010, 2009, 1995, and 1958). Eighteen individuals were reported from four locations in 2010, nine individuals were reported from two locations on the 2009 and two individuals were seen in 1995. Four individuals were found in the Collierstown area on 18 December 2010.
Status: Rare migrant or winter resident in the area and not expected.
Photo: Collierstown area, 18 December 2010.
For additional photos: American Pipit

Passeriformes: Bombycillidae

Waxwings

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*):

Occurrence: Year-round resident/breeder
Dates: Year-round
Location: RC
History: Cedar Waxwings are a year-round resident of the area and are commonly seen in small flocks during the winter and spring. These birds have a large distribution within the county and they have been seen on top of Apple Orchard Mountain as well as at lower elevations such as Lexington. A recently fledged juvenile was photographed on 18 September 2010 suggesting either late nesting or a second nesting attempt that year. They have been reported on 50 of 84 CBC with an average of 54 individuals seen each year. Murray reports nests on 22 June 1931 and 12 June 1944
Status: Common year-round resident/breeder and should be seen in the area.
Photo: Near Whetstone Ridge, 25 January 2009.
For additional photos: Cedar Waxwing

Passeriformes: Calcariidae

Buntings

Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*)

Occurrence: Transient during fall migration
Dates: 11 November – 18 November
Location: WL
History: A single individual was found at Willow Lake on 11 November 2010 by Dick and Lucy Rowe. It appears that this bird remained in the area for only one day. On 17 November 2012, Allen Larner and Fenton Day found a Snow Bunting in the same area of Willow Lake. A previous record of Snow Buntings was reported by George Tolley in the Brownsburg area during the mid-1980's. Laura Neale reported a Snow Bunting from Spy Rock in Nelson County on 7 November 2005.
Status: Rare migrant and not expected.
Photo: upper photo, Willow Lake, 11 November 2010 by Lucy Rowe; lower photo, Willow Lake 17 November 2012 by Dick Rowe.
For additional photos: Snow Bunting