



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

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April 2019

APRIL MEETING

DATE: Thursday, April 4, 2019

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Detwiler Auditorium, Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, 1501 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA 22802.

PROGRAM: *A Birding Year In and Around Japan* with Dr. Libby Lyons.

Dr. Libby Lyons works for the National Science Foundation, and her work in international science cooperation has taken her to fantastic birding locations around the world. She is a long-time Northern Virginia resident who lived in Japan during 2016. Libby birded from Alaska-like Hokkaido with its Steller's Sea Eagles and Japanese Cranes, to Kyushu with the sunrise spectacle of a swirling mass of 10,000 cranes, to tropical Okinawa, glimpsing the elusive Okinawa Rail. She also took birding forays to Thailand, the Philippines, and Taiwan. She will present a travelogue of birding in the region, with a few scientific tidbits added in, e.g., the decline of such rare species as the Spoon-billed Sandpiper and the complex communication patterns of Japanese Tits.

Join us for dinner with Libby at Bella Luna, 80 West Water Street, Harrisonburg, VA 22801 before the meeting at 5:30 PM. Please contact Robyn Puffenbarger, 540-908-7335 or rpuffenb@bridgewater.edu, in advance if you plan to attend.

APRIL FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

Members and guests welcome. Minors (under 18) must be accompanied by a parent or adult.

Hillendale Monthly Walk, Thursday, April 11, with Tom Mizell: Meet at the Children's Playground Parking Lot at 8 AM.

Madison Run Fire Road, Shenandoah National Park, Saturday April 6, with Greg

Moyers: Targets include Louisiana Waterthrush, Pine Warbler, and Blue-headed Vireo. This well-maintained gravel road enters the SNP from the Valley, east of Grottoes. We'll travel about four miles round-trip, and finish around noon. Bring water and snacks. There are no restroom facilities. Meet at 8:30 AM at the entry to the Fire Rd (at the intersection of Brown's Gap Rd and Ore Bank Rd.) Please sign up in advance by contacting Greg at gwmoyers@msn.com or 434-3029.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Monthly Walk – *Tom Mizell*

It was dark as the song of the Northern Cardinal awoke me around 6:15 AM on the last winter morning of 2019. It was soon joined by an American Robin chorus that loudly announced a new day. As I stopped by Silver Lake around 7:15 AM it was about 28 degrees. I saw only Mallards and Red-winged Blackbirds during a short lake survey. Conspicuously absent were the Redheads, Canvasbacks, Scaup and Ring-neck Ducks which had been regularly seen there the last few months. Yep, the Seasons are a changing.

As I drove into Hillandale Park a few police cars had gathered in the parking lot nearest the gate and several more came in shortly after I arrived. I wondered what that might mean, if anything. On to the Playground parking lot where a few folks were warming up their binoculars. Our wish list for the morning included Brown Creeper, Blue-headed Vireo, Cooper's Hawk and Eastern Towhee. Our moment for safety conversation covered ticks and “to be on good behavior” due to the presence of many law enforcement personnel. Before long 13 RBC members were walking the trail as the sunlight graced the treetops.

Blue Jays were perched and chattering loudly. Some flying in all directions of the compass. Some landing in the walnut trees near the log cabin were carrying peanuts in the shell. Fish Crows were calling and more Northern Cardinals and American Robins were singing away. We found White-throated Sparrows and were afforded fairly good looks at Golden-crowned Kinglets in the walnut trees adjacent to the cabin. We came across several more of these entertaining little birds as they fed in the budding trees. Woodpeckers were drumming near and far. We saw Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Tufted Titmouse, Mourning Doves, White-breasted Nuthatches and European Starlings as we neared the trail fork behind the cabin. A Brown Thrasher sang enthusiastically to the southwest of the fork and some of the folks got to view it. The rest of us headed northwest along the golf course boundary fence and we added Eastern Towhee.

By 8:30 we had 13 species. We added Carolina Wren, Mallards, Purple Finches and Downy Woodpeckers as we approached the Northwest pedestrian bridge. Immediately after crossing the bridge we enjoyed good looks at a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

As we walked along the paved road near the shelters, we saw numerous law enforcement people with their dogs. One of the officers told me they were practicing their tracking techniques. So, we left them to track as we trekked on ourselves. We added Grackles, Northern Mockingbird, American Crow and about 100 yards upstream of the cabin we found an Eastern Phoebe. Randy Cline and Greg Moyers teamed up to provide us a Yellow-rumped Warbler at the stream. It was almost 9:30 and still 28 degrees as we approached the cabin bridge a second time and we saw a Song Sparrow in the stream channel. At the bridge we saw our second target bird the Brown Creeper moving up a walnut tree in its sporadic manner. It was still chilly and 6 of the birders had departed, (a few said due to cold feet) and the remaining 7 continued for the next hour along the southwest loop. By 10:36 AM the temperature had climbed to 39 degrees and Black Vulture, Northern Flicker, Carolina Chickadee made their presence known. The last addition was a Cooper's Hawk that was seen above a kettle of Black Vultures. It topped off the list at 33 species. Wait, read on as more was happening on 20 March 2019.

Our second Hillendale walk of the day began at 5:15 PM. Eleven RBC members gathered to share the official changing of the Seasons. Five birders were returnees from the morning's walk and the 6 additions for the afternoon walk gave us 19 members on the day. We walked past the cabin to the Northwest Pedestrian Bridge. The last birds we saw during the winter of 2019 were American Robin, Turkey Vulture, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, Mallard, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Carolina Wren, White-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet and White-throated Sparrow.

Drum roll: Winter turned to Spring as the group stood on the bridge for a 5:58 PM portrait (see below). Applause, smiles, some laughter and soft cheers were offered in our enjoyable welcome to Springtime. Spring was also announced by a woodpecker drumming from somewhere on the golf course. The first species to appear in my spring notes was Mourning Dove. Somewhat appropriate don't you think?

The Spring procession after the Dove was as follows: Turkey Vulture, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Cardinal, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Robin, Junco, Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Towhee, Song Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow and Tufted Titmouse. We concluded our Spring walk at 6:45 PM with 13 species and the temperature was about 48 degrees. Total species for the day was 34 as we added Junco in the afternoon. I think at least 40 Blue Jays spent time with us throughout the day. Thanks to all that joined in this celebration of the seasons on 20 March 2019!



Winter to Spring birders at Hillendale Park, 5:58 PM, March 20, 2019

Photo credit: Tom Mizell

American Woodcock Trip, Slate Lick Fields, Wednesday March 27 – Diane Lepkowski

Arriving about 7 PM, four RBC members convened at the parking area. Joy and Wayne Beaman shared their sighting of about 30 Wild Turkeys off Hopkins Gap Road – nice find! We proceeded to check the viewing platform and surrounds, finding not one single bird. Large swathes of brushy growth had been recently cleared both below the platform and around the parking area. Ambling downhill to the Fields, we met more silence. Finally, once in the flats, we spotted a few shrub-skulking birds: cardinals and a White-throated Sparrow.

As we awaited the hoped-for post-sundown woodcock displays, Spring Peepers offered a strong serenade. We explored a bit off-trail; admiring the creek, we noted a potential swimming hole and tried for photos of its beautifully-carved cliff backdrop. A robin performed aerial maneuvers before perching atop a pine. A kettle of Turkey Vultures descended into a distant tree line, presumably to roost for the night.

With the sun now well below the horizon, the air calm, and the sky clear, it seemed time for the evening's show to begin. As we turned to spot a late-arriving member heading to meet us, a new sound caught our ears -- the first "peent" of an American Woodcock! As it turned out, Lisa Perry, our late arrival, heard the bird peenting and displaying as she walked down to join us. By the time the group moved closer to the bird it was more distant, though still in earshot.

While this adventure tale may not sound "stellar" so far, the star-laden, moonless night sky was unquestionably the evening's best treat. There, we found the famous bull, Taurus; the hunter Orion; and even a bird (!) – Cygnus the Swan. Far from city lights, we were awed by the Milky Way. A dense blanket of stars seemed to fill every constellation. A possible satellite (or, Wayne suggested, piece of space junk) sped through. With the help of Mike Smith's cellphone app, we identified more constellations and stars including Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, and Betelgeuse, the bright, orange-red star in Orion that's "elderly" and expected to eventually explode into a massive supernova.

We had a fabulous night; as one member put it: "the heck with that woodcock – the stars stole the show!"

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Herb Myers reported his first **Field Sparrow** of the season singing at his place in Keezletown on Feb. 28.

Diane Holsinger reported **Tree Swallows** on March 2.

Mike Smith reported **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Pine Siskins, and Purple Finches** at his feeders near Elkton on March 3. Many of these birds continued to visit Mike's feeders throughout the month.

A group of six **Tundra Swans** was reported at multiple locations around the Timberville/New Market area for at least a week at the beginning of March.

Mike Smith saw 18 **Northern Harriers** departing a roost near Elkton on March 4.

Kevin Shank reported his first **Pine Warbler** of the season at Union Springs on March 5. As of March 24, the **Evening Grosbeaks** are still being seen. Visitors to Kevin's place have also reported **Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, Fox Sparrow, and a Red Crossbill**, seen on March 20.

Greg Moyers reported **Northern Pintails** at a small pond on Dinkel Avenue in Bridgewater on March 7.

Diane Lepkowski reported a **Herring Gull**, three **Tundra Swans**, **Ring-billed Gulls**, and a **Common Merganser**, along with other ducks at Lake Shenandoah on March 8.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski reported a **Merlin** on Antioch Rd on March 9.

Diane Lepkowski saw a **Lesser Yellowlegs** at the pond across from the Green Valley Book Fair on March 9.

Diane Lepkowski, Dave Wendelken, and Greg Moyers reported **Pine Warblers** at Madison Run Fire Rd on March 10. Greg and Diane spotted **Wild Turkeys** in a field along Port Republic Rd on the way back to Harrisonburg.

Tom Mizell saw a pair of **Red-breasted Mergansers** on the river at Wildwood Park off-and-on between March 11-14.

Greg Moyers reported a **Brown Thrasher** at Hillandale Park on March 12.

Mike Smith heard his first **Blue-headed Vireo** of the season at his place on March 15 and had a **Fox Sparrow** at his feeder on March 17. Mike's first **Pine Warbler** of the Spring made an appearance at his feeder on March 22 while an **Eastern Phoebe** sang nearby.

Diane Holsinger had her first **Brown Thrasher** of the season singing in her yard in Timberville on March 16. The following day, Diane had an **Eastern Towhee** at her feeder.

Diane Holsinger reported a **Blue-winged Teal** at Lake Campbell on March 18.

Herb Myers reported a pair of **Eastern Screech-Owls** occupying a nest box at his place in Keezletown on March 22. On the same date, Herb reported at least three singing **Pine Warblers** on Massanutten Mtn. On March 23 Herb found at least five **Purple Finches** at the base of Massanutten Mtn and a **Brown Thrasher** while surveying a breeding bird atlas block.

Clair Mellinger had three **Fox Sparrows** visit his feeder in Harrisonburg on March 24.

Diane Holsinger reported her first **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** of the season at Silver Lake on March 25.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bluebird Trail – *Debbie Harrison*

The Rockingham Bird Club, with the help and support of the Rockingham County Fair Association, has established a 'Bluebird Trail' of nest boxes at the Rockingham Fair Grounds and there are more requests to establish & monitor more trails. Any trail needs MONITORS to check the boxes on a weekly basis (April thru August) which takes about 1 hour.

People interested in volunteering 1 HOUR per MONTH, will be joining a monitoring team (including mentoring) & given an orientation on nest box monitoring and the protocol used for collecting and reporting data. If you have a home nest box (or trail) that you monitor, you can register your trail as well. A sign-up sheet will be available at the club meeting or contact Debbie at 540-856-3058 woodshar@aol.com.

Rockingham Bird Club Executive Committee

Nominations are now in order. Please contact President Debbie or any current Officer.

Please indicate your willingness to serve as:

One-year terms:

President

VP – Programs

VP – Field trips

Secretary

Treasurer

Two-year terms (with 1 successive term allowed):

2 Members-at-Large

(Our current Members-at-Large are: Tom Lord, thru June 2019 & eligible to serve again, and Katherine Cummings, thru June 2020)

John Irvine Autobiography – *Bill Benish*

Follow up regarding John Irvine publication – long-time member and past president of the Rockingham Bird Club: I was able to bird a few times with John, and I miss those opportunities to talk with him at meetings. After John’s passing in September 2018, his son Jed notified the local birding community that John had completed a memoir of his life called “*An Avian Autobiography*”. As Jed said, “It contains accounts of pivotal birding moments across his life as well as fascinating stories of his growing up.”

Jed provided me with a PDF electronic copy. Although, I tend to be a slow reader, I was able to blaze through reading the 168 pages which include both writing and photos. Much of the content is Irvine family history. For me, reading in the context of a regional birder, I delighted in learning more about John’s full life. I asked Jed if sharing the copy would be okay or if he preferred people to reach out to him directly. Jed generously replied, “Feel free to share as widely as you wish. Dad would be honored that so many folks have shown interest.”

The memoir PDF file is just under 5MB, so for now, I’ll simply offer to email a copy in response to any requests to me through wcbenish@gmail.com. Along with any request, please let me know if you want Jed’s email address.

 *In Memoriam*

A donation will be made to the Rockingham County Library in memory of RBC members Walter Wayne Daggett, 86, of Bridgewater, who passed away on March 10, 2019 and Polly Scott, 82, a resident of Sunnyside, who passed away on March 26, 2019.



NEW MEMBERS

John & Kappy Barnes

Mark Wayne Gascho

Hazel K. Shirk

Rockingham Bird Club
151 Deer Lick Lane
Broadway, VA 22815



PRESIDENT: Debbie Harrison
151 Deer Lick Lane
Broadway, VA 22815
Phone - 540-856-3058

VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS - Robyn Puffenbarger

VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS - Diane Lepkowski

SECRETARY: Anne Nielsen

TREASURER: Audrey Shenk

MEMBERS AT LARGE: Katherine Cummings & Tom Lord

GOLDFINCH GAZETTE - Denise Hoodock

EMAIL: info@rockinghambirdclub.com

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