



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<http://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume XLI

Number 4

December 2015

DECEMBER MEETING ****Note location change****

DATE: Thursday, December 3, 2015

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: STRITE Auditorium (located in the Crestwood Building, 2nd floor), Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, 1501 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA 22802.

PROGRAM - Denise Hoodock

A Summer with the Terns, Joanna Morelli. It isn't every day that you wake up to the racket of a tern colony, and barely notice the constant "ke-arrrr" produced by common terns.

This past summer, James Madison University student and one of Zig's research student's, Joanna Morelli, lived and worked on the tern colony on Falkner Island (Stewart B. McKinney NWR, Guilford, CT.) Five days a week, every week from May to August, Joanna looked for and marked roseate tern nests, banded and monitored common terns, and eventually monitored roseate tern fledgling success.

Joanna is thrilled to share photos of common and roseate terns (and other inhabitants of the island), stories about each tern species' behavior, and the resulting reproductive success of the summer 2015 field season. Oh, and a few silly tern poop stories, too! Please join us for Joanna's presentation, "*A Summer with the Terns.*"

Before the meeting, we will be hosting Joanna at Bella Luna, 80 West Water Street, in Harrisonburg, for dinner at 5:30 PM. Please contact Denise Hoodock at 540-828-2595, 703-216-5499 or dhooock@gmail.com if you'll join us for dinner.

DECEMBER FIELD TRIPS - Diane Lepkowski

Hillandale Park, Monday, December 14 with Tom Mizel – Meet at the Children's Playground at 8 AM for our last Hillandale walk of fall 2015.

116th VARC CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, Saturday, December 19, 2015 – *Bill Benish*

Our VARC Christmas Bird Count will take place weather permitting on Saturday, December 19, 2015.

We are fortunate to have several generous and experienced leaders, many of whom also led last year. Thanks in advance to the current slate of leaders: Clair Mellinger, Tom Lord, Gabriel Mapel, Charles Ziegenfus, Bob Eggleston, William Leigh and Michael Shank.

All potential participants - please ensure that Bill Benish knows about arrangements you already have with a leader or if you need help to connect with one. Typical coverage time varies for each sector as does the amount of area conducive to alternate means of travel by foot, etc. As such, we have a variety of coverage effort needs.

Also, if you may not be in the field, but live within the circle, you may be able to contribute as a 'feeder watcher'. Please alert Bill if you may be participating as a 'feeder watcher' since we record that effort differently.

Bill Benish C: 540.908.7336, wcbenish@comcast.net

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE – *Debbie Harrison, President*

The Executive Committee, following our Club's Purpose of promoting interest in the study of birds, conservation of birds and other natural resources, voted to make donations to the following:

the Organization for Tropical Studies,
the Wildlife Center of Virginia,
the American Bird Conservancy,
the Coastal VA Wildlife Observatory,
Project Perry Parrot Sanctuary,
the Center for Conservation Biology at William and Mary,
The National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count, and
Massanutten Regional Library.

Additionally, to donate toward the sign (sponsored by RBC) for the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum, the Virginia Mennonite Retirement Center for the use of their facility for club meetings, and Highland Retreat for the use of their facilities for the Saw-whet Owl Banding Project, and, finally, to offer reimbursement for supplies to Clair Mellinger and Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus for the Saw-whet owl banding operation.

BIRD CLUB BOOK CLUB - *Maureen Gallagher-McLeod*

The B.C.B.C. will meet at 6:30 PM on Thursday, December 17, 2015, at the home of Elizabeth Ihle. We will share a meal and discuss "*The Geese of Beaver Bog*" by Bernd Heinrich. If you are interested in joining the discussion, contact Maureen at famcleod@earthlink.net or 896-9541.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Park – *Tom Mizell*

On Thursday, November 11, five members of the Rockingham Bird Club drove through a light drizzle to Hillandale Park. Temperatures were in the 40s and our wish list included Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Kinglet, Yellow-rumped Warbler and Brown Creeper. I asked the group to share safety issues and they offered “be careful of the abundant walnut crop along with Osage Oranges.” This is a year of bumper crops of each.

The first species was American Robin. Dozens were present throughout the walk and their singing was reminiscent of Spring. American Crows called, European Starlings flew in tightly knit groups and as we left the parking lot a Red-bellied Woodpecker flew to the top of the power pole. Under threatening clouds we headed toward the cabin. Before we crossed the bridge at the cabin a Pileated Woodpecker called repeatedly in flight and we watched it land in a tall oak north of the bridge. Within a few moments a Robin chased the Pileated out of the tree and back across the main road. This was the first of numerous Robin chases. We crossed the bridge at 8:35. A flock of about 20 Cedar Waxwings mixed with the Robins in the tree tops. It is noted that most deciduous trees were devoid of leaves. 14 species in the first hour and by the time we reached the Northwest corner bridge we enjoyed Northern Mockingbird, Northern Cardinal, Gray Catbird, Carolina Wren, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White breasted Nuthatch, Downy Woodpecker and House Finch. Also, we observed many birds feasting on cedar tree berries.

As we crossed this second bridge we heard a Red-shouldered Hawk calling from near the main shelter. The five of us pursued the calling and Dan Perkuchin spotted it. The Red-shouldered Hawk was perched in an oak tree, being harassed by Blue Jays. It flew towards us and perched overhead, giving us very good looks. As we studied the bird, it continued to call persistently and quite loudly, apparently with good reason -- a second Red-shouldered Hawk responded by calling from near the Children's Playground. We only saw the one. We enjoyed watching it and listening to its call for several minutes. Coincidentally, it was a year to the very day that we had the Red-shouldered Hawk sighting at the main shelter in 2014.

We passed the cabin a second time as we began the south loop. More blue sky appeared. We added Rock Pigeon, Falcon species, and Purple Finch. Two hours and 48 minutes after compiling our wish list, Don Perkuchin found a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in a cedar tree. We all got good looks at this strikingly colorful bird. It moved its way up to the top of the tree and with the sun now shining brightly the Sapsucker color was showcased to our advantage. This turned out to be the only wish list bird we saw this day but was well worth the wait!

As the walk was winding down we found two Northern Flickers ground feeding among a mix of Robins. As our walk began with Robins chasing the Pileated Woodpecker, it concluded in like fashion with Robins chasing the Flickers. We tallied 26 species by 11:39 AM. Interesting to think that our next Hillandale walk will be in December. Hope you can join us as we enjoy one more Hillandale walk before Winter arrives.

Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding – Debbie Harrison

On Sunday, Nov 8, seven members of the RBC headed up to the Highland Retreat Banding Station, under very clear skies. There were a large number of visitors that night, but we also got to see several owls!

Clair & Zig recorded info from each owl, banded them, and then handed them off to visitors before releasing them back into the night.

On Tuesday, Nov 17, five members of the RBC went to the Banding Station on a cloudy, slightly breezy night. No other visitors were there & only the low nets were opened. One owl was captured; it had been banded 3 nights earlier, so we just had "show & tell" and everyone got to hold it before we all went out for the release & watched her 'helicopter' up into the night.

BIRD SIGHTINGS:

Diane Holsinger reported a **Northern Harrier** and a **Peregrine Falcon** on Mt. Clinton Pike on Oct. 26, a pair of **Buffleheads** at Silver Lake on Oct. 27, 98 **Killdeer** on Weavers Rd on Oct. 29, and 350 or more **American Goldfinches** on Fulton School Rd on Nov. 1.

Diane Holsinger reported a **Great Horned Owl**, an **Eastern Screech Owl**, and four **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** at her place on Oct. 28. Diane had a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Yellow-rumped Warbler**, and 28 **Cedar Waxwings** on Nov. 6 and six **Purple Finches** at her feeder on Nov. 18.

William Leigh, Diane Lepkowski, and Greg Moyers saw a group of late **Tree Swallows** at Lake Shenandoah on Oct. 31. **Ruddy Duck**, **Hermit Thrush**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, and **Swamp Sparrow** were also seen.

William Leigh found a **Greater Yellowlegs** at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 1. Shortly after bidding William adieu, Kathy Byers, Diane Lepkowski, and Greg Moyers had a flyover **Great Egret** at the same location.

Diane Lepkowski, William Leigh, Greg Moyers, and Dave Wendelken watched a **Merlin** enjoying a meal of sparrow at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 8. A **Bald Eagle**, a **Red-shouldered Hawk**, and five **Buffleheads** were also present. Diane Holsinger reported that the **Merlin** (or another one) was still present, along with a **Double-crested Cormorant**, the following day.

Diane Lepkowski reported around a dozen **Gadwalls**, 10 **Ring-necked Ducks**, a **Hooded Merganser**, and the continuing **American Black Duck**, **American Coots**, and **Pied-billed Grebes** at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 10.

Ken and Mildred Ranck reported three **Purple Finches** at their feeders in Mt. Crawford on Nov. 14.

William Leigh and Greg Moyers saw a **Winter Wren** at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 14.

Diane Holsinger reported **Hooded Mergansers** at the Nazarene Church Rd Wetland and **Northern Shovelers** and **Wilson's Snipe** at Weaver's pond on Nov. 14. Diane found 25 **American Pipits**, 41 **Killdeer**, and a **Northern Harrier** at Weaver's pond on Nov. 18.

Tom Mizell reported four **Hooded Mergansers**, a **Wood Duck**, and a **Pied-billed Grebe** at Wildwood Park on Nov. 17.

William Leigh and Diane Lepkowski reported two **Surf Scoters** at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 17.

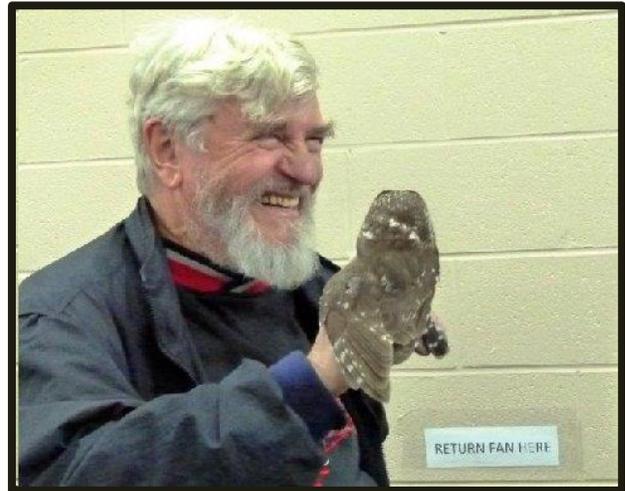
Tom Mizell had a pair of **Buffleheads** and six **Gadwalls** at Silver Lake on Nov. 20.

Diane Lepkowski had a close encounter with a seemingly-curious yard **Black Vulture** on Nov. 21.

Diane also had a **Great Horned Owl** in the yard on the same date and **Purple Finch, Fox Sparrow,** and **Eastern Towhee** on Nov. 22.



Donna Dobbs with Northern Saw-whet Owl at Highland Retreat



Bill Faw with Saw-whet Owl at Highland Retreat

Photo by Clair Mellinger, 11/17/2015



Clair Mellinger and Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus examine wing of a Northern Saw-whet Owl at Highland Retreat



Surf Scoter, one of two at Lake Shenandoah

Photo: Dave Wendelken, 11/17/2015

Top 10 Foods for Winter Bird Feeding

By Bill Thompson, III | Editor, Bird Watcher's Digest

<http://www.birdwatchersdigest.com/bwdsite>

Winter: 'tis the season for feeding birds all across North America, especially in those regions where it gets mighty cold and snowy. If you are a veteran bird feeder, you've probably gained lots of insight into the foods your backyard birds prefer. Perhaps you've learned through trial and error, or perhaps you did your homework and read up on the subject. If you are just getting started in bird feeding, or if you are frustrated by a lack of success in attracting winter birds to your feeders, the first thing you need to determine is whether you are feeding the right foods. If you are not giving the birds what they want, you might not have many birds. The following 10 foods are extremely popular with backyard birds all across North America.

10. Black-oil sunflower seed. This seed is the hamburger of the bird world. Almost any bird that will visit a bird feeder will eat black-oil sunflower. Birds that can't crack the seeds themselves will scour the ground under the feeders, picking up bits and pieces. Why do birds prefer it? The outer shell of a black-oil sunflower seed is thinner and easier to crack. The kernel inside the shell is larger than the kernel inside a white-or gray-striped sunflower seed, so birds get more food per seed from black-oil. This last fact also makes black-oil a better value for you, the seed buyer. Striped sunflower is still fine (evening grosbeaks may even prefer it slightly), but black-oil is better.

9. Peanuts. Peanuts—de-shelled, dry-roasted, and unsalted—are a fairly recent trend in bird feeding, at least in North America. Woodpeckers, jays, nuthatches, chickadees, and titmice will readily visit a feeder for this high-protein, high-energy food. Even cardinals and finches will eat peanuts.

8. **Suet.** Most humans don't want a lot of fat in their diet, but for birds in winter, fat is an excellent source of energy. Ask at your grocery store butcher counter if you don't see packages of suet on display. No suet feeder? No problem—just use an old mesh onion bag.

7. **Good mixed seed.** Is there such a thing as BAD mixed seed? You bet! Bad mixed seed has lots of filler in it—junk seeds that most birds won't eat. Good mixed seed has a large amount of sunflower seed, cracked corn, white proso millet, and perhaps some peanut hearts.

6. **Nyjer/thistle seed.** Although it can be expensive, Nyjer, or thistle, seed is eagerly consumed by all the small finches—goldfinches, house, purple, and Cassin's finches, pine siskins, and redpolls. You need to feed thistle in a thistle feeder of some kind—the two most commonly used types of thistle feeder are a tube feeder with small thistle-seed-sized holes, and a thistle sock.

5. **Safflower.** This white, thin-shelled, conical seed is eaten by many birds and has the reputation for being the favorite food of the northern cardinal. Some feeder operators claim that safflower seed is not as readily eaten by squirrels and blackbirds (caveat: your results may vary). Feed safflower in any feeder that can accommodate sunflower seed. Avoid feeding safflower on the ground in wet weather; it can quickly become soggy and inedible.

4. **Cracked corn.** Sparrows, blackbirds, jays, doves, quail, and squirrels are just a few of the creatures you can expect at your feeders if you feed cracked corn. Fed in moderation, cracked corn will attract almost any feeder species. Whole corn that is still on the cob is not a good bird food because the kernels are too big and hard for most small birds to digest. Cracked corn is broken up into smaller, more manageable bits.

3. **Mealworms.** We fed mealworms to a pair of nesting bluebirds all this past summer. Most feeder birds, except goldfinches, will eat mealworms if you offer them. Mealworms are available in bait stores, or by mail order. Don't worry, they aren't slimy and gross. In fact, they aren't even worms; they are larval stage of a beetle (*Tenebrio molitor*), if that makes you feel better.

2. **Fruit.** Humans are supposed to eat at least three servings of fruit every day. Fruit is also an important dietary element for birds, but it can be hard to find in many areas in midwinter. Set out grapes, slices of citrus fruits, apple or banana slices, and even melon rinds, and watch your birds chow down. If you want to feed raisins, chop them up and soak them in warm water first to soften them up a bit.

1. **Homemade bird treats.** You can come up with your own recipes for winter bird treats. Smear peanut butter on a tree trunk, and poke some peanut bits into it. Melt suet in your microwave, and pour it into an ice-cube tray to harden. Before it solidifies, add peanut bits, raisins, apple bits, or other bird foods. Put the tray in your freezer to harden. Once it does, you've got cubed bird treats—easy to make and easy to use!

Rockingham Bird Club
151 Deerlick Lane
Broadway, VA 22815



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

VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS - Denise Hoodock

VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS - Diane Lepkowski

SECRETARY: Donna Dobbs

TREASURER: Steve White - 540-833-6726

MEMBERS AT LARGE: Bill Benish & Lisa Perry

GOLDFINCH GAZETTE - Denise Hoodock

EMAIL: info@rockinghambirdclub.com