



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club
<http://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume XXXIX

Number 6

February 2014

FEBRUARY MEETING

DATE: Thursday, February 6, 2014

TIME: 7:00 PM

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

PROGRAM, Elizabeth Ihle

We are delighted to welcome retired Clemson University professor **Leslie Grady, Jr.** to speak about “**Effects of Climate Change on Birds in the Eastern U.S.**” While focusing on birds in Virginia, Professor Grady will discuss potential impacts of climate change, what the CBC data and other data bases tell us about climate change, and two possible future scenarios based on future carbon dioxide emissions. Dr. Grady was a professor of Environmental Engineering at Clemson. He and his wife moved to this area to be closer to family. Although he claims to be a woefully inadequate birder, he is the father-in-law of a U.S. Park Service ecologist who has a masters degree in ornithology.

We shall meet for dinner ahead of time at Union Station at 128 West Market Street at 5:30. If you plan to join us, please contact Gloria Crump at ggcrump@comcast.net or 540-234-9300.

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS, Diane Lepkowski

Highland County, Saturday February 8th, with Michael Shank, *Foul weather date is Saturday, Feb. 22.*– Highland, with the highest mean elevation of any Virginia County, serves as wintering grounds for Golden Eagles, Rough-legged Hawks and more. Tree Sparrow and Loggerhead Shrike are other target trip species. Meet at the parking lot beside (south of) Bob-a Rea’s in Bridgewater (Rt. 42) at 7:00AM. Dress warmly (temps ten degrees lower than locally are possible) and bring water/drinks and lunch/snacks. A stop in Monterey for rest rooms/snacks is possible, but otherwise modern facilities will be few and far between. Please sign up in advance, and advise if you can offer to drive. Contact Mike Shank at tallwhiteoak@verizon.net or 540-879-2650/ 540-810-7444.

Hillandale Park, Wednesday February 12, with Tom Mizell – We will meet at the parking lot of the Children’s Playground at 8:00 AM for our monthly Hillandale Park Walk.

Annual RBC Waterfowl & Raptor Count – Saturday February 15, Coordinator, Tom Lord: This is our local, County-wide count. Please consider joining the fun and contributing to our local records. Contact Tom for info at: 540-828-1226 or lordadriana@gmail.com

Great Backyard Bird Count, Feb 14-17, 2014-- (from the GBBC website): From Afghanistan to Zimbabwe, bird watchers from more than 100 countries are expected to participate in the 17th annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC), February 14–17, 2014. Anyone anywhere in the world can count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count and enter their sightings at www.BirdCount.org. The information gathered by tens of thousands of volunteers helps track the health of bird populations at a scale that would not otherwise be possible. The GBBC is a joint project of the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) and the [National Audubon Society](#) with partner [Bird Studies Canada](#).

West Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas – Breeding Season 2014 --Lisa Perry, Coordinator: This year marks the final year for an ongoing bird-mapping project in West Virginia, known as the West Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas. If you enjoy birding, and *especially* if you love listing, consider taking some time this year to participate in the West Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas.

In North America, many states and Canadian provinces have Breeding Bird Atlases. A Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) is like a census of all of the birds that breed in a particular state or region. Ornithological organizations, governments, and universities collaborate to fund and conduct research for a BBA. Usually each atlas has a small paid staff including professional wildlife biologists. However, most BBAs also rely heavily on volunteer involvement. They are a wonderful example of citizen science.

Generally, researchers compile data over a 5-year period. Research is conducted using a grid-based system with “blocks” which are usually approximately 10 sq. miles each. Each block is surveyed for all types of birds that can be found there during their respective breeding seasons. “Safe dates”, or date windows within which it is considered safe to assume the birds are not migrating or wintering, are defined for each species. A code system is used to give more detail about each observation, so that each species can be categorized as Possible, Probable, or Confirmed to breed at the observed location. An example of a code used might be “CM” for a bird seen Carrying Material for a nest. Once the research phase is complete, data is compiled into a book which will include distribution maps by species, along with accounts about each species’ current and historical status.

This is the second BBA for West Virginia. The first edition was published in 1992. The most current Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas was completed from 1985-1989. Loudoun County, VA completed a special county-wide BBA from 2009-2013.

If you are interested in participating, you can find a great deal of information online at <http://martes.dnr.state.wv.us/BreedingBirdsAtlas/default.aspx>. Lisa Perry is a recent transplant to Rockingham County; she worked as a paid researcher and a Regional Coordinator for the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas for two seasons (2010-2011) and has logged volunteer hours near her childhood home for the West Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas. **Lisa will organize a “CBC-style” field day to WV, sometime this coming Spring, for interested Club members. Contact her at: koerner.lisa@gmail.com or (540) 455-3601.**

BIRD CLUB BOOK CLUB, Maureen Gallagher-McLeod: We will meet at 6:30 PM on Thursday, February 20, at the home of Elizabeth Ihle. After a carry-in dinner, there will be a discussion of the book *The Bluebird Effect* by Julie Zickefoose. This is a beautifully illustrated book about encounters with rehabilitated birds. If you would like to join a book discussion, contact Maureen at famcleod@earthlink.net or 896-9541.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Park Walk, December 21 -- Tom Mizell: On a sunny morning with temperatures in the low 60s, 12 members of the Rockingham Bird Club gathered at Hillandale Park for our last walk of Fall. American Robins were the first to greet us. Blue Jays, White-breasted Nuthatches and Mourning Doves called out to us as we gathered at the playground. We added Turkey Vulture, Starling and Cardinal to the list as we crossed the pedestrian bridge at the cabin. House Finches, House Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, Downy Woodpeckers, Tufted Titmice and Carolina Chickadees were along the trail near the golf course fence. As we walked in the grassy area along the stream channel about 200 yards from the Northwest Corner, we found Northern Flicker and Yellow-rumped Warbler. Purple Finches and Song Sparrows appeared and then a Sharp-shinned Hawk flew overhead. An American Crow called out and a couple of Red-bellied Woodpeckers sounded from the walnut trees. As we crossed the second pedestrian bridge at 12:02 PM we paused for group photos at the bridge as well as a modest discussion about Fall having progressed to Winter at 12:11 PM. The last birds observed during Fall were Dark-eyed Juncos in the woods just north of the bridge.

Winter was upon us and we continued our walk having totaled 23 species during the Fall portion of the walk. Winds were not stirring gently. Tufted Titmice, Mallards, Juncos, Northern Cardinal and Blue Jays were the first species to appear in Winter. As we entered a lull in bird sightings one of the group pointed to an overhead limb that bore a branch resembling a “high heeled shoe”. Time to move on. By 12:37 PM we completed the first loop.

We were surprised to see our first butterfly of winter as an Angle-wing flew by us after we crossed the cabin bridge the second time. Some members left and a few more waited until winter to join us so by now 10 RBC members remained. We were pleased to add a Hermit Thrush near the horseshoe pits. We were drawn to the activity of several little brown birds in the cedars. By immersing one of our own in the brush (in an area that has a reputation for chiggers) we were able to coax a Fox Sparrow out of the cedar trees. We all got a good look at this fine bird. Winter had indeed arrived!

We crossed the cabin bridge a third and final time and before leaving the parking lot, we added Red-tailed Hawk, Cedar Waxwings, Black Vulture and a Cooper's Hawk. We concluded the walk at 1:43 PM and the temperature was now 68 F. We easily handled our first breaths of winter weather but little did we realize that a few weeks later "Polar Vortex" would weave itself into our vocabulary and greet us in January. Species counts for this walk were 23 for Fall and 20 for Winter with 7 new species waiting to show themselves after Winter arrived. Our total species for the day was 30.

Hillandale Park Walk, January 18 - Tom Mizell: On this sunny January day, with temperatures below freezing, nine Rockingham Bird Club members arrived to find trees, shrubs, and ground covered with frost. This striking spectacle was apparently the result of the fog that blanketed much of the Valley earlier that morning.

Black ice covered portions of the parking lot as we carefully assembled. We cautiously moved toward the bridge near the cabin on the frozen ground. The call of Bluebirds was the first to penetrate the frigid air. Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Mockingbird, Carolina Chickadees and White-breasted Nuthatches were the other early birds today. We added to the list as we moved slowly and by 9:30 AM, as we arrived at the northernmost pedestrian bridge, we tallied 21 species. This included Mallards, House Finches, Goldfinches, Blue Jays and some American Robins. We heard and then watched a group of Canada Geese approach. As they flew overhead we could see they were being pursued by a solitary Starling that was flying rapidly to keep pace. The Starling presented quite a contrast in size and flight pattern as it flew in the draft of the geese.

We encountered a lull in December between the northernmost bridge and the cabin bridge; we only added Northern Flicker and Slate-colored Junco to the list, which topped out at just 23 species after our final hour. We nevertheless had a refreshing walk. Numerous times during the morning, we observed the remnants of frost as the warming sun melted some of it. The shadows of the pedestrian bridge railing (on the bridge deck) and likewise the shadow of the towering utility poles resulted in lines of frost remaining. This created unique patterns after the frost on surrounding unshaded surfaces melted. Certainly this was an experience to enjoy, one we did not anticipate. Well, we wonder what birds and/or other encounters will greet us along our February walk. Hope you will join us.

BIRD SIGHTINGS:

Ken Hinkle has hosted a pair of **Eastern Towhees** at his feeders in Bridgewater since before Christmas. Ken also reported a **Brown Creeper** in his yard on Jan. 20.

Vic and Joshua Laubach and Gabriel Mapel found, or re-found, a **Snowy Owl** on Cecil Wampler Road near the I-81 overpass on Dec. 27. A second bird near the White Wave plant in Mt. Crawford was confirmed around Jan. 11. The Cecil Wampler bird was seen through at least Jan. 16 and the White Wave bird is still being seen as of Jan.25.



Snowy Owl, Mt. Crawford

Photo: William Leigh

Diane Holsinger saw a **Northern Bobwhite** near Old Trimble Rd and Silver Lake Rd on Dec. 28. Diane mentioned that it was likely an escapee.

Diane Lepkowski found nine **Horned Grebes** on Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 29. On Jan. 10 John Shea reported 12 **Horned Grebes** from three locations – three at Lake Shenandoah, six at Lake Campbell, and three on Silver Lake.

Kevin Shank reported nine **Common Mergansers** at Union Springs Dam on Dec. 30 and a “Gray Ghost” adult male **Northern Harrier** at Union Springs on Jan. 15.

Diane Lepkowski found a **Cackling Goose** at Lake Shenandoah on Jan.1. On the same date, Gabriel Mapel and Vic Laubach saw a **Lapland Longspur** in with a flock of **Horned Larks** on Scholars Rd. Gabriel found another **Lapland Longspur** on Old Bridgewater Rd in Mt. Crawford on Jan. 22. William Leigh found a Longspur on South Whitesel Church Rd on Jan. 25.

William Leigh found 13 **Ring-billed Gulls** and two **Bonaparte’s Gulls** on Lake Shenandoah on Jan. 3.

Silver Lake has hosted a bevy of waterfowl throughout the month with reports from Tom Mizell, Diane Holsinger, John Shea, Greg Moyers, Ken Hinkle, and Diane Lepkowski. Finds include **Horned Grebes, Buffleheads, American Wigeon, Redheads, Greater Scaup, Gadwalls, Canvasbacks, Northern Pintail, and American Coots.**



Horned Lark, Augusta County

Photo Diane Lepkowski

Lake Campbell has also been a good spot for waterfowl. Herb Myers and Diane Lepkowski have reported **Horned Grebes, Gadwalls, Ring-necked Ducks, American Coots, Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, Canvasbacks, Redheads, and Hooded Mergansers** at this location.

On Jan. 7 Gabriel Mapel and his father had a flyover of three **Tundra Swans** at Wildwood Park. Also on Jan. 7, Herb Myers reported an **Eastern Phoebe** at his place in Keezletown.

Greg Moyers saw a pair of **Great Horned Owls** along Ridgedale Rd on Jan. 16. Ken Ranck added **American Coot** to his “yard” list on Jan. 21 when he found a pair on North River behind his home in Mt. Crawford.

Diane Holsinger saw a **Rusty Blackbird** with a large flock of cowbirds on Jan. 25. On the same date, Diane Lepkowski and Greg Moyers found **American Pipits** at several locations including South Whitesel Church Rd, Cannery Woods Drive, and Bowman Rd.

On Jan. 26, Diane Lepkowski’s yard feeders hosted four **Fox Sparrows** and were haunted by a **Cooper’s Hawk**. Also on the 26th, Diane and Dave Wendelken sighted an adult male **Northern Harrier** coursing farm fields along Rt. 33 at McGaheysville.

White-crowned Sparrows (note from former **Goldfinch Gazette** Editor, Ken Hinkle) – For the last several years I have noticed the White-crowned Sparrows going for the thistle

seed in late winter and on into spring before they leave. This year they have been voraciously feeding on the niger seed for the last month or so. I had two thistle feed socks up, which the Goldfinches were on as usual. I noticed the White-crowns were trying to get the hang of the socks by hovering around them, and in no time they learned the clinging technique. Now I have four thistle feeders up and the White-crowns have commandeered them all. My Goldfinches will have to fend for themselves!

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