



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<http://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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February 2015

FEBRUARY MEETING

DATE: Thursday, February 5, 2015

TIME: 7:00 PM

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

PROGRAM - *Denise Hoodock*

Our speaker this month is Bob Schamerhorn from Richmond, VA. He is a member of the Richmond Audubon Society, the Colonial Nature Photography Club and Virginia Society of Ornithology. His hope is to educate and to inspire the conservation of nature, by capturing and sharing its beauty. Bob's program, *Birding Florida's Hotspots*, displays a spectacular array of birds that only Florida can offer and the places to find them. His slideshow contains Swallow-tailed Kites, Snail Kites, Sandhill Cranes, Roseate Spoonbills, Crested Caracaras, Limpkins, Florida Scrub Jays, Burrowing Owls, Painted Buntings and lots more. Presented with colorful photographs, locality maps and discussion of some of the best places to bird watch and view wildlife in Florida, from St. Augustine to Orlando, down to the Everglades and over to Fort De Soto. Most locations are easy access and great for any level birder, novice to expert. A printed map with location information is provided for each attendee.

Before the meeting, please join us in hosting Bob at Golden China Restaurant, 1005 E. Market Street in Harrisonburg, for dinner at 5:30 PM. Please contact Denise Hoodock at 540-828-2595, 703-216-5499 or dhoodock@gmail.com if you'll be joining us for dinner.

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS AND MORE - *Diane Lepkowski*

2015 Raptor and Waterfowl Count, Saturday February 14, Tom Lord: This annual count covers all of Rockingham County and is divided into 6 areas. The areas and leaders are:

1. NORTHWEST: north of US 33, west of US 11 and within the County borders;
Clair Mellinger, 433-1752
2. NORTHEAST: north of US 33, east of US 11, to the northern County border;
Tom Lord, 828-1226

3. EAST: east of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River and to the northern, eastern and southern County boundaries; David Wendelken, 434-3297
4. SOUTHEAST- CENTRAL: south of US 33, west of the South Fork of the Shenandoah River, north of the southern County border, east of VA 276; Charles Ziegenfus, 434-3164
5. SOUTH CENTRAL: south of US 33, west of VA 276, and east of VA 42 to the southern County border; Greg Moyers, 434-3029
6. SOUTHWEST: south of US 33 and west of VA42, to the southern and western County borders. Tom Mizell, 828-6059

If you wish to participate, contact the leader of the area you are interested in or call the count coordinator, Tom Lord, 828-1226.

Great Backyard Bird Count, Friday, February 13, through Monday, February 16, 2015: This 4-day event allows bird watchers of all ages to count birds at a stationary location (i.e. your yard and bird feeders), providing a real-time snapshot of where the birds are. For as little as 15 minutes on one day, or as long as they like, participants tally the number of individual birds of each species seen. Lists are then reported on the GBBC website. For information, visit <http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/whycount.html>

Monthly Hillandale Walk, Monday February 16, Tom Mizell: Meet at the children's playground parking lot at 8:30 AM.

Highland County, Saturday February 21, Mike Shank: Possible finds include Golden and Bald Eagles, Loggerhead Shrike and if we're really lucky, Rough-legged Hawk. Meet at 7 AM at the Bob-a-Rea's parking lot (south side Bob-a-Rea's) across from the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Department. Bring lunch, snacks and drinks and dress warmly; Highland is often five to ten degrees colder than Harrisonburg. Restroom facilities are limited. Please contact Mike at 540-810-7444 or tallwhiteoak@verizon.net with questions, and let him know if you plan to attend.

TRIP REPORTS

Bald Eagles at Kimsey Run, WV Trip – Debbie Harrison

Seven members of the RBC, along with one guest, ventured out on a typical January morning (cold, but not too cold; sunny, but not too sunny.) We left Broadway at 9 AM with high hopes and eyes open. There were 'town' birds, along with 'water' birds as the road followed along the North Fork of the Shenandoah River.

Our pit stop at Misty Valley gas/grocery/hardware brought our first Bald Eagle. A few birders were inside as it flew over, but those of us in the parking lot were excited to share it with one another.

The first birding stop, along Rt. 259 before the turn to the Reservoir, didn't turn up much, but we kept looking and found a big bird perched. Our route took us around the other side of that tree and it turned out to be an immature Bald Eagle (below the dam.) At our stop at the bottom of the dam, we found

American Crow, Eastern Phoebe, and White-breasted Nuthatch, Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, Dark-eyed Junco, Carolina Wren, Northern Mockingbird and our only American Kestrel of the day.

At the Reservoir, we were straining through our binoculars to see what was perched at the top of the mountain along with the 2 kettles high above the mountain, when a car load of 3 WV birders joined our spot and let us look thru their spotting scope at a Golden Eagle. (Thanks to Matt Orsie & new friends!) There were 10+ Bald Eagles on the far ridge and 3-4 flew towards us and over the lake!

The lake was frozen, but we saw Eastern Bluebirds in the field before us, along with Song Sparrows. We searched and searched the dead standing timber in the lake and finally found a Red-headed Woodpecker. Again, Matt was kind enough to set up his scope so we all had good looks at it! Also seen were: Common Raven and Red-tailed Hawks. We left the lake and followed the road up to the top of the ridge. Along the way were "White-tailed Icicles" (frozen waterfalls), more Eastern Bluebirds and a Red-tailed Hawk.

On Big Ridge Road we had four Bald Eagles over the distant ridge and four more flew near. In the area were White-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Cardinal, American Crow, European Starlings, and House Finch. We met the land owner from the log cabin who regaled us with 'eagle stories'. We then headed down the ridge for one last stop at the Vet Clinic, back on Rt. 259, where we finished up at 1 PM. There we found six Bald Eagles perched (four mature + two immature), along with 2-3 more flying, American Crows chasing a Red-tailed Hawk, and Eastern Bluebirds.

It was a very nice trip with a total of 24 species, including approximately 30 Bald Eagles and 1 Golden Eagle.

January Hillandale Park Trip - Tom Mizell

Light snow was falling and a high temperature of 25 degrees F as I approached Hillandale Park on 14 January for our first walk of 2015. Don Perkuchin was already waiting in the lot and he waved good morning as I parked. Within moments a few other cars arrived, some with light snow coatings. White-breasted Nuthatches, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, American Crows and Northern Cardinals were among the first to appear as we gathered. We spent a few moments putting on appropriate weather gear and talking about safety issues (frostbite). Our wish list birds included Kinglet, Snowy Owl and Winter Wren.

A pair of Pileated Woodpeckers hammered out a big New Year Welcome to four Rockingham Bird Club members and a guest throughout the morning hours at Hillandale Park. Indeed, the Pileated pair were heard throughout the 3-hour walk and were much enjoyed by all. In their prolonged appearances they afforded us easy viewing and ample opportunities to watch them, as they expertly climbed the trees; demonstrated the contrasting black and white as they flew about; hammered away with chips falling; and, enjoyed the breakfast bar at special trees. I seem to have clear visual images of the male actually swallowing food it extracted from a cedar tree. There appeared to be something very special about the cedar tree buffet, as we noted the male in particular seemed to be voraciously enjoying a meal.

Woodpeckers were plentiful this morning. Downy, Northern Flicker (first appearing on one of the tall concrete power poles), and Red-bellied Woodpeckers competed for wood-dwelling critters. After

crossing the pedestrian bridge we found Carolina Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, White-throated Sparrows, a flock of Eastern Bluebirds, Northern Mockingbirds, and several White-breasted Nuthatches along the stream channel. A bright red Northern Cardinal struck an impressive pose in a green cedar tree as a light snow fell. As we stood near the stream channel watching a Downy Woodpecker walking upside down, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker made a sudden appearance flying towards us and then looping away and landing in a nearby Poplar tree where it gave us a good show.

During the three-hour walk we listed 24 species (numerically almost matching the high temperature of 24 degrees F.) Blue Jays, White-breasted Nuthatches and Eastern Bluebirds were the most numerous. Other species we enjoyed included Dark-eyed Juncos, Eastern Towhees, Song Sparrow, Mourning Doves, Sharp-shinned Hawk, (the Sharpy startled a couple of us as we crossed the northernmost pedestrian bridge), American Goldfinch and the last species heard was Cooper's Hawk. One of the day's challenges was to see the birds clearly as the fine snow blurred our glasses. Well, time to close. Hope you can join us in February. Anonymous Quote: "I have never seen so many Blue Jays!"

Wildwood Park, January 20, 2015 – Tom Mizell

The morning began with a gathering at the Wildwood Park shelter near the North River Dam. It was sunny and the temperature was 24 degrees F. Our wish list included Winter Wren, Brown Creeper and Eastern Towhee. Our cautionary safety talk touched on river issues.

A Great Blue Heron flyby happened while we were still at the shelter. As five members of the RBC began a walk through the park, Kathy Byers spotted a Hooded Merganser pair swimming below the North River Dam, accompanied by a Ruddy Duck. We soon listed Blue Jay, American Crow, Carolina Wren, Mourning Dove, Northern Cardinal, several Red-bellied Woodpeckers (we heard three at one time), Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse. It was about 9:00 AM as we paused at the beginning of the gravel loop trail, where we sought to ID a small bird atop a Poplar tree. By its motion we suspected a Kinglet. However, before we clearly identified this little bird a very "Emphatic Thud" sounded from maybe 20 feet away! It surprised all of us and Betty Redmond said "What was that?" As we looked behind us a "red" squirrel lay flattened on the ground and for a few moments did not move. One of the group said "Oh, its bleeding!" As we focused our binoculars on this unexpected creature it slowly righted itself and carefully crawled onto the deck of one of the wooden trail bridges. The squirrel was clearly in a state of confusion. We observed that it was quite injured and bleeding and, as we approached, it moved carefully to the security of a tree. Just beyond the tree we saw what we surmised was the cause of the injuries. A Red-tailed Hawk was perched high overhead just a short distance away. We think that the squirrel had fallen from the grasp of the raptor and almost into the midst of our group. (I spoke with Bridgewater employees the next morning. They had just seen a "red" squirrel that was missing a portion of fur and showing some lacerations to its body. They saw it near the same wooden bridge-likely the squirrel we saw just one day before. We hope it survives to warn others of the dangers from the skies.)

After much discussion of this shocking event we continued our walk. In short order we approached the westernmost corner of the park and found the gray Screech Owl perched in its usual "gnarly" tree. It appeared unconcerned by our staring from below. In this general area we glimpsed a Bald Eagle flying up river and got fairly good looks at the Red-headed Woodpecker that resides in a hollow pine snag across the river. An Eastern Towhee called from the far stream bank and flying just above the water's surface a Belted Kingfisher "rattled" by, heading upstream as Canada Geese and Mallards conversed.

Other birds we enjoyed included Song Sparrow, Downy Woodpecker and Dark-eyed Juncos. It was another COLD winter day with temperatures ranging from 24 to 34 by 10:30 AM. After one loop we tallied 26 species. As we approached our cars a Bald Eagle once again flew overhead, this time heading downstream, affording the group a convincing view. It flew over the dam to a Sycamore perch a couple hundred yards or so down river.

As we dispersed for home some of us stopped for a moment at Bridgeview Park and added American Coots, a pair of Pied-billed Grebes and a Sharp-shinned Hawk. Interestingly enough a Bald Eagle flew downstream as we were at Bridgeview, making a third eagle sighting of the morning.

Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding Report (Fall 2014) - Clair Mellinger:



Owl Banding, with Clair Mellinger's Family
Photo: Clair Mellinger

Here's a summary of the Northern Saw-whet Owl banding project results for this year. The photo is of Mamie (my wife), Celia (our daughter) and our two grandchildren, Ben and Anna ... and, of course, a Saw-whet Owl. They were home for Christmas and wanted to see an owl. So we went up on December 21(!) to try to catch one. I wasn't very optimistic but on our second net-check we caught a single unbanded bird. The results for the year aren't that exciting, but the year had its moments ... such as having 32 visitors in one night and catching an owl for my family on December 21.

The summary numbers look like this: we banded 63 new owls, recaptured four owls that had been banded by other banders, banded two Eastern Screech Owls, and re-captured several of the birds we had banded earlier in the season. The end count was better than last year but our third lowest count. I kept telling people that we were catching very few hatch-year birds (i.e. birds hatched during the summer of 2014) but in the end hatch-year birds made up about 37% of the total ... which is low but not as low as I perceived it to be. This probably means that, unlike the Snowy Owl, the Northern Saw-whet Owl has probably had at least two "bad" breeding years in a row.

Along with the RBC, visitors included three different college classes from EMU and Bridgewater, the Headwaters Master Naturalist group, and many others. Our count was 196 visitors which, I think, is a conservative estimate. Next year, I am hoping that there will be more owls than visitors again. - *Clair*

BIRD SIGHTINGS:

William Leigh and Dave Wendelken found four **Red Crossbills** along the Bother Knob road on Dec. 28.

William Leigh, Diane Lepkowski, and Dave Wendelken reported a **Common Goldeneye**, a **Ring-billed Gull**, **Red-breasted Mergansers**, **Redheads**, **Canvasbacks**, and **Buffleheads** at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 29.

Diane Lepkowski and Tom Mizell found a **Red-headed Woodpecker** at Wildwood Park on Jan. 1. "Screech", the resident **Eastern Screech Owl**, was also seen.

William Leigh reported **Purple Finches** and a **Pine Siskin** along Ore Bank Rd on Jan. 1.

Greg Moyers saw a pair of **Tundra Swans** on a pond near Timberville on Jan. 4.

Diane Lepkowski reported at least 550 **Rusty Blackbirds** in the Osceola Springs Rd. flock on Jan. 4.

Diane Lepkowski saw a **Peregrine Falcon** in Harrisonburg on Jan. 6 and a few times since.

Gabriel Mapel found a pair of **Common Goldeneyes** on the North River at Bridgewater and a **Snow Goose** at Lake Campbell on Jan. 10.

Marshall Faintich found a pair of **Tundra Swans**, **Redheads**, **Canvasbacks**, and a **Northern Pintail**, among other ducks, at Lake Campbell on Jan. 13.

Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus found at least seven **Horned Grebes** on Silver Lake on Jan. 14.

Andrew Clem found a **Northern Pintail** on the North River at Bridgewater on Jan. 16.



Ross's Goose (January 2015)

Photo: Diane Lepkowski

William Leigh found a **Ross's Goose**, or possibly a **Ross's x Snow Goose** hybrid at the Research Drive ponds on Rt. 11 on Jan. 19. The bird was last reported by John Shea on Jan. 22, when it was accompanied by a **Snow Goose**.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski found a pair of **Red-breasted Nuthatches** on the Bother Knob Rd on Jan. 19.

Tom Mizell and Don Perkuchin spotted a **Tundra Swan** at Silver Lake on Jan. 22. John Shea saw the swan along with **Redheads, Canvasbacks, Gadwalls,** and a **Bufflehead** the following day.

Tom Mizell found another, or possibly the same, **Tundra Swan** on the Oakwood Drive pond near Bridgewater on Jan. 24.

Dave Wendelken has had as many as 27 **Pine Siskins** at his feeders at his place outside of Harrisonburg the last few weeks.

Ken Hinkle had a **Tree Sparrow** in his yard on Jan 28, the first in several years.

Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus and his JMU Ornithology Class found an adult **Trumpeter Swan** near Dayton on January 27.



Pine Siskin at Dave Wendelken's feeder
(January 2015)

Photo: Diane Lepkowski

BIRD CLUB BOOK CLUB - Maureen Gallagher-McLeod

The B.C.B.C. will meet on Thursday, February 26, 2015 at 6:30 PM, at the home of Charles and Pat Churchman. After sharing a carry-in dinner, we will discuss Part One of *The Snoring Bird* by Bernd

Heinrich. Part Two of the book will be discussed in March. If you are interested in joining the discussion, contact the Churchmans or Maureen at famcleod@earthlink.net or 896-9541.

TREASURER'S REPORT – *Steve White*

In connection with our mission of encouraging bird study, protection, and appreciation, our club makes annual contributions to a small group of conservation charities, focusing mostly on those with a local ornithological relevance. In January it was once again my privilege to make donations totaling \$4,800.00 as decided and directed at the January 5th meeting of the RBC Executive Committee. These donations, in approximately equal amounts, went to the following causes:

- 1) The Wildlife Center of Virginia in Waynesboro has, since formation in 1982, treated and rehabilitated over 65,000 wild animals representing more than 200 species of native birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, sharing the lessons learned from these cases with some 1.4 million school children and adults across the state of Virginia.
- 2) The American Bird Conservancy, with headquarters in The Plains, Virginia, was founded in 1994 and is the only US-based conservation group with a major focus on bird habitat conservation. ABC acts across the full gamut of threats to birds to safeguard the rarest species, restore and preserve bird habitats, and reduce threats to avian biodiversity.
- 3) The Valley Conservation Council in Staunton, founded in 1990, is dedicated to protecting the Shenandoah Valley's natural and agricultural resources through private and public planning, conservation easements, and the formation of agricultural forestal districts. VCC has over 400 member households in its 11-county service area which includes the headwaters of both the James and the Potomac Rivers.
- 4) The Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory was formed in 1994 to promote and expand the work of a group of volunteers who had set up an annual songbird banding station at Kiptopeke in 1963. The CVWO conducts research and educational projects on the Eastern Shore, in Virginia Beach, in the Chesapeake Bay, near Williamsburg and Richmond, and in the Shenandoah River State Park. Several of these areas are globally significant for the many millions of migratory birds that pass through them.
- 5) The National Audubon Society is well known to anyone with an interest in birds. It is a nation-wide organization with the mission of conserving and restoring natural ecosystems with a special focus on avian biodiversity. Our club's contributions are targeted on two of the projects with special local significance: the Important Bird Areas of Virginia, and to help defray the Society's support for the Rockingham Bird Club's participation in our annual Christmas Bird Count.
- 6) La Selva Biological Station is under the auspices of the Organization for Tropical Studies. The latter was founded in 1963 and is a nonprofit consortium that includes 63 universities and research institutions in the United States. The OTS's substation La Selva is in Costa Rica and has an international reputation as a banner laboratory for ongoing research in lowland rain forests. Our contributions began several years ago upon the recommendations of several RBC members who had visited the site, including the late Fred Scott.

7) Project Perry or The Central Virginia Parrot Sanctuary, a rescue charity accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries, is dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, sanctuary, and relocation of the large population of pet-store and aviary birds that have been abandoned by their owners.

8) The Center for Conservation Biology at William & Mary is a new recipient of the club's donations this year. It conducts activities within three complimentary areas - research, education, and management. It trains budding conservation scientists and educates the public about conservation choices and consequences, concentrating on improving resource management techniques and cost savings.

The above list comprises causes to most of which we have been donating for several years but does not exhaust the total of donations we make. Some of our funds have been donated on an ad hoc basis to support high school ecology studies, scholarships, and the important projects of individual club members such as the Saw-whet Owl banding project and the Rockfish Gap Hawk Watch. I think our club can be very proud of the support we lend to these organizations and projects that share our interest in all our feathered friends.

A large portion of the funds for making these charitable donations comes from the annual dues our members pay. There are still over 60 members on my list for last fiscal year (July 1 2013 - June 30 2014) who have not renewed for the current year. We would appreciate getting your renewals as soon as it is convenient. Dues have remained at their present level for my entire tenure of 10 years as treasurer: \$15 for individual, \$20 for family membership. Checks made out to "RBC" can be mailed to me at 7738 Sparkling Springs Road, Singers Glen, VA 22850. Thank you and Good Birding!



Tree Sparrow at Ken Hinkle's Home (Bridgewater, 1/28/2015)

Photo: Ken Hinkle

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