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# Goldfinch Gazette

## The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<http://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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### FEBRUARY MEETING

**DATE:** Thursday, February 2, 2017

**TIME:** 7:00 PM

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

**PROGRAM:** *The Eastern Screech-Owl in Virginia and Beyond* presented by John Spahr

The Eastern Screech Owl is the most common owl throughout much of its extensive range, including here in Virginia. This small nocturnal predator lives in a variety of habitats and is quite tolerant of human activity, often living in towns and cities. John has been studying this species for several years in neighboring Highland County where he has found that it is quite common, with specific habitat and elevation preferences. He will include his findings in a broader presentation of all aspects of this small owl, from prey preference to plumage, and from nesting to nurturing the owlets. Why do some nests of this species harbor a living snake? This program will be extensively illustrated with high-quality images and promises to be both entertaining and educational. Find out why John is personally examining most of the major museum collections of screech owls across the country. So far, he has examined over 1,000 screech owl specimens ranging from Florida to New England, with several thousand more to go.

Join us for dinner with John before the meeting: 5:30 PM at Bella Luna Wood-fired Pizza, 80 West Water Street, Harrisonburg. Please contact Debbie Harrison if you plan to attend ([woodshar@aol.com](mailto:woodshar@aol.com) or 540-856-3058).

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### FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

**Highland County, Saturday February 4, with Mike Shank:** Targets include wintering Golden Eagles, Bald Eagles and Rough-legged Hawk. Meet at 7 AM at Bob-a-rea's parking lot on Rt. 42 in Bridgewater, across from the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Department. Bring lunch, snacks, and drinks and dress warmly. Please contact Mike at 540-810-7444 or [tallwhiteoak@verizon.net](mailto:tallwhiteoak@verizon.net) in advance.

**2017 Raptor and Waterfowl Count, Saturday February 11:** This is our County-wide winter count, held annually (with just a few misses) since 1998. Tom Lord, coordinator in years past, advised just recently he won't fill that role. So we're in need of help covering sectors, and hoping to coordinate this to continue the count. All levels of experience are welcomed...if you're a newbie, it's a great opportunity to field bird and learn from others. The more eyes the better! Please contact Diane

Lepkowski if you're interested or have questions (540-908-7662 or [dianelep1@yahoo.com](mailto:dianelep1@yahoo.com)) We hope prior-year sector leaders will be willing to help again in their roles.

**Hillandale Monthly Walk with Tom Mizell:** To Be Announced.

## TRIP REPORTS

### **January Hillandale Park Walk – Tom Mizell**

As I drove into Hillandale Park on 25 January I was impressed with dozens of American Robins moving about the grounds under blue skies and a temperature of 32 degrees. A few Juncos were in one group as I approached the Playground parking lot. Soon seven members of the Rockingham Bird Club gathered amidst a variety of bird songs and calls. Before we left the lot we heard Northern Mockingbird, Carolina Wren, White-breasted Nuthatch, Tufted Titmouse and the soft gentle call of Mourning Doves. Of course Blue Jays squawked and Red-bellied Woodpeckers conversed as they hammered and pecked. By the time we crossed the Cabin Bridge at 8:15 AM, we added Song Sparrow and Carolina Chickadee. We were pleased to see the stream flowing fairly full from the rains of the last couple days.

Around the cabin we added Brown Thrasher, American Goldfinch, American Crow and Northern Cardinal. A parade of Canada Geese in a solitary line (where was the other half of the “V”?) passed overhead as we began our trek along the golf course boundary. Along this stretch to the northwest corner we added Downy Woodpecker and White-throated Sparrows. The birding group, now numbering eight, was spread along about 250 feet of the trail. Bringing up the trailing edge of this stately procession, Greg Moyers and David Wendelken spotted a Golden-crowned Kinglet. Greg apparently coaxed the Kinglet to show itself to the entire group. Within a few minutes, the Kinglet fluttered and flitted from shrub to tree to shrub passing closely and allowing us to enjoy the flash of that rich golden crown. This was the first of several Golden-crowned Kinglet shows for this morning. We reached the northwest corner bridge around 9:20 having tallied 21 species.

After we crossed the bridge, we decided to walk eastward to where the walking trail meets the bike trail. Approaching the northeast corner, Anne Nielsen, who only moments earlier had joined the group, said “Is that a Brown Creeper?” Absolutely! Many of us got good looks at this winter visitor. It is always enjoyable to see them walking upside down and fluttering downward from “on high” back towards the ground to start their upward feeding-search again. The northeast corner yielded several White-throated Sparrows along with more Golden-crowned Kinglets. Now an hour later from the first Kinglet sighting, Greg and David had moved about 300 feet ahead of the group. As the seven of us caught up with them they pointed out a Hairy Woodpecker. It gave us good looks along with a fine demonstration of that rapid drumming sound that carries quite a distance.

Approaching 10 AM, our birder numbers dropped from 9 to 6. We added Turkey Vulture before some of us were hypnotized by a Northern Flicker, working the ground with its bill near the volleyball court seemingly oblivious to us birders. We enjoyed its deliberate ground-piercing action and wondered what it might be accomplishing. Was it eating ants? Was it taking in dirt? How about worms? Was it searching through mole tunnels? We enjoyed trying to guess what it was seeking. I got a message later in the afternoon from Don Perkuchin that the bird feeds on ants, among other things. Perhaps enticed by 60 degree forecast, the ants boldly ventured out of their winter confines much to the delight of the Flicker. It was an enjoyable show and we certainly were afforded long looks at this striking bird. Moving to the cabin bridge, we added a Mallard pair in the stream and heard Bluebirds.

We circled the southern loop and noted that it was extremely quiet. Only one new species was added - a Red-tailed Hawk. Was the hawk the reason it was so quiet? The walk concluded around 11 AM as the remaining 4 birders took a seat at the picnic tables at the cabin. We talked of getting together for lawn chair birding at the cabin site sometime in the spring. Our total for this morning was 27 species.

Next month the group has been invited to gather at the nearby Byers residence for early morning refreshments and to observe nature from their home before proceeding into Hillandale. Details TBA.

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

Shannon Updike reported a pair of **Greater White-fronted Geese** at the RMH ponds on New Year's Day. The continuing pair of **Snow Geese** and a **Bufflehead** was also sighted. Don Perkuchin saw the **Greater White-fronted Geese** here on Jan. 3. On the same date, Jonathan Todd reported a pair of **Horned Grebes** and the **Snow Geese**. Jonathan added **Cackling Geese** on Jan. 6. Diane Lepkowski found both goose species on a storm water retention pond near the hospital on Jan. 16.



**Snow Geese, Sentara RMH Hospital Pond**

*Photo: Greg Moyers*

Several good birds were reported at Lake Shenandoah by Diane Lepkowski, Greg Moyers, and William Leigh on Jan. 2. Sightings included 13 **Horned Grebes**, **Hooded Merganser**, **Buffleheads**, **Red-breasted Nuthatches**, **Brown Creepers**, and **Winter Wrens**. On the same date, William saw **Redheads** and **American Wigeons** at the RMH ponds and Diane reported 57 **Eurasian Collared-Doves** at Lumber Mill Rd. Diane continues to be visited by her yard **Great Horned Owl**.

Diane Holsinger's January yard list included **Purple Finches** and **Fox Sparrows**.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski found four **White-winged Scoters** at Lake Shenandoah on Jan. 7. Other reports from throughout the day by Greg, Diane, Herb Myers, and William Leigh included **Red-**

**breasted Mergansers, Ring-billed Gulls, Redheads, Ruddy Ducks, Buffleheads, Northern Shovelers, and a Red-breasted Nuthatch.** On Jan. 8, Greg Moyers estimated 300 + **Ring-billed Gulls** on the ice at the lake.

Gabriel Mapel and Vic Laubach reported a **Snow Bunting** and a **Lapland Longspur** in with the flocks of **Horned Larks** on Nicholson Rd near Elkton on Jan. 8.

Diane Holsinger reported **Redheads, Gadwalls, Bufflehead, Northern Shovelers, American Wigeon, and Northern Pintail** at Silver Lake on Jan. 10.

Karen and Annie Shank found two blue morph **Snow Geese** on the river near Wildwood Park in Bridgewater on Jan. 12. The Shanks have also heard a pair of **Great Horned Owls** at their place near Bridgewater.

Jonathan Todd reported **Ring-necked Duck, Redhead, Gadwall, and Ruddy Duck** at Lake Campbell on Jan. 12.

Greg Moyers reported a **Surf Scoter** at Lake Shenandoah on Jan. 15. John and Jonathan Todd found a **Hermit Thrush** and heard a **Great Horned Owl** at the lake later the same day and added a **Red-shouldered Hawk** near the RMH ponds.

Greg Moyers and Barbara Andes watched a **Short-eared Owl** hunting over fields north of Timberville on Jan. 15.

William Leigh, Gabriel Mapel, and Vic Laubach found a **Tundra Swan** along Moore's Mill Rd on Jan. 16.

On Jan 26, Greg Moyers found a **Cackling Goose** on the Hospital pond with the two continuing Snow Geese, amid a flock of Canadas. Greg reported that the flock flew toward Lake Campbell, where Diane Lepkowski found them later that day. That evening, two **Snow Geese** flew west with a flock of Canada's, past Diane's yard.



**Surf Scoter, Lake Shenandoah**

*Photo: Greg Moyers*

## **117<sup>th</sup> VARC CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT**

On Saturday, December 17, 2016, we completed our Rockingham County Christmas Bird Count “VARC” circle. Although we were able to rise early to listen for owls near our homes, we weren’t able to get on the road until about 9AM due to a thin icy sheen. Winds were steady but gentle, and it was relatively warm throughout the day with temperatures rising to 55F. We enjoyed comfortable conditions after the thaw, allowing most of us to extend finishing times, compensating for lost morning coverage.

We tallied 78 species - only one less than our All Time High (ATH). Our number of 9,780 individual birds was consistent with past years. Thirty-five people contributed afield and/or by feeder watching (FW). This was within our higher range of participant numbers. Our 21-hour FW effort was an ATH, surpassing last year’s 15.5h.

We were graced by many notable species. Although our two Count Week (CW) birds do not count toward the 78 tallied species, the special CW status stands out prominently. RBC member Fletcher Bingham found House Wren in Bridgewater. From the wider birding community, Ron Shearer contributed to the count, documenting a CW immature Black-crowned Night-Heron at Silver Lake.

Thirty-eight species were reported from two or fewer of our 6 sectors. Of the birds we found on count day, 15 species appeared only on less than a third (20 or less) of 61 years of the VARC counts. These “less frequent” 15 are in order by fewest appearances to most: Eurasian Collared-Dove – new High Count (HC) 20 previously 1; Winter Wren; Palm Warbler; Chipping Sparrow; Ruddy Duck; Brown Thrasher; Redhead; Bald Eagle - our first appearance was in 1993 as CW with 2002 being our first regular appearance; Wilson's Snipe; Red-shouldered Hawk – tied HC of 3; Pine Siskin; Northern Harrier; Fox Sparrow; Green-winged Teal (American); and American Pipit. Twenty-seven species- not including the CW birds- were found in only one out of six sectors. Further, 14 species were represented by only a single individual bird each. Six of these 14 saves are also in the “less frequent” appearances list above including Green-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck, Northern Harrier, Brown Thrasher, Palm Warbler and Pine Siskin. The other eight saves, with a singular stand-out, include American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, American Coot, Great Horned Owl, Eastern Towhee, Fox Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird and Brown-headed Cowbird.

Seventeen species were seen in all six areas. Other HC birds included Hairy Woodpecker 10 previously 9, White-breasted Nuthatch 71 previously 69, and Hermit Thrush 5 tied the 111th year. Our 51 American Kestrel count is an encouraging number. This was our 2nd highest since the HC of 58 in the 115th year which was followed by a dip to 34 in the 116th. Although our circle may be outside some or all of their study area, Lance and Jill Morrow have been working hard to contribute to the study of this species. They have presented at RBC meetings and also worked to improve design quality and sheer quantity of suitable nest boxes in the Shenandoah Valley.

We missed tallying Black Vulture, Cedar Waxwing and E. Phoebe. Unfortunately, we also missed a fairly reliable Eastern Screech Owl from Wildwood Park in Bridgewater. Eastern Phoebe was seen in Bridgewater two weeks prior to the count and up to two Greater White-fronted Geese were seen in Bridgewater just before and after the count week period.

Party leader Kathy Byers soloed due to the delayed start causing a change in her team’s original plans. Although, we always try to have parties of at least two, we are thankful that Kathy was able to complete her area (A6BB) around Briery Branch. Debbie Harrison starred in her official party-lead role for Sector 1 (NW side of the circle) taking over from Clair Mellinger. I/Bill Benish covered A3E,

most recently covered by Gabriel Mapel. Last year, I led the subsector known as A6HQ (Hone Quarry), but Mike Shank added that A6HQ to his coverage along with A6US (Union Springs). Mike also contributed sightings from two of his family properties. Fletcher Bingham led a subsector -A4BW (Bridgewater and Mount Crawford- north and east of North River). Fletcher has helped with that area in the past when he assisted Ken Hinkle for Bob Eggleston who remains the overall leader for A4. Leaders of our other less-shuffled areas included Tom Lord (A2), Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus (A3W) and William Leigh (A5 -with subsection assistance by Diane Lepkowski and Greg Moyers.).

If you have Internet access, you can review the full tally through the link below and enter our Count Code VARC: <http://netapp.audubon.org/CBCObservation/CurrentYear/ResultsByCount.aspx>

We can also access more information about last year's 116th CBC international results through the links below. One detail I found interesting is "roughly 5 percent of the North American landmass that is covered by Christmas Bird Count circles".

Great thanks to all those who contributed directly to the count as well as many who hoped to participate but were unable due to weather or holiday time plans with family!

Respectfully and gratefully,

Bill Benish, CBC Compiler for the VARC Circle, Member-at-Large, Rockingham Bird Club  
[wcbenish@gmail.com](mailto:wcbenish@gmail.com) [540-908-7336](tel:540-908-7336) (text and email enabled)

### **Treasurer's Report - Steve White**

This fiscal year's fundraiser was a great success! We grossed \$10,090.50 and after wholesale seed price total and Virginia state sales tax payments, our net was \$4,926.99 which is the second highest net in my 12 years as treasurer. Special thanks to all who made it happen; in particular, to Kathy Byers for stepping forward as the new Bird Seed Sale Coordinator. Additional thanks to those master chefs who slaved over a hot stove to produce the very best homemade suet cakes east of the Mississippi: Shirley Knicely, Karen & Annie Shank, and Ralph & Kay Gibson!

Appreciation also goes to the dozen plus volunteers who helped disperse the tons of seed on November 12th. And, of course, to all our loyal RBC customers: we could not have done it without you!

So, you may ask, what will we do with all that money? Some will go to paying our operating expenses - honorariums for speakers and programs, rental of the VMRC's fine conference facilities, production and mailing of the "Goldfinch Gazette." The bulk of the money, however, is used to further our mission - as stated in our bylaws - of fostering appreciation and conservation of bird life, ornithological studies, preservation of important bird habitat, and collecting census data on the distribution and trends in avian populations. (See complete list of organizations below to which donation checks were sent.) Most of these have been recipients of our donations for several years now. All recipients express warm gratitude for our support, and we can all be proud of our relationship with such bird-friendly charities whose work supports the myriad bird species that comprise Rockingham County's population of migrants and permanent residents.

Organization for Tropical Studies \$300

Wildlife Center of VA \$300

American Bird Conservancy \$300

Coastal VA Wildlife Observatory \$300

National Audubon Society: Christmas Bird Count \$150

Project Perry, Central VA Parrot Sanctuary \$300

Center for Conservation Biology @ William & Mary \$300

Edith J. Carrier Arboretum @ James Madison University \$200

Massanutten Regional Library \$150



**Great Horned Owl**

*Photo: Diane Lepkowski*

### **From Debbie Harrison, RBC President: Update on Dupont settlement**

*DuPont – Waynesboro Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Plan*

Ann Nielsen and I attended the Public meeting in Waynesboro on January 10, 2017, and met several other birders there. The Plan was presented (slideshow) and time was given to participants to meet and discuss the presenters and slides. These are available online -

[https://www.fws.gov/northeast/virginiafield/environmentalcontaminants/dupont\\_waynesboro.html](https://www.fws.gov/northeast/virginiafield/environmentalcontaminants/dupont_waynesboro.html)

Mercury was released into the South River and the South Fork of the Shenandoah River between 1929 and 1950 (and now is also in the main stem of the Shenandoah River). The goal is to restore, replace, or acquire the equivalent of the injured natural resources using the recovered monetary damages.

Potential impacts to natural resources including mussels, fish, reptiles, amphibians, bats, songbirds, waterfowl, fish-eating birds, and mammals were assessed, including aquatic habitat and the associated floodplain or upland habitat along the rivers.

Federal law requires that settlement funds be used specifically to compensate for natural resource injuries, not for impacts to human health or the local economy. With regards to birding: proposed projects may include the acquisition, protection, enhancement, and/or restoration of habitat that would benefit migratory birds across their life cycle.

The Trustees would like to partner with existing programs to prioritize and identify projects. Please see the website for updates on how to submit projects for this category (Migratory Songbird Habitat Restoration). The Trustees encourage you to submit your comments on the Plan by January 30<sup>th</sup>. They can be sent to:

Anne Condon  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
VA Field Office, 6669 Short Lane, Gloucester, VA 23061  
804-824-2407, Fax 804-693-9032, Email: [anne.condon@fws.gov](mailto:anne.condon@fws.gov)

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