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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 7, 2019

**TIME:** 7:00 PM

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

**PROGRAM:** *A Decade of Ornithological Research in the Shenandoah Valley Raptor Study Area* presented by Lance and Jill Morrow.

The Morrows will present the results of their research on American Kestrels, Barn Owls and Loggerhead Shrikes. They would like to update the bird club members and thank us for providing kestrel nest boxes. Lance has been banding birds since the 1970s and Jill since 2000. Together, they established the Shenandoah Valley Raptor Study Area in 2008 and began installing kestrel and bluebird nest boxes, locating raptor nest sites, logging behaviors, and banding birds. Their research has resulted in the publication of 10 papers in VSO's Virginia Birds and Raven, the Journal of Raptor Research and North American Bird Bander.

Join us for dinner with Lance and Jill before the meeting: Taste of Thai, 917 S. High Street, Harrisonburg, VA 22802 at 5:30 PM. Please contact Robyn Puffenbarger, 540-908-7335 or [rpuffenb@bridgewater.edu](mailto:rpuffenb@bridgewater.edu), in advance if you plan to attend.

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### FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

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

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

**Highland County, Saturday February 16, with Mike Shank:** Along with enjoying the County's wonderful scenery, this may be your best chance to see wintering Golden Eagles. Meet at 7 AM at Bob-a-rea's parking lot on Rt. 42 in Bridgewater, across from the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Department. Mike plans to return 3-4 PM. Bring lunch, snacks & drinks, and dress warmly; Highland is often ten degrees colder than Harrisonburg. Please contact Mike at [tallwhiteoak@verizon.net](mailto:tallwhiteoak@verizon.net) or 540-810-7444 if you plan to attend.

**2019 RBC Raptor / Waterfowl Count, Saturday February 23** – This long-standing annual RBC Count covers the entire County and records primarily just waterfowl and raptors. This mainly involves car-birding to scan for raptors and tallying waterfowl on lakes, ponds and rivers. We are in the process

of confirming sector leaders and will have more details and information soon. Diane Lepkowski & Greg Moyers are co-coordinating this year. Please contact Diane ([dianelep1@yahoo.com](mailto:dianelep1@yahoo.com)) with questions or if interested in helping.

## TRIP REPORTS

### **Eagle Trip to Lost River, WV – *Debbie Harrison***

On Jan. 26, 2019, I was joined by 3 RBC members for our drive to Lost River, WV. It was cold, but sunny and calm winds. Being a small group, we were able to travel together (thanks, Wayne, for driving!). Our first eagle spot was across the road & fields from Lost River Grill: an adult + 1 juvenile in a tree; then another adult further down the field. (Thanks, Mike, for bringing the spotting scope!)

At Kimsey Run Reservoir, we found many distant eagles, mostly perched. Then we noticed a swan in the open water. Just one Tundra Swan. One Red-tailed Hawk flew from the parking area across the road. Eagles: 2 adults high on the far ridge and 2 adults closer to the lake, along with some adults and juveniles flying. Total of 10 found here. No bluebirds or woodpeckers; Had 2 ravens fly over. (Thanks, Joy, for the pictures!)

We saw lots of Juncos and icicles and one Red-tailed Hawk along our driving route. At Parker Hollow Reservoir, we first saw 9 turkeys just as we drove into the parking area. There were Blue Jays and 1 Northern Mockingbird. Eagles were all flying, back and forth. We believe we had 3 adults and 2 juveniles here.

Driving back thru Baker, WV we stopped at the Lost River Animal Hospital (grand finale?). There were many Bald Eagles perched and some flying along the river. In many binocular views, you could see more than 1 eagle at a time! We believe we had 11 adults and 3 juveniles here.

Last place to check was the top of Big Ridge Road, but nothing was flying there, so we stopped back by Kimsey Run Reservoir. We found 2 adults Bald Eagles in one tree (but didn't count them again-- just looked & took their picture) and 1 Red-shouldered Hawk.

Total bald eagles = 22 adults + 10 juveniles!

### **Hillandale Monthly Walk – *Herb Myers***

Five persons showed up for a cold, snowy but sunny walk in Hillandale Park. Two were new to the walk. The most common birds were Blue Jays and White-throated Sparrows. The latter were actually singing. Here is a list of what we saw and/or heard: Mallards, Mourning Doves, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flickers, Blue Jays, White-breasted Nuthatches, Carolina Wrens, Northern Mockingbird, American Goldfinches, White-throated Sparrows, Eastern Towhees and Northern Cardinals.

### **Lake Shenandoah – *Greg Moyers***

Nine members of the RBC attended the walk at Lake Shenandoah on Saturday, January 5th. The forecast was for rain, but we were pleased to have a mostly dry morning, with only a couple of brief sprinkles. From the parking lot we spied five male Red-breasted Mergansers on the lake – a nice surprise as these birds are most commonly seen in March in our area. Other birds on the water included a pair of Hooded Mergansers, a Gadwall, and an American Coot. Birds were in short supply on this day, but we were able to see Brown Creeper, Pileated Woodpecker, Belted Kingfisher, and two

Great Blue Herons. After wrapping up at Lake Shenandoah, five attendees continued to Lake Campbell where we added a Canvasback and a pair of Ring-necked Ducks. The trip tally was a modest 24 species.

### **119<sup>th</sup> Christmas Bird Count – Bill Benish**

We held our “VARC” Christmas Bird Count on New Year’s Day 2019, with the combined effort of 29 people afield and at least 6 feeder watchers. We identified 10,487 individual birds of 72 species on count day plus two Count Week (CW) species. I am grateful for everyone’s flexibility as we rescheduled due to safety and access concerns related to heavy rain and flooding. The reschedule prevented some from being able to participate. Fortunately, a few others who had been unable to join on the original date found that New Year’s Day opened an opportunity for them to contribute.

We had three different feeder watcher homes reporting from within Bridgewater which yielded nice finds including our only Ruby-crowned Kinglet, one of our two Merlins and five of the six Pine Siskins. The Shank family near the Union Springs dam also served as a hotspot watch location hosting many people who hoped for Evening Grosbeaks. The grosbeaks were already CW status prior to the count day, but we were not able to upgrade them. The last appearance of Evening Grosbeak on our CBC was during the 1995 count. Our other CW bird was Red Crossbill thanks to Matt Gingerich’s scouting efforts. The last time we had those was 2005.

Nearly every sector leader reported that birds seemed quiet or otherwise difficult to locate. There was no snow cover as temperatures ranged from balmy 60F in the morning to cooler 54F as the day progressed. Birds may not concentrate when more foraging areas are open. The lack of snow may also account for decreased visual detectability. Our number of individual birds was only about 800 less than our average of the last 10 years, but this was padded with an All Time High (ATH) of Rock Pigeons 1,509 and an impressive report of about 450 Turkey Vultures at a single roost location with 882 total TVs. As usual, European Starling made up around 40% of our total with another 40% from the pigeons, TVs, Canada Goose (413), Mallard (384), Mourning Dove (457) and House Sparrow (252). Matt Gingerich pointed out that he had been surprised by a relative lack of chickadees and titmice. The Tufted Titmouse number (29) was our lowest since 1973 and was less than half of last year. Our totals for the chickadees were both exactly half of last year; Carolina Chickadee (31) and Black-capped Chickadee (3). Crow and sparrow numbers were generally lower this year as well.

Ten species were represented each by a single bird including Wood Duck, Ruffed Grouse, Peregrine Falcon, Pied-billed Grebe, Golden Eagle, Wilson’s Snipe, Eastern Screech Owl, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Brown Thrasher and Swamp Sparrow. Overlapping three of those singletons, ten birds seen this year but not last year included Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Ruffed Grouse, Peregrine Falcon, Great Horned Owl, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Thrasher, Purple Finch, plus the two CW birds Red Crossbill and Evening Grosbeak.

Due to our record high 82 species last year, it’s not surprising that we missed a few of those species this year. The eighteen species missed this year included a few rarities. The full list of missed species included Gadwall, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail, Redhead, Lesser Scaup, Long-tailed Duck, Hooded Merganser, American Coot, Killdeer, Blue-headed Vireo, Hermit Thrush, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Eastern Towhee, Savannah Sparrow, Snow Bunting, Rusty Blackbird and Common Grackle. The grackle numbers vary greatly for us year to year, present in only half of the counts since year 2000 with 3,500 last year and over 10,000 in 2004.

ATH birds: Rock Pigeon 1,509 (previous ATH was 1,267 for 2013), Green-winged Teal 30 (previous ATH was 24 for 2011). Ties for ATH: Merlin 2 (matching 2004 and last year), Peregrine Falcon 1 (6<sup>th</sup> year with 1 individual - 2004 was our first).

Twenty species were reported only from a single sector area. Our primary six sectors start numerically in the north northwest, continuing clockwise.

Unique to Area 1: Field Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Red Crossbill (CW)

Area 2 produced Golden Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Great Horned Owl. Mike Smith's group found a Great Horned Owl in the more standard early part of the day and Ken Ranck's group also found a pair vocalizing during mid-day. Ken also served us by hosting Guy Babineau- a board member from the Monticello Bird Club- on his team with Donna Dobbs. Guy captured a couple audio recordings and posted them into the VA Breeding Bird Atlas eBird portal:

<https://ebird.org/atlasva/view/checklist/S51183379>.

Area 3: Wood Duck, Green-winged Teal, Wilson's Snipe, Eurasian Collared Dove, Red-headed Woodpecker, Fish Crow, Brown Thrasher

Area 4: Pied-billed Grebe, Ruby-crowned Kinglet

Area 5: Eastern Screech Owl, Swamp Sparrow

Area 6: Ruffed Grouse, Evening Grosbeak (CW)

The full species list and numbers follow: Canada Goose 413, Mute Swan 3, Wood Duck 1, Mallard 384, Northern Shoveler 5, Green-winged Teal (American) 30, Ruffed Grouse 1, Pied-billed Grebe 1, Great Blue Heron (Blue form) 8, Black Vulture 48, Turkey Vulture 882, Golden Eagle 1, Northern Harrier 2, Sharp-shinned Hawk 2, Cooper's Hawk 10, Accipiter sp. 1, Bald Eagle 9, Red-shouldered Hawk 2, Red-tailed Hawk 49, Buteo sp. 2, Wilson's Snipe 1, Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) 1509, Eurasian Collared-Dove 16, Mourning Dove 457, Eastern Screech-Owl 1, Great Horned Owl 3, Belted Kingfisher 8, Red-headed Woodpecker 3, Red-bellied Woodpecker 54, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 9, Downy Woodpecker 38, Hairy Woodpecker 9, Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted) 12, Pileated Woodpecker 11, American Kestrel 49, Merlin 2, Peregrine Falcon 1, Eastern Phoebe 3, Blue Jay 96, American Crow 113, Fish Crow 2, crow sp. 8, Common Raven 33, Horned Lark 118, Carolina Chickadee 31, Black-capped Chickadee 3, chickadee sp. 4, Tufted Titmouse 29, Red-breasted Nuthatch 15, White-breasted Nuthatch 48, Brown Creeper 8, Winter Wren 7, Carolina Wren 58, Golden-crowned Kinglet 19, Ruby-crowned Kinglet 1, Eastern Bluebird 79, American Robin 64, Brown Thrasher 1, Northern Mockingbird 20, European Starling 4487, Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle) 3, Field Sparrow 9, Dark-eyed Junco (Slate-colored) 171, White-crowned Sparrow 98, White-throated Sparrow 151, Song Sparrow 67, Swamp Sparrow 1, Northern Cardinal 151, Red-winged Blackbird 11, Eastern Meadowlark 8, Brown-headed Cowbird 5, House Finch 162, Purple Finch 21, Red Crossbill CW, Pine Siskin 6, American Goldfinch 87, Evening Grosbeak CW, House Sparrow 252

Thanks again to all those who were able to participate. Thanks also to those who helped coordinate the effort but were unable to join due to the reschedule such as Fletcher Bingham, Debbie Harrison and Herb Myers. Special thanks to leaders including Matt Gingerich, Ken Ranck, Mike Smith, Michael Shank, Charles Ziegenfus, Bob Eggleston, William Leigh and Kathy Byers!

-Bill Benish, as VARC CBC Compiler

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

Mike Smith reported a **Bald Eagle**, **Northern Harrier**, **American Kestrels**, and **Horned Lark** on Model Rd in Elkton on 12/27.

Greg Moyers reported a **Long-tailed Duck** near Timberville on Dec. 30.

Matt Gingerich found a **Peregrine Falcon** feasting on an unfortunate bird along Williamsburg Rd on Jan. 2. Matt had **Palm Warblers** hanging around his place in Linville as late as Jan. 7 and reports two **Eastern Screech Owls** in residence on his property. Matt has been seeing **Savannah** and **Swamp Sparrows** along Grist Mill Rd.

Mike Smith had a number of good yard birds at his place in Elkton on Jan. 8 including **Pine Siskin**, **Brown Creeper**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, and **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**. A **Purple Finch** joined the above birds on Jan. 13. On Jan. 21, two **Hermit Thrushes** joined the creeper, finches, and sapsucker at Mike's feeder.

Herb Myers had a **Purple Finch** at his place in Keezletown on Jan. 11.

Matt Gingerich reported a **Golden Eagle** soaring above Rocky Lane on Jan. 11.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski reported a **Red-headed Woodpecker** on Centerville Rd on Jan. 12. They also reported a **Common Goldeneye** at Lake Shenandoah and the continuing **Eurasian Collared Doves** at Lumber Mill Rd on the same date.

William Leigh reported a flock of around 18 **Pine Siskins** on Victoria Drive in Bridgewater on Jan. 12.

Mike Smith found **Horned Larks** and a couple of **Northern Harriers** on Nicholson Rd and a couple of **Bald Eagles** on Model Rd on Jan. 14.

Matt Gingerich found a **Lapland Longspur** among a flock of **Horned Larks** on Skidmore Rd on Jan. 15. He also had a group of 11 **Savannah Sparrows** at this location.

Mike Smith found a group of 19 **Rusty Blackbirds** on Ore Wash Rd in Elkton on Jan. 15.

Matt Gingerich found at least one **Cackling Goose** in a group of Canada Geese at the technology park ponds on Rt. 11 north of Harrisonburg on Jan. 16.

Diane Lepkowski reported two **Greater White-fronted Geese** along with **Ring-billed Gull**, **Canvasback**, **Ring-necked Duck**, and **Gadwall** at Lake Shenandoah on Jan. 17. The two geese were relocated by Matt Gingerich at Lake Campbell later the same morning.

Bill Benish saw three **Common Mergansers** on the river at Wildwood Park on Jan. 17 and a **Bald Eagle** at Silver Lake later the same day.

Greg Moyers reported a **Black-crowned Night Heron** in the stream at Hair Corral in Dayton on Jan. 17.

Diane Lepkowski and Dave Wendelken found **American Pipits** and **Eastern Meadowlarks** on Skidmore Rd on Jan. 18. Diane and Greg Moyers had a fence post-perched **Merlin** at this location on Jan. 21. Also, on Jan. 21, Diane and Greg reported a pair of **Canvasbacks** and a pair of **Redheads** at Silver Lake.

**Eastern Phoebes** were reported by Diane Holsinger at RMH on Jan. 19 and Herb Myers at his place in Keezletown on Jan. 21.

Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus reported a scaup at Silver Lake on Jan. 23. Subsequent reports of the bird indicate a consensus on **Greater Scaup**.

As many as six **Evening Grosbeaks** at Union Springs, originally reported last month by Kevin Shank, continued to be reported through at least Jan. 26.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Reminder: Inclement Weather (for meetings)**

RBC follows the decision made by Blue Ridge Community College (BRCC) announced on the radio & website, etc. If classes are canceled OR delayed, then the meeting is canceled.

### **Shenandoah Valley Raptor Study Area: Winter update – *Lance and Jill Morrow***

We are gearing up to do some winter kestrel trapping soon. Driving around the Shenandoah Valley Raptor Study Area we are seeing kestrels hanging out near many of the nest boxes so we are dying to catch them and read their bands to see if they are our known breeding adults or birds that were banded as nestlings in our nest boxes.

Recently a road survey we conducted from Virginia to Texas and back counting kestrels was published in the Bulletin of the Texas Ornithological Society! If you want to read it, go to our Research Gate page:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329949022\\_A\\_ROAD\\_SURVEY\\_OF\\_WINTERING\\_AMERICIAN\\_KESTRELS\\_FROM\\_VIRGINIA\\_TO\\_TEXAS\\_AND\\_BACK](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329949022_A_ROAD_SURVEY_OF_WINTERING_AMERICIAN_KESTRELS_FROM_VIRGINIA_TO_TEXAS_AND_BACK)

Basically, while driving we counted all kestrels visible from the roadside all the way from our house in Rockingham County Virginia to Texas and back (6583 km) from 27 Nov - 7 Dec 2017. Overall, 98% of kestrels counted (245 out of 249 kestrels counted) were wintering west of 95 degrees west longitude in the state of Texas where the predominate habitat is agricultural areas crisscrossed by un-mowed grassy roadside ditches. At the end of the paper, we make suggestions for protection and enhancement of winter habitat for kestrels that could improve overwinter survival. If you scroll all the way to the back cover of the journal you will find a photo of Jill holding a male and a female kestrel that we caught on the same trap at the same time (in Virginia)!



Merlin, Skidmore Road

Photo: Diane Lepkowski



**NEW MEMBERS**

Nita Gibson

Ricka Shorish

Rockingham Bird Club  
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Broadway, VA 22815



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 Rockingham Bird Club