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# Goldfinch Gazette

## The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<http://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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### MARCH MEETING

**DATE:** Thursday, March 2, 2017

**TIME:** 7:00 PM

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

**PROGRAM:** *The Oldest Island: a birder's visit to Madagascar*

Presented by Dr. Sarah Swank, Professor Emerita of Biology, Bridgewater College

Madagascar is unique. Isolated from continental lands for over 80 million years, the island has developed a distinct suite of flora and fauna. Six families of birds are endemic to the island and found nowhere else on earth. Human population pressure threatens its natural ecosystems, but its National Parks and preserves protect some of the most fascinating wildlife on earth. This traveler will share glimpses of the island's ecology, its history, its people, their cultures and their problems.

Join us for dinner with Sarah before the meeting: 5:30 PM at Taste of Thai. Please contact Anne Nielsen, 540-574-6125 in advance if you plan to attend. Please do leave a message if Anne isn't there.

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### MARCH FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

**Lake Shenandoah, Saturday March 11, with Greg Moyers:** Meet at the parking lot at 8:30 AM. Please contact Greg at [gwmoyers@msn.com](mailto:gwmoyers@msn.com) or 434-3029 if you plan to attend. Remember that the Lake is a VDGIF fee-access area: access pass; or Virginia State hunting/fishing/boating licenses are available on line at: <https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/licenses/>

**Hillendale Monthly Walk with Tom Mizell:** Monday, March 20. Meet at the Children's Playground at 8:00 AM for our first walk of spring. If you are an early riser, please note winter gives way to spring at 6:29 AM.

**American Woodcocks at Big Meadows, Saturday March 25 with Diane Lepkowski:** Meet at Big Meadows' Byrd Visitor Center at 4:45 for a hike through Story of the Forest trail, then bring dinner or dine at the Wayside Restaurant. We'll meet again around 7:00 PM near the visitor center to head down to the Meadow, where we'll try for displaying woodcocks after sundown (7:30 PM). Bring water, flashlight and winter attire. Contact Diane Lepkowski if you plan to attend or wish to carpool ([dianelep1@yahoo.com](mailto:dianelep1@yahoo.com) or 540-432-1047.)

# TRIP REPORTS

## Highland County Field Trip – Mike and Evelyn Shank

On February 4, 2017, the RBC group to Highland County saw part of their target birds, but not all. We recorded 24 species; noticeably absent was the Rough-legged Hawk. We got our first Bald Eagle at John and Nancy Spahr's. They joined us for part of our day. John took us to several of his Screech Owl boxes and we were able to see one via camera and one red morph sunning in its doorway. We found a Red-shouldered Hawk on our way out to O'Brien's. There we saw our second Bald Eagle feeding on something in a field. We checked back later and found a Golden Eagle feeding at the same carcass. Also saw several Red-bellied Woodpeckers, 2 American Kestrels, 10+ Red-tailed Hawks, American Crows, Ravens, Juncos, Doves, Blue Jays, 1 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Song Sparrow, Goldfinches, Starling, English Sparrow, Northern Cardinal, Eastern Bluebirds, Meadowlark, Canada Goose, and Downy Woodpecker. Donald Wagner also birded with us. He escorted us to his home in Sugar Grove, WVA, where we saw two Bald Eagles at their nest site. We watched them from Donald and Estelle's front porch and got a second Golden Eagle there.

## 2017 Raptor & Waterfowl Count – Tom Lord

The annual Raptor & Waterfowl Count was done on Saturday, February 11. The team leaders were Greg Moyers, David Wendelkin, Clair Melinger, Charles Ziegenfus, Don Perkuchin and Tom Lord. A total of 15 bird club members traveled 552 miles through out the county to find 31 different bird species. Two new species were found that were not seen since its inception in 1998. These were a Cackling Goose and a Short-eared Owl. A sighting of 46 Common Mergansers set a record high count for this species. Over the 19 years of the mid-winter count, a total of 53 species have been sighted.



**Cackling Goose (right) – Raptor & Waterfowl Count record!**

*Photo: Diane Lepkowski*

## **February Hillandale Park Walk and Neighborhood – Tom Mizell**

Twelve members of the Rockingham Bird Club gathered at Ridge Lodge, home of Kathy and Dane Byers on Wednesday 15 February 2017. Temperatures were in the high 40s with slight overcast.

As the initial wave of birders got out of their cars and walked about the Cul de Sac, we were welcomed by Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Mourning Doves, Blue Jays, Juncos and Robins. Four of us ascended upon the house from different directions and as we gathered at the front door we were greeted by Kathy's neighbor. He asked "How may I help you?" We were at the wrong house! With a smile and kind words he directed us to the house to his right. I offered some donuts in token for our surprising him at this early hour and he laughed. We chatted a while as I soon realized he was a news reporter friend that I had not seen since the 90s. By now others had arrived at the right house, some by car and some by walking. As I walked from the neighbor's house I could hear laughter reverberate out Ridge Lodge's door as folks talked about our visit on the front porch next door.

Inside Ridge Lodge we were greeted by hot cocoa and coffee and fresh fruit. Milla Sue Wisecarver brought in muffins. By now 12 folks were looking out various windows and from the deck at a multitude of active birds. Randy Cline called out "Brown Creeper" as he looked out the kitchen pantry window at a mighty oak! As is the "now" Ridge Lodge tradition for spotting the Brown Creeper, Randy received a feeder funnel as a door prize.

The resident Mockingbird exploded off the utility building roof to chase away sparrows that had the audacity to feed at its feeder. Several doves "cooed" overhead. White-breasted Nuthatches shared the canopy with the Creeper and Carolina Chickadees. The sharp calls of Carolina Wrens and Northern Cardinals filled the air and a distant American Crow said "I'm flying your way." Other species in the Byers Nature Preserve included White-throated Sparrow, Song Sparrow and American Goldfinches.

Time flew and the group continued to sight various species from this special place. Downy Woodpecker and House Finches brought the first hour's total to 19. An impressive start and the group began a walk down Circle Drive towards Hillandale Park. Along this walk a falcon sped overhead. Diane Holsinger checked this off as a Merlin. Not bad for our 20<sup>th</sup> species. We entered the park at the Circle Drive entrance and walked via the bike trail. For many of us this was our first time we had seen this part of the park.

We encountered several sparrows in the wooded section and understand the cedars provide great habitat for migratory songbirds in the spring. By 9:30 AM we were on the usual trail. In a fitting welcome, a Golden Crowned Kinglet got the attention of Tom Lord and soon we all got good looks as it flitted and sped about in the cedars and walnut trees.

By 9:40 AM we crossed the Northwest corner Pedestrian Bridge. It was noted that one of the golf course hazard ponds was drained but we still we heard a Kingfisher in this general area. No doubt it was "rattling" its dismay about the absence of water in the pond. We added Rock Dove and Hawk species during our walk around the NW loop of the usual figure eight trek. Around 10:15 AM we found the Log Cabin area strangely silent with very little, if any, birds about. So we headed back towards Ridge Lodge. At least 3 Turkey Vultures circled about the time we crossed the Cabin Bridge. While walking again on Circle Drive, the group spontaneously burst out in applause for a well-hosted trip and by 10:48 AM this day's edition of the Hillandale walk came to an end. But, the more I'm around, the more I realize that for each of us these outings continue and resist "ending". We don't often want to stop casting our eyes to the trees, brush, and heavens in search of birds. Three cases in

point follow: 1. as I drove down South Dogwood I saw a Cooper's Hawk in the front yard of a residence. 2. Don Perkuchin called about an hour later informing me he was looking at Eurasian Collared Doves at the corner of West Dry River Road and Lumbermill Road. 3. Kathy Byers wrote that as soon as all the folks left Ridge Lodge no less than two Red-tailed Hawks and a Northern Flicker flew into the trees in her yard.

I'm sure others of the group of 12 saw something enjoyable after they left as well. Twenty seven species for the day and I am looking forward to our next Hillandale Walk in March. Will "winter" be over then? We will find out; hope you join us.

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

Mike Smith had **Pine Siskins** at his feeders Jan 12 – 14 with a maximum of 3 individuals.

Jonathan Todd found a **Merlin** on Devon Lane in Harrisonburg on Jan. 30. Jonathan also had an **Osprey** along I-81 in Harrisonburg on the same date.

Diane Holsinger reported a pair of **Greater White-Fronted Geese** and **Hooded Mergansers** on the Shenandoah River in Timberville on Jan. 30. On the same date, Diane had a **Fox Sparrow** and a **Purple Finch** at her feeders.

Mike Smith had 2 **Red-breasted Nuthatches** at his feeder east of Elkton on Feb 6. At least one has wintered here. He also had a **Brown Creeper** on Feb 10.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski saw a **Red-headed Woodpecker** on Centerville Rd south of Bridgewater on Feb. 11.

Mike Smith had a winter first **Fox Sparrow** on Feb 16 – 18; perhaps an early migrant. On Feb 17, he had a male **Purple Finch** at his feeder although he's had small numbers all winter.

The pair of **Snow Geese** and the **Cackling Goose** that has been reported previously continues to be seen sporadically at Lake Campbell and the RMH ponds.

**Bald Eagles** continue to be reported at the Donnelley Drive nest.



Snow Geese, Sentara Rockingham Memorial Hospital Grounds

*Photo: Diane Lepkowski*

**Collaboration and Community: The First Season of the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas 2 (VABBA2.) Consider being a mentor and leading an Atlas outing for local birders.**

Trying something new can be nerve-wracking, so consider taking interested folks out on an Atlas excursion. Birding has and always will be about community, so let's help our fellow birders become Atlasers as well. Mentoring is a key tool for increasing the community of Atlas volunteers, but so is training! To that end, the VABBA2 project is organizing a number of Atlas training workshops throughout the spring and early summer. Some sessions will be held by Regional Coordinators for local groups. However, four larger, day-long regional training sessions will also be held around the state this spring. The eastern training session will occur in conjunction with the annual VSO meeting in Richmond (May 5–7), sponsored by the Richmond Audubon Society. The other sessions will be held in Charlottesville, Fairfax County, and a western location (TBD). Stay tuned on the Atlas website and Facebook page for details of these training workshops and other exciting Atlas events.

**Bird Club Book Club- Maureen Gallagher-McLeod**

The B.C.B.C. will meet at the home of Elizabeth Ihle on Thursday, March 16, at 6:30 PM. After sharing a carry-in dinner, we will discuss the book "Earth in the Balance" by Al Gore. If you are interested in joining the conversation, contact Maureen at [famcleod@earthlink.net](mailto:famcleod@earthlink.net) or 896-9541.



**Barred Owl, Shenandoah National Park**

*Photo: Diane Lepkowski*

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