



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<http://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume XLI

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November 2015

NOVEMBER MEETING

DATE: Thursday, November 5, 2015

TIME: 7:00 PM

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

PROGRAM - *Denise Hoodock*

KESTRELS IN THE SHENANDOAH VALLEY RAPTOR STUDY AREA – Lance and Jill Morrow will discuss their American Kestrel nest box research. Currently the Morrows are monitoring 70 kestrel nest boxes in the Shenandoah Valley Raptor Study Area, which they established in 2008 after moving from Wyoming. Over the past 8 years the Morrows have banded over 1000 kestrels with USGS bird bands. Data collected include: nest box occupancy rates, clutch sizes, numbers of kestrels fledged from each box, nest site fidelity, and aberrant plumages and behaviors. They will have kestrel nest box samples and dimensions available for those who wish to make one (or more!).

Recent papers published by Morrows include: “Accumulation of Organic Material on the Talons of American Kestrels” - in *North American Bird Bander*; and “Capture of an American Kestrel with Dilute Plumage” - in the *Bulletin of the Texas Ornithological Society*

Before the meeting, please join us in hosting Lance and Jill at Taste of Thai, 919 South High 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.

NOVEMBER FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

Hillandale Park, Thursday, November 12 with Tom Mizell – Meet at the children's playground parking lot at 8:00 AM for our monthly walk.

Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding with Debbie Harrison - Date to be announced -- This will be a nighttime trip to join Clair Mellinger at the banding research station he's operated for many years in northwest Rockingham County with the help of Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus. We'll aim for around the second week in November. Contact Debbie, woodshar@aol.com, 540-856-3058, if you're interested in attending.

116th VARC CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT, Saturday, December 19, 2015 – Bill Benish

Please mark your calendar to join in this 116th year of the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) international citizen science effort on Saturday, December 19, 2015. Our date is the first Saturday within the yearly date range of 12/14 to 1/5. If we need to use a backup date due to weather problems and safety concerns, the most likely date will be Saturday, Jan 2, 2016. Our circle, VARC, is sponsored officially by the Rockingham Bird Club which has contributed both financially and through the dedication and skills of many members. There is no fee for participants again this year.

We will participate in the field in coordination with sector leader or as a feeder watcher if the house location is within the circle. A camera is a great resource to help document less common birds. Our VARC circle is a 7.5 mile radius from the intersection of Ottobine and Clover Hill Roads. Generally, we divide the area into six sectors and hope that most sector leaders from last year will be serving again this year, so please start making your plans with them directly and soon. If you need help connecting with a sector leader or have any questions, please contact Bill Benish. If you think you already know who you'll be joining, please advise both your sector leader and Bill Benish.

Look for other years' results by clicking on the CBC Results > "Current year and historical data" link in one of the sections of the web page link: <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>

Thanks again in advance for your contribution of effort! Bill Benish, [540.908.7336](tel:540.908.7336) or email: wcbenish@comcast.net

Ruffling a Few Feathers

Elizabeth Ihle

Let me start by telling you that this piece is entirely my own idea; no one asked me to write this because I volunteered! Having been in the RBC for at least twenty years and having served seven years as president and at least ten as program vice-president, I want to speak up, even if I ruffle a few feathers. *We need more members to take responsibility.* Right now, because no one volunteered to edit our newsletter or head up Bird Seed Savings Day (BSSD), our current officers chose not to let the club down and are now playing double duty. They didn't have to do that, and we need to be grateful and step up to assume some of these burdens.

Our highly competent president, Debbie, is now co-chairing Bird Seed Saving Day with our field trip vice-president Diane. Our program vice-president Denise also edits our newsletter.

We need to thank our lucky stars that they have taken on these roles, but the rest of us just can't sit back and expect the club to function without each member's contribution. A neighboring bird club simply cancelled its seed sale one year, when no one stepped up. While it takes some (but not a lot) of specialized knowledge to organize field trips, three of our other important posts—president, seed chair, and program vice president—just need people with a modicum of organizational skills. The newsletter editor needs some word processing experience. None of these posts requires past years of membership in the bird club.

My mother always said that to get something done one should ask the busiest person s/he knows, and I think there's a lot of truth to that. The hardest burden for me to bear as club president was people turning me down when I asked for help. "I'm swamped; I'll help more when I retire; and I don't know enough to help," were responses I received.

The truth of the matter is that this club is amazingly easy to run because (1) There are no politics with everyone trying to help everyone else and (2) this club has no money worries. Few organizations can say that. However, this club *is burning out its current officers*. They can't serve forever.

What I'd like to see is for several folks to step up with the idea that they could take more responsibility now: one who could help Debbie and Diane with this year's BSSD and a second who could work with Denise on either the programs or the newsletters. (The club has a list of speakers from the Virginia Society of Ornithology and also takes suggestions from members.) I promise you that folks now shouldering the responsibilities will be happy to mentor and assist you.

We're not going to continue to have a club if more people won't help run it.

TREASURER'S REPORT - *Steve White*

Revenue has begun to come in from advance orders for our bird seed fundraiser. Thanks to all who ordered early. **Pickup date is Saturday November 7th at BFG Supply (formerly Wetsel's) on North Liberty adjacent to the Southern States filling station. Your seed and suet orders will be available from 8:00 AM until 1:00 PM**, unless you have made other arrangements on your order form.

Many thanks as well to RBC members who have renewed their member dues in September and October. However, we still have a long way to go in membership renewal. Less than one third of the 194 members from last year's roster have taken the time to pay dues for the current fiscal year (2015-2016).

Membership is still the same bargain it's been for my entire tenure as treasurer - \$15 for individual and \$20 for family membership. If you haven't yet renewed, you can catch me at the next club meeting on Thursday November 5th, or you can mail a check made out to "RBC" at 7738 Sparkling Springs Road, Singers Glen, VA 22850. Thank you for your prompt responses, and good birding to all.

BIRD CLUB BOOK CLUB - *Maureen Gallagher-McLeod*

The B.C.B.C. will meet at 6:30 PM on Thursday, November 19, 2015, at the home of Elizabeth Ihle. We will share a meal and discuss "*The Geese of Beaver Bog*" by Bernd Heinrich. If you are interested in joining the discussion, contact Maureen at famcleod@earthlink.net or 896-9541.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Park, September 23 – *Tom Mizell*

Thirteen members and one visitor (almost 3 year old Addisyn) enjoyed the first day of fall at Hillandale Park on Wednesday, September 23, 2015. As early birder, Phyllis Showalter, was waiting in the parking lot on this foggy morning, her presence was rewarded by the flyby of a Cooper's Hawk. This certainly gave us a fine start. It is interesting that the previous two Hillandale walks each concluded by the appearance of a Cooper's Hawk. The group's wish list included: Black-throated Blue and Palm Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Philadelphia Vireo, Nashville Warbler and Toucan. Obviously, some of the group appreciates humor.

Additional birds, as we gathered in the parking lot included: Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers, Blue Jay, Great Crested Flycatcher, Tufted Titmouse, Mourning Dove, Northern Flicker and American Robin. Beside the log cabin we added Eastern Towhee, Cedar Waxwing, Northern Cardinal, Gray

Catbird, Common Grackle and Brown Thrasher. Sixteen species in the first half hour! A special highlight was the soft, sweet singing of Addisyn as she walked among us. She last sang to us during our walk in Bridgewater in the spring. Next time you see her ask about the Bald Eagles that she has seen along “Jordan Stretch” just west of Bridgewater. During travels along that road, Addisyn told Annie Shank “I’m keeping my eyes open for the Bald Eagle.” The smiling words of a 3 year old learning about birds!

Along the golf course section of the trail, White-breasted Nuthatches could be heard along with the sound of lawn mowers and trimming devices. Don Perkuchin's trained ear identified a Snapper lawn mower about the time we found our first warblers of the morning. Magnolia Warbler, the first of many observed during the walk, gave some of us clear looks. By the time the walk concluded I think almost everyone was afforded good looks at these impressive migrants. In this same area we added Worm-eating Warbler and Carolina Wren. Continuing along the golf course boundary Greg Moyers spotted a Blackburnian Warbler and Swainson's Thrush. Black-throated Greens, Red-eyed Vireo, Fish Crow and American Crow moved the tally to 25 species. Before we crossed the Northwest corner pedestrian bridge we added Eastern Wood Pewee, Cape May, Black-and-white, Tennessee and Parula Warblers and American Redstart raising the warbler count to 9 and species count to 35. It was during this warbler parade and associated focusing on the overhead canopy that some of the group found themselves bumping into each other and stepping on each other’s feet. Due to many birds being directly overhead some of us leaned up against tree trunks and others steadied themselves with the help of fellow birders. I heard one person say “I’ll help prop you up if you will help prop me up.” “Warbler neck” happens.

As a Pileated Woodpecker sounded, some of the group got a glimpse of a small bird sporting some yellow. Tom Lord found a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher on the west side of the pedestrian bridge. It flew back into the canopy and several folks pursued this fine looking bird. However, to our disappointment it successfully escaped further observation.

By the time we returned to the cabin area (thus completing the first loop) the mowing machines were in full throttle along the stream channel. We walked the southern loop and added 10 more species including Black Vultures, House Wren, House Finch, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, and Red-tailed Hawk. Tree Swallow was the last species and raised the tally to 45. The walk concluded at 11:55 AM and I noted that the temperature was 61 F. Yes, fall has arrived.

Hillandale Park, October 5 – Tom Mizell

On Monday, October 5, a blue sky day, with temperatures in the 50s, ten members of the Rockingham Bird Club sought the birds of Hillandale Park. Safety was a concern as we dodged ripening and falling Osage Orange fruits and Walnuts. Hummingbird and “Warblers” were on our short “wish list”.

Recent precipitation was obvious as the stream channel in front of the cabin was flowing quite full. Twenty-three species appeared in the first forty minutes. Early sightings were American Crow, Blue Jay, Red-bellied Woodpecker (atop a tall transmission pole), Mourning Dove and European Starling. By the time we drew near to the cabin we spotted Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Towhee, Northern Mockingbird, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Downy and Hairy Woodpecker and Scarlet Tanager.

More birds surrounded us and our “turn and focus skills” were called into rapid fire action. By the time the feathers settled we enjoyed American Goldfinches, House Finches, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Black-throated Green. Greg Moyers spied a White-eyed Vireo that got the group energized as if we weren't already. Kathy Byers found a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Almost non-stop sightings continued as Tom Lord found a Magnolia Warbler, and Greg added Swainson's Thrush and Ovenbird. An Osprey flew high overhead.

Approaching the northwest corner, we encountered a group of about 15 preschoolers and accompanying parents. Each had a bag and they were all very polite and quiet as their teacher told them we were looking for birds. Don Perkuchin looked towards the bags the children were carrying and asked one of the little ones “What is in your bag?” The reply was “Nature.” Think about that and you might smile as we did upon hearing that response.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Fish Crow, House Wren and Northern Flicker were among the 30 species seen as well in the first hour. Other warblers included Yellow-rumped, American Redstart, Northern Paula, Blackpoll, and Common Yellowthroat. Then, around 10:30 AM, Greg sighted a Blue-winged Warbler. It was feeding in the company of Catbirds, Wrens, House Finches, Magnolia and Black-throated Green and Blue Warblers and most of us got to see this treat. Needless to say this morning's hotspots kept many of us from calling it quits early as four of us lingered until about 11:40 AM.

Walking the south loop we added Cooper's Hawk and Red-tailed Hawk taking our total to 52 species. From our wish list dreams we realized 12 warblers!

Anonymous Quote: From the mouth of a preschooler; that reply to Don, “Nature” pretty well sums up what we enjoy at Hillandale Park. Join us in November to see what the leaves have been hiding.

Wildwood Park – Tom Mizell

A Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a Brown Creeper, a Cape May Warbler and Screech Owl were among the many highlights of our Tuesday, October 13 visit to Bridgewater's Wildwood Park. Ten members of the RBC gathered at 8:00 AM in 60 degree temperatures on a cloudy fall morning. As we entered the gates near the dam we found Mallards, Canada Geese, American Robins, and Carolina Wrens to be among the first to greet us, along with energetic, jogging college students.

Just upstream of the dam we spied a Great Blue Heron perched on a horizontal branch hanging over the river. Continuing along the North River's edge we added Eastern Phoebe, Downy Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Blue Jay, Eastern Bluebird, and Carolina Chickadee by 8:45 AM. A striking Belted Kingfisher admired its reflection on the water as a Pileated Woodpecker called from the forested bluff.

We drew near the Northwest corner and Bob Eggleston spotted a Pied-billed Grebe upstream. In this same area a “Kingfisher Kommotion” occurred as Bob was beckoning us to see the Pileated Woodpecker he walked up on. Two Kingfishers were in rapid chase and flew wingtip to wingtip, rattling and flying low over the water. Their chase carried them directly at Ken Hinkle who was standing at the water's edge. Time slowed as they flew toward his head but Ken saw them coming. In a “parting the water's motion” he faced their approach and upon his impromptu orchestration one flew

to his left and one flew to his right. Those of us that witnessed this event made much conversation. Knowing what happened, you can perhaps understand why my field notes read “Kenfishers -2”. It is noted that the resident Screech Owl was quietly perched in close proximity to this flyby and the group got a look at this special owl. Earlier this year, 3 young Screech Owls were seen not too far from today’s perch. At that time they were under the watchful eye of a parent as a fourth could be heard flapping in the Wood duck box which served as their nursery.

Before our loop walk concluded at the children's playground around 9:45 AM, we picked up Cedar Waxwings, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker and Turkey Vulture moving our tally to 25. At the playground, we found Brown Creeper and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

The group now stood at 4 and by 10:00 AM we set up lawn chairs across from the bluff a couple hundred yards upstream of the dam. Things were now somewhat quiet. I asked Tom Lord what he would like to see and he said “Spotted Sandpiper”. No more than 2 minutes later he got his wish! We spent about an hour enjoying the fall day at water’s edge. The fall colors and leaves cascading down upon us added a special touch. A Canada Goose pair serenaded us and soon a single file line of 30-plus Canada Geese played “follow the leader” as they paddled in front of us.

Two of us lingered until noon and the high fliers treated us as we enjoyed an Osprey, American Crow, Raven, Broad-wing Hawk pair, Red-tailed Hawk, Black Vulture and an accipiter (Sharpy possibly). Last, but not least, a mature Bald Eagle winging south was spotted by Dan Perkuchin. (An immature Bald Eagle flew over as the chairs were being set up.) Total species – 34.

Lake Shenandoah – Greg Moyers

Nine members of the RBC attended the walk at Lake Shenandoah on October 24. We were greeted by a pair of Ring-billed Gulls and a trio of Double-crested Cormorants on the lake. Other birds on the lake included American Coots, an American Black Duck, a Horned Grebe, and four Pied-billed Grebes. As we started around the lake, President Harrison (Debbie) noticed a bird nest in a bush at the water’s edge. Peering into the nest, she discovered an intact egg! Birds were active in the bushes around the lake and the sparrows were out in force, including Swamp, Song, White-crowned, White-throated, Field, and Chipping, as well as Dark-eyed Junco and Eastern Towhee. Highlights higher in the trees included Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Cedar Waxwings, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Diane Lepkowski was lucky enough to see a Common Yellowthroat prior to the walk and a probable Tennessee Warbler as she made an early exit. The remaining group members added Red-winged Blackbirds and a Red-tailed Hawk along the path across the road as we put the wraps on the morning. We tallied around 46 species on the walk.

BIRD SIGHTINGS:

Greg Moyers and William Leigh reported as many as nine **Pectoral Sandpipers** at the pond on Oakwood Drive near Mt. Crawford from Sept. 12 - Sept. 18. Greg also had a **Least Sandpiper** and a probable **Semipalmated Sandpiper** at this pond on Sept. 17.

Diane Holsinger reported **Ospreys** at Silver Lake on Sept. 18, Oct. 6, and Oct. 17 and one near Newman Lake on Oct. 4. Diane’s other reports from Silver Lake included three **American Wigeons**

and a **Barn Swallow** on Oct. 4, two **Pied-billed Grebes** on Oct. 9, and numerous **Tree Swallows** on Oct. 17.

Diane Lepkowski had **Tennessee, Black-throated Green, and Prairie Warblers** in her yard near Harrisonburg on Sept. 20. On Sept. 21, Diane added a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** and a **Great Horned Owl**. Diane welcomed to her yard **White-throated** and **White-crowned Sparrows** on Oct. 10.

Diane Holsinger's yard list over the past month featured an **Evening Grosbeak** on Oct. 11. Other highlights included **Nashville Warbler** and calling **Great Horned Owl** on Sept. 18, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** and **Wood Thrush** on Sept. 21, six **Rose-breasted Grosbeaks** on Sept. 22 and more of the same species on Oct. 1-4, a calling **Eastern Screech-Owl** on Sept. 28, **Palm Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, and Savannah Sparrow** on Oct. 11, **White-throated** and **White-crowned Sparrows** on Oct. 15, and a late **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** on Oct. 21.

Huck Hutchens and Diane Holsinger each reported three **Ruddy Ducks** on Lake Shenandoah on Sept. 21.

Mike Shank reported **American Golden Plovers** in the fields around the Shenandoah Valley Produce Auction on Lumber Mill Rd on Sept. 22. That evening, Greg Moyers counted 17 **American Golden Plovers** at the same location, and found 17 **Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary, and Spotted Sandpipers, a Northern Shoveler, and a Lesser Scaup** at the Nazarene Church Rd Wetland.

Michael Godfrey found a **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** with the **Golden Plovers** on Lumber Mill Rd on Sept. 23. William Leigh reported that 25 **American Golden Plovers** were present at this spot on Sept. 27. Diane Holsinger reported a **Peregrine Falcon** and 22 **Horned Larks** at the same location on Sept. 28.

Matt Gingerich reported 341 **Broad-winged Hawks**, five **Bald Eagles**, an **Osprey**, and a **Northern Harrier**, among others, while hawk watching at his place in Linville on Sept. 22.

Ron Shearer reported three **Black-crowned Night Herons** at Silver Lake on Sept. 23.

Shaphan Shank reported 10-12 **Common Nighthawks** at Union Springs Rd on Sept. 28.

Karen Shank reported several good yard birds on Sept. 29, including **Indigo Bunting, Northern Waterthrush, and Palm, Cape May, and Yellow-rumped Warblers.**

Huck Hutchens reported **Northern Pintail, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs**, and a possible **American Black Duck** at the Oakwood Drive pond in Mt. Crawford on Sept. 30.

Diane Holsinger had a nice group of birds on Mt. Clinton Pike on Oct. 5, including **Black-throated Green Warblers** and a **Red-eyed Vireo.**

A **Blue-winged Warbler** was one of many good birds found on Tom Mizell's Hillandale Park walk on Oct. 5. See Tom's report for more details.

Ken Ranck found a **Red-necked Phalarope** on Leonard's Pond on Oct. 7. The bird was last reported on Oct. 10.



Red-necked Phalarope, Leonard's Pond

Photo: Diane Lepkowski

Diane Lepkowski found a **Pectoral Sandpiper**, **Ruddy Duck**, **Green-winged Teal**, and a late **Barn Swallow** at Leonard's Pond on Oct. 8.

Herb Myers reported a few late **Common Nighthawks** on Happy Valley Rd on Oct. 9.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski found several good birds at Switzer Dam on Oct. 10, including **Ruffed Grouse**, **Bald Eagle**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Lincoln's Sparrow**, and nine warbler species, including **Blackpoll**, **Magnolia**, **Tennessee**, and **Cape May**.

Diane Lepkowski found four **Palm Warblers** on Autumn Lane on Oct. 12.

Diane Holsinger saw a **Peregrine Falcon** on Mountain Valley Rd on Oct. 11 and a **Northern Harrier** on Mt. Clinton Pike on Oct. 13. Diane found a **Great Egret** in a pond along I-81 on Oct. 14.

Ken Hinkle welcomed his first **White-crowned Sparrow** of the season at his place in Bridgewater on Oct. 12.

Greg Moyers found an **American Coot** and a **Lincoln's Sparrow** at Lake Shenandoah on Oct. 13. Diane Lepkowski reported five **Coots** at the lake in the following days.

Ken Hinkle and Tom Mizell found a late **Northern Waterthrush** at Wildwood Park on Oct. 15.

John Shea reported a **Horned Grebe** at Lake Shenandoah on Oct. 16.

William Leigh reported a **Short-billed Dowitcher** at the Oakwood Drive pond on Oct. 21.

Steve White saw a flock of **Cape May Warblers** and a continual stream of **Yellow-rumped Warbler** on Oct 23. Also on Oct 23, latest he's ever seen a female **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** at his feeder.

OTHER EVENTS:

Sierra Club Event: “Birds of the ‘Burg” Family-Friendly Bird Walk – Saturday, November 7

Meet at Shelter #12 at Hillandale Park in Harrisonburg, 8:30 AM – 10:30 AM. Beginners and families are welcomed! RBC birders and Virginia Master Naturalists will help lead these trips, which are sponsored by the Sierra Club Shenandoah Group. Children under 18 must be accompanied by parent or legal guardian. No reservations necessary. Bring binoculars if you have them. For questions, contact Ralph Grove (Sierra Club) at 478-3677 or Kathy Byers (RBC) at 820-6517.

Highland Retreat Saw-whet Owl Banding – *Clair Mellinger*

Zig and I are gearing up for another banding season at Highland Retreat. We will probably begin banding around November 1. Banding to the north of us in PA and NY is still quite slow but the folks in Ontario and Quebec have had a pretty good year to this point.

I am going to try a keeping a blog site this year to keep folks up-to-date about what we are doing and when we are doing it. You can find the first edition of the blog at:

highlandretreatowls.wordpress.com

I hope that this will be an easy way for me to answer questions and get information to those who need/want it.



Female kestrel in nest box with newly hatched young

-Photo courtesy of Jill and Lance Morrow

Rockingham Bird Club
151 Deerlick Lane
Broadway, VA 22815



PRESIDENT: Debbie Harrison
151 Deerlick Lane
Broadway, VA 22815
Phone - 540-856-3058

VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS - Denise Hoodock

VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS - Diane Lepkowski

SECRETARY: Donna Dobbs

TREASURER: Steve White - 540-833-6726

MEMBERS AT LARGE: Bill Benish & Lisa Perry

GOLDFINCH GAZETTE - Denise Hoodock

EMAIL: info@rockinghambirdclub.com