



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club
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April 2013

APRIL MEETING

DATE: Thursday, April 4, 2013

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Detweiler Auditorium, Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, 1501 Virginia Ave, Harrisonburg, VA 22802.

PROGRAM, *Elizabeth Ihle*

Our friend John Spahr from the Augusta Club is going to tell us about Kingfishers and Kookaburras on Thursday night, April 4, at 7 PM at the Detweiler Auditorium at VMRC. This most interesting and colorful family of birds has nearly 100 species that range in size from as small as a warbler to as large as a crow. Most kingfishers are tropical. In spite of their name, most do not feed on fish, or are even associated with water. Sadly, here in Virginia we are shortchanged by having only one member of this large and fascinating family. These highly photogenic birds, together with their most amazing habits and habitats, allow for an informative and dazzling presentation.

Beforehand we'll meet John at 5:30 at Beyond, at 50 W. Water Street, the location of the Old Spanky's. Parking will be available across the street in the municipal parking garage. If you wish to join us for dinner, please contact Elizabeth Ihle at 540-234-8296 or email her at eliza51@aol.com.

APRIL FIELD TRIPS, *Diane Lepkowski*

Madison Run Fire Road with Greg Moyers: Wednesday April 10: The fire road is one of the best places in the county to find Louisiana Waterthrushes. Other possibilities include Pine Warbler, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and early returning migrants such as Black-and-white Warbler and Blue-gray Gnatcatcher. This is about a four-mile walk, depending on turnaround point, on fairly level, even terrain. We will meet at the fire road at 8:15 AM and plan to conclude by lunch time. Please contact Greg Moyers at gwmoyers@msn.com or 434-3029 if you plan to attend.

Hillandale Park Walk, Thursday, April 18 -- Tom Mizell: Meet at the Children's Playground Parking Lot at 8:00 AM for our monthly walk.

BIRD CLUB BOOK CLUB, Maureen Gallagher-McLeod: The B.C.B.C. will meet on Thursday, April 25, at 6:00 PM in the home of Elizabeth Ihle. We will share a meal and discuss the book *Shadow Mountain: A Memoir of Wolves, a Woman, and The Wild* by Renee Askins. Contact Maureen at famcleod@earthlink.net or 896-9541 if you are interested in joining the discussion.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Park Walk -- Tom Mizell

After very high winds on 19 March, it was promising that the morning of 20 March began with thousands of stars glimmering and a near stillness in the air. As I left my home in the darkness any thoughts I'd entertained about canceling the walk disappeared completely as a Great Horned Owl called from nearby Wise Hollow. Well, maybe second thoughts to cancel still threatened when, at 6:30 AM, I found the Hillandale gate still locked. However, within 10 minutes the gates were opened so the scheduled beginning time of 6:45 AM would work this day.

To begin in the last hours of winter meant beginning in darkness. While the eastern sky began to lighten there was much bird singing. A lone jogger turned out to be one of our members. The last birds heard or barely seen in winter (prior to 7:04 AM) were Cardinal, Robin, Carolina Wren, Mallard, Bluebird, Towhee, Mourning Dove, Grackle, American and Fish Crows. Two members of the Club began the "winter walk." In addition to the early birds, we found Song Sparrow, Tufted Titmouse, American Goldfinch, Carolina Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Downy Woodpecker, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Flicker, and Phoebe by 8:00 AM.

Between 8:00 and 8:30 AM seven more members joined us for the "spring edition" of Hillandale. The wish list included Towhee and Brown Thrasher. Fox Sparrows were found along the trail and around 8:30 AM the Blue Jays dueled with a Sharp-shinned Hawk in the oaks around the golf course. We found White-throated Sparrows and a Golden-crowned Kinglet in the cedars near the north end of the Park's main road. Brown Creeper, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and to our surprise a Blue-headed Vireo were present near the biking trail in the woods. The Blue-headed Vireo was found just east of the volleyball court.

Kathy Byers mentioned there being a Cooper's Hawk nest near Shelter #1, and another park visitor that we frequently encounter on the trail reported seeing birds at the nest. At the walk's conclusion, four of us went to the nest site and enjoyed watching two Cooper's Hawks. One flew repeatedly to and from the nest as the other perched in a tree and allowed us to truly enjoy viewing it and hearing its calling. Our morning concluded around 11:00 AM, with 33 species observed.

Anonymous Quote: What was especially exciting was watching a pair of Cooper's Hawks near the park entrance. The female worked steadily on the nest, inserting small branches and

stripping bark from trees for its lining, while the male watched. He seemed to be guarding the left-overs of a meal she had caught. Or did I get the gender roles reversed?"

Bridgewater Parks -- Tom Mizell

Six members of the Rockingham Bird Club enjoyed many of the Bridgewater Parks on a cold winter morning, March 14. It was about 26 degrees as we assembled at Wildwood Park. Our wish list included Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Screech Owl, Hooded Merganser and "28 species."

We began our walk at Wildwood Park at 8:30 AM. A pair of Carolina Chickadees began the show, making their presence known before the Mallards and Canada Geese greeted us. In the same tree where the Chickadees flitted to and fro we noticed a female Mallard perched "quietly" in a fork of the tree while a male Mallard was on the ground perhaps looking for her. We moved past the pair. In one loop of the trail that lies west of the pedestrian suspension bridge we tallied 29 species. Highlights were "Screech" in the usual nest tree, Brown Creeper, Golden-crowned Kinglet, a flock of Fox and White-throated Sparrows, a Phoebe along the river, Red-bellied and Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker and Kingfisher.



Eastern Screech Owl, Bridgewater

Photo: Diane Lepkowski

Moving downstream along North River, we car pooled to Bridgeview Park. We added Yellow-rumped Warbler before we got out of our cars, then walked the Park trail before moving on. This park affords a nice view with benches adjacent to the river.

The group decided that the next stop should be the Cooks Creek Arboretum, on the east side of town. We spent some time near the Cooks Creek pedestrian bridge and then walked the 1/3 mile wood chip trail. More Yellow-rumped Warblers were in the Sycamore trees along the creek. We added Chipping Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Rock Pigeons, Killdeer and Mockingbird at the Arboretum.

Next we spent some time on both sides of the Route 42 bridge. First stop was in Edgebriar Park. There is a concrete slab that adjoins North River and while leaning on the rail we added a pair of Pied-billed Grebes, a Coot and White-breasted Nuthatches. At our last scheduled stop a solitary Tree Swallow welcomed us to 7 Bridges Park on the west side of Route 42.

We returned shortly after noon to Wildwood Park and after all departed I walked the loop one more time, adding a Red-tailed Hawk. Total species observed in the parks of Bridgewater was 40. If there is sufficient interest we will try this tour again.

BIRD SIGHTINGS: Greg Moyers

Greg Moyers reported a **Snow Goose** feeding with a group of Canada Geese in a field on Battlefield Road in Augusta County on 3/2.

Diane Holsinger found a flock of 300+ **American Pipits** on Rt. 33 west of Harrisonburg on 3/5.

Gabriel Mapel reported a **Snow Bunting** on Strickley Road in Augusta County on 3/7. Gabriel has found several good birds along Strickley Road including **American Pipits**, **Rusty Blackbirds**, and, on 3/9, both a **Peregrine Falcon** and a **Golden Eagle**.

A **Lapland Longspur** has been seen along Rt. 340 south of Merck throughout the month. The bird was originally reported by Vic Laubach on 3/7.

Greg Moyers found a **Yellowlegs** (likely Greater) at the Nazarene Church Road wetland on 3/11. On the same date, Mike Shank reported a **Purple Martin** at his place west of Dayton.

Gabriel Mapel reported a **Northern Goshawk** on Shalom Road near Stuarts Draft on 3/15.

Diane Lepkowski and Greg Moyers had several good sightings in March. They reported **Pine Warblers** along the Madison Run Fire Road on 3/16. (A Pine Warbler was also seen the next day, 3/17, at Mike Smith's suet feeder east of Elkton.) Also at Madison Run, on 3/23, Diane, Greg, and John Shea again found Pine Warblers, a pair of calling **Barred Owls**, a pair of **Red-breasted Nuthatches**, and, on Ore Bank Road, a singing male **Purple Finch**. They also reported a **Merlin** on Badger Road and **Rusty Blackbirds** on Mossy Creek Road on 3/17. On 3/24, they found a **Common Goldeneye** on Lake Shenandoah.

On 3/18, after several months' absence, two **Pine Siskins** returned to Mike Smith's. Other sightings at Mike's included two **Red-breasted Nuthatches** and a **Brown Creeper** (all feeding at suet, on 3/24.)

Gabriel Mapel saw a **Wild Turkey** and a **Short-Eared Owl** near his home in New Hope on 3/19.

Kevin Shank saw a male **Red-Breasted Merganser** and an **American Woodcock** at the Union Springs Dam on 3/19.

Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus and his ornithology class found a **Common Goldeneye** on Lake Campbell on or around March 21.

An early **Blue-headed Vireo** was found on the RBC's monthly Hillandale Park walk on 3/20.

Steven White saw a **Great Horned Owl** perched on Sycamores on a bluff at his home on 3/25.



American Pipit

Photo: Diane Lepkowski

On 3/25, after the snow storm, Diane Lepkowski reported 80+ **American Pipits** on S. Whitesel Church Road, and smaller flocks along other County roads. Also on 3/25, Greg Moyers found a **Common Loon** on Lake Shenandoah along with at least 53 **Ring-Necked Ducks**, several **Ruddy Ducks**, and the **Horned Grebe** which had been at the lake for several days. Greg then found at least two **Lapland Longspurs** on Strickley Road, one of which was in breeding plumage.

Other post-snow storm sightings, reported by “Zig” on 3/26, included an early **Barn Swallow** near Lake Shenandoah, **33 Red-breasted Mergansers** on Silver Lake, **Blue-winged Teal** at Lake Shenandoah, and about **40 Rusty Blackbirds** on Scholars Rd. Per Clair Mellinger’s “Birds of Rockingham County”, RB Merganser high count was in 1983 -- a flock of 55 birds on Lake Shenandoah.



RBC member William Leigh cradles a male **Eastern Bluebird** after rescuing it from entrapment in splinters of the rail fence in background.

Photo: Greg Moyers

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