



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club
<http://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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DECEMBER MEETING

DATE: Thursday, December 5, 2013

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Strite Auditorium, Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, 1501 Virginia Ave, Harrisonburg, VA 22802. Strite is on the second floor of the Crestwood Building just across from our usual meeting place. There is an elevator to the second floor.

PROGRAM: “Wild and Weird Birds of the World” – John Spahr

It is our great fortune to have a world-birder and technological wizard almost next door in Staunton, VA. Our friend, John Spahr, will present our Thursday, December 5, program.

Over the past few decades, John has birded most of the world’s continents and many islands. In his travels he has encountered some interesting birds, ranging from the plain Small Ground Finch of the Galapagos Islands to the gaudy birds of paradise of New Guinea to the Marabou Stork of Africa, one of the world’s largest and ugliest birds. John has recently studied some of these more unusual species in detail. With the use of lots of images, he will share his insights and opinions of a sampling of birds that range from the beautiful to the bizarre...and beyond. Beforehand, we shall have dinner at 5:30 with John at Union Station, 128 West Market Street, in downtown Harrisonburg. The restaurant is in the old Whetzel Building on the second floor; you may take an elevator to reach it. If you are planning on joining us, please call or email Elizabeth Ihle (540-421-5257 or eliza@aol.com).



Best Bird of the Year? (See sightings report, page 3)

Photos: Clair Mellinger 11/21/13, field lighting courtesy of Charles “Zig” Ziegenfus

DECEMBER FIELD TRIPS, *Diane Lepkowski*

Hillandale Park, Saturday December 21, with Tom Mizell -- Note this is a Saturday and not the normal 8:00 AM startup. The plan is to start at 11:00 AM in the fall and bird into winter which will begin at 12:11 pm.

Lake Shenandoah, Saturday December 28, with Greg Moyers – Greg Moyers will lead a walk around Lake Shenandoah on December 28. We will meet in the parking lot at the lake at 8:30 AM. Please contact Greg at gwmoyers@msn.com or 434-3029 if you plan to attend. Remember that a VADGIF access pass, hunting or fishing license is required.

BIRD CLUB BOOK CLUB, Maureen Gallagher-McLeod -- The BCBC will meet at the home of Denise Hoodock at 6 PM, December 19, to share a dinner and discuss the book *Swampwalker's Journal: A Wetlands Year* by David M. Carroll. Anyone interested in attending the book discussion can contact Maureen at famcleod@earthlink.net or 896-9541.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Park Walk, -- Tom Mizell: A local weather forecaster used the term “Winter Weather Advisory” for November 12. Just the kind of weather some of our birders apparently enjoy as on 11/12/13 the temperature was 40 degrees with wind gusts up to 15 mph (feels like 32 F) as 7 members of the Rockingham Bird Club and a visitor embraced the winter weather at Hillandale Park.

As we gathered in the parking lot and felt the chilly wind, folks put on additional layers and shared jackets and a cap with our visitor. The call of Canada Geese was the first sound that greeted us in the parking lot. Soon the calls of Red-bellied Woodpecker, House Finch, American Robin, White-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Cardinal and Caroline Chickadee pierced the frigid air. We paused for several minutes to watch Robins sharing the cedar trees near the log cabin with Cedar Waxwings. They each moved briskly and feasted on the cedar berries. This was a recurring vision that we enjoyed throughout the morning.

Shortly after we crossed the pedestrian bridge, we spied fluttering activity in a cedar tree adjacent to the trail. Golden-crowned Kinglets gave us a very good show as they fluttered and hovered and enjoyed breakfast. Soon Blue Jays, Tufted Titmice and a Downy Woodpecker appeared near the cabin. By 8:30 AM we listed 15 species.

By the time we began the second loop, 4 of the original 8 birders remained as the other 4 headed for warmer places. One interesting encounter on the second loop involved a Red-bellied Woodpecker flying into a nearby tree. It approached a knot hole as they often do. It is understood they search these cavities for insects, someone else's stored provisions, and on occasion, we have observed them drinking water from these cavities. On this day we observed the Red-bellied as he worked his way up the trunk. He stuck his head into the hole and quite suddenly jerked his head back out and jumped to a nearby branch! A squirrel was already enjoying this “safe haven out of the wind,” and using what we assumed was a proven boxing technique, sent the woodpecker fleeing. We added Mockingbird, Accipiter, Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-throated and Song Sparrows, Juncos, American Goldfinches and American Crow. Our total for the morning was 24 species. Will you brave the last days of fall in December? Hope to see you at Hillandale.

Northern Saw-Whet Owl Banding, Debbie Harrison: On 11/16, even with short notice, 9 members went to the Owl Banding station at Highland Retreat. Unfortunately, no owls were banded, but we got to see the nets and the classroom where the owls will be processed when caught. Clair Mellinger talked about his experiences since he started this station in 2001 and also presented a slide show with pictures of procedures and statistics from prior years.



Dark-eyed Junco

Dining heartily on grasses at RBC member Therese Metcalf's home, this Junco is here for the winter and, if all goes well, will head to northern breeding grounds come spring.

Photo: Diane Lepkowski, 11/17/13

BIRD SIGHTINGS:

*Late addition -- news flash! Clair Mellinger and Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus were rewarded for their work managing the Northern Saw-whet Owl banding station with a fence post-perched **Snowy Owl**, an immature bird, in the Singers Glen area. They spotted the bird on their way home from banding owls, at around 11:30 PM on 11/21. Coordinating Clair's camera and Zig's headlights, they were able to capture the moment!*

Mike Smith watched approximately 100 **Chimney Swifts** enter the Elkton Elementary School chimney on Sept. 24. Mike flushed a **Ruffed Grouse** near Hearthstone Lake on Sept. 26. He also had three warbler species at his place east of Elkton on Oct. 3 – **Pine** and **Magnolia Warblers**; and **Common Yellowthroat**; as well as an **Eastern Screech-Owl** on Oct. 6. On an Island Ford-to-Elkton 10/4 canoe trip, Mike's sightings included a **Bald Eagle**, **Spotted Sandpiper**, 10 **Wood Ducks** and three **Belted Kingfishers**.

Diane Holsinger has had a number of yard sightings at her Timberville home including a **Purple Finch**, a **Lincoln's Sparrow**, and a **Palm Warbler** on October 30, a **Golden-Crowned Kinglet** on Nov. 14, and all of the area woodpeckers except Red-Headed on Nov. 15.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski found a **White-rumped Sandpiper** at the Nazarene Church Road wetland area on Nov. 3. Also present were 13 **Pectoral Sandpipers**, three **Stilt Sandpipers**, five **Wilson's Snipe**, and a **Greater Yellowlegs**. With Greg and Diane still watching, a **Peregrine Falcon** swooped in and scattered the shorebirds. The falcon came up empty but remained perched at the top of a dead tree for several minutes before moving on.

Ken Hinkle found three **Buffleheads** at Hone Quarry on Nov. 12.

Diane Lepkowski, Greg Moyers, and William Leigh found a **Hermit Thrush**, **Winter Wren**, and **Brown Creepers** at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 16. Diane and Greg continued on to Spaders Church Rd where at least 35 **American Pipits** were seen in the field and in the trees.

Diane Lepkowski, Therese Metcalf, and Greg Moyers had several **Fox Sparrows** at Hone Quarry on Nov. 17. They continued on to the Nazarene Church Road wetland, where they found a **Pectoral Sandpiper** and eight **Wilson's Snipe**.

Ken Hinkle and Bob Eggleston reported seeing a **Whimbrel** at Leonard's Pond on 11/21.



Pectoral Sandpiper at Leonard's Pond

Photo: Greg Moyers, 11/15/13

RBC CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT (VARC CBC) – Saturday December 14, 2013:

Our RBC count is scheduled for opening day of the 114th Annual Audubon Christmas Bird Count, which runs Dec 14, 2013 to January 5, 2014. From Audubon's website, <http://birds.audubon.org/about-christmas-bird-count> -- *"The longest running Citizen Science survey in the world, Christmas Bird Count provides critical data on population trends. Tens of thousands of participants know that it is also a lot of fun. Data from the over 2,300 circles are entered after the count and become available to query under the Data & Research link."* Birders of all experience levels are welcome to participate. If you need help connecting with a sector leader or have any questions, please contact Bill Benish at 540.908.7336 or wcbenish@comcast.net

Rockingham County Fairgrounds Bluebird Trail Report -- Debbie Harrison: Our first 'monitors meeting' was successful. The participants included 4 non-RBC members (who were invited to our monthly meeting) along with several club members. Seven people have signed up with me. This gives us 4 teams of 2 monitors, so each team will check Bluebird houses once a month. We have room for others to join our teams or act as 'substitutes'. We will meet in April to commence the weekly checks thru August.

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GOLDFINCH GAZETTE – Sandy Sylvest