



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<http://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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March 2019

MARCH MEETING

DATE: Thursday, March 7, 2019

TIME: 7:00 PM

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

PROGRAM: *Butterflies – Yippy!* By Adrienne Frank

Yippy is for the fun we have as Butterfly Enthusiasts! We are out in the hottest weather, dodging insects to find, identify, and observe behavior of butterflies. Eleven families of butterflies come in diverse sizes, shapes, and colors. Their behaviors (flight patterns, puddling, perching, chasing) are a marvel to watch. They are intertwined with specific habitats, using host plants for laying eggs and feeding caterpillars, and nectar plants for adult nutrition. If you understand a little bit about behavior, habitats, and associations with habitat, you can attract butterflies to your property and preserve their habitat. Adrienne Frank is currently the President of the Historic Rivers Chapter of the Virginia Master Naturalists. She has been learning about butterflies for the last 15 years by participating in butterfly counts and collecting data on local butterflies, including host plants, behavior, and sightings. Every year in August, she coordinates the Annual Williamsburg Area Butterfly Count and submits that data to the North American Butterfly Association.

Join us for dinner with Adrienne before the meeting: Bowl of Good, 831 Mount Clinton Pike, Harrisonburg, VA 22802 at 6 PM. Please contact Robyn Puffenbarger, 540-908-7335 or rpuffenb@bridgewater.edu, in advance if you plan to attend.

MARCH FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

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

Hillendale Monthly Walk, Wednesday, March 20, with Tom Mizell: Meet at the Children's Playground Parking Lot at 8 AM. Also, if the weather allows, Tom will offer a second walk that same day at 5:15 PM for those that would like to go birding from Winter to Spring.

American Woodcocks at Big Meadows, Saturday March 30, with Diane Lepkowski: Meet in Shenandoah National Park at Big Meadows' Byrd Visitor Center at 4:45 for a hike through Story of the Forest trail, then dine at the Wayside Restaurant (if it's open) or pack your own meal. Arrive early to peruse the Visitor Center's wonderful shop and displays! It closes at 5 PM. 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 (about 7:35 PM). Bring water, snacks, a flashlight and your National Park Pass if you have one (pass or entrance fee required for entry.) Dress warmly; temperatures in the Park can be 10 degrees colder than in the Valley.) Contact Diane Lepkowski if you plan to attend or wish to carpool. (dianelep1@yahoo.com or 540-432-1047)

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Monthly Walk – *Tom Mizell*

As I left home for Hillandale Park on February 11, 2019 it was 33 degrees and a light rain was falling. It sleeted overnight and the county schools were opening two hours late. I wondered if anyone else would show for the walk.

As I neared the park, I drove past the Bagel store and both Don and Dan Perkuchin's cars were in the lot so I knew there would be at least three of us making the rounds. While we gathered in the parking lot, we saw Blue Jay, Mourning Dove and heard American Crow. As we put on rain gear, we were joined by two visitors. Our wish list included Brown Creeper, Winter Wren and Red-breasted Nuthatch and our moment for safety included a caution about the slick and frozen ground. Let's get the walk underway before the weather worsens.

As we approached the pedestrian bridge near the cabin, we added Northern Mockingbird and two more bird club members that decided to brave the elements. The Walnut trees welcomed a Red-bellied Woodpecker as the Carolina Wren's call reverberated through the cold. A pair of Canada Geese flew overhead calling in the cold and damp air. They called and circled around a couple times before they headed back towards the golf course pond.

Northern Cardinals sang and showed themselves in the cedars on the south side of the trail near the cabin. Groups of White-throated Sparrows were scratching about the leaves in several places along the gravel path. Walking along the path behind the cabin Downy Woodpecker, Carolina Chickadee and Hairy Woodpecker pushed our total species to twelve. So, for 7 birders we were getting close to two species each. And, yes Blue Jays were everywhere.

We continued towards the Northwest Corner of the park. White-breasted Nuthatches spoke to us several times over the trail and in the tall snags in the golf course woods. After we crossed the concrete slab where the wooded trail gives way to the stream channel grassy area, we paused to watch small birds on the ground and in the brush.

Swoosh! What was that? Something flashed through the birding group in the area where the sparrows were scratching and disappeared into the trees towards the cabin! Lots of "oohs and ahhs" Collectively people shared their glimpses of "pointed wings", "dark back", "falcon size", "low and fast flight", "about the size of a kestrel". Whatever it was it added a bit of excitement to the cold morning. All things considered some of us thought it may have been a Merlin. We hoped to catch up with it again but that did not happen this chilly day. Maybe next time.

As we crossed the Northwest pedestrian bridge the cold began to take its toll and soon the group was down to three. Dozens of American Robins flew over as we neared the cabin again bringing our list to 15 species.

I had to leave early, and it was 32 degrees as I drove out the park at 9:50. Thanks to Dan and Don Perkuchin who persevered in the chill. They walked the Southern Loop and added House Finch and Pileated Woodpecker to give us 17 species for the morning.

Warmer days are ahead. I look forward to seeing you March 20! Rumor has it that the birds of both Winter and Spring will make a showing that day.

PS. A belated “Thank you to Herb Meyers” for taking care of the January Hillandale walk and for the writeup for the Gazette!

Annual Raptor & Waterfowl Count, February 23 – Diane Lepkowski

Despite full cloud cover, steady precipitation (drizzle to moderate rain) and temperatures holding in the 30's (F), we had an excellent day. Seventeen participants covered 520 miles. Total combined field time for our teams was 37 hours 15 minutes. Total species: 37.

Highlights: Bird of the day was a **SANDHILL CRANE**, found by Lisa Perry at a pond on Moores Mill Road; it offered a brief look before flying off. This rarity was a new record for the Count! The bird was relocated an hour later in a cornfield ½ mile east of the pond. Another record-breaker: **29 Northern Harriers** departing a communal roost in eastern Rockingham County. We had *new highs* for: **Barn Owl**, 4 (prior 1, in 2018 – our first record); **Common Goldeneye**, 24 (prior 2, most years zero); **Northern Shoveler**, 113 (prior 48); **Canvasback**, 58 (prior 16); **Common Merganser**, 91 (prior 56); **Wood Duck**, 26 (prior 11); **Bufflehead**, 11 (prior 7); **Killdeer**, 38 (prior 34); and **scaup**, with at least 5 **Greater Scaup**, 41 **Lesser Scaup** (a record high), and 24 logged as scaup species. **Eastern Screech-Owl** tied prior records (2). Our **American Kestrel** count of 61 came close to an earlier record of 68, and Bald Eagles made a nice showing at 7, one less than the 2017 high.

Low species counts included Canada Goose, with a new low of 399 (prior low 745, last year) and Mallard, 371 (2nd lowest.) Vulture numbers were middling, which was not surprising given the rain.

Misses included **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, and we found no rare geese. **Trumpeter Swans**: two were reported both before and after the Count. **Pied-billed Grebes** had been on the river at Bridgewater before Count Day. We wondered if the high, fast-moving river conditions may have driven them to calmer waters.

Many thanks to all who participated!

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Greg Moyers and Barbara Andes reported a **Short-Eared Owl** on Cold Spring Rd near Timberville on Jan. 27.

Two **Trumpeter Swans** were reported on Cold Spring Rd on Jan. 28 and have been reported off-and-on through Feb.

Matt Gingerich found three **Lapland Longspurs** in a flock of **Horned Larks** on Skidmore Rd on Jan. 28.

Diane Holsinger reported two **Common Goldeneyes**, **Canvasbacks**, **Redheads**, and a **Greater Scaup** on Silver Lake on Jan. 29. As many as 43 **Canvasbacks**, 30+ **Redheads**, and 25+ **Lesser Scaup** have been reported at Silver Lake through late Feb.

Mike Smith reported an orange-colored **Purple Finch** visiting his feeders near Elkton on Jan. 30.

Mike has reported **Purple Finches**, as many as 25 **Pine Siskins**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Brown**

Creepers, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren, and Hermit Thrushes visiting his yard throughout Feb.

Diane Holsinger reported a **Chipping Sparrow** at her place in Timberville on Jan. 30.

Mike Smith reported **Rusty Blackbirds, Red-winged Blackbirds**, and a probable **Palm Warbler** at Ore Wash Rd in Elkton, and a **Bald Eagle** on Model Rd on Jan. 31. Mike also reported a **Northern Goshawk** in Elkton on Feb. 7 and three **Buffleheads** on Berrytown Rd on the same date.

Bill Benish and Robyn Puffenbarger had a **Fox Sparrow** at their yard in Bridgewater on Feb. 16. Bill also reported that they had another **Merlin** sighting at their place on Feb. 4. Bill and Robyn have had up to 30+ **Pine Siskins** at their feeders through Feb.

Mike Smith reported a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** on Ore Wash Rd in Elkton on Feb. 19.

Kevin Shank reports that the six **Evening Grosbeaks** at his place in Union Springs continue to be seen as of Feb. 22. Kevin is also seeing good numbers of **Purple Finches** and **Pine Siskins** at the feeders.

Lisa Perry found a **Sandhill Crane** on Moores Mill Rd near Tenth Legion while covering her raptor/waterfowl count sector on Feb. 23.

Karen Shank spotted 11 **Buffleheads** on the North River west of Bridgewater, at the bridge on Spring Creek Rd, on Feb 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.



American Kestrel

Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski



NEW MEMBERS

Vera Kuhn

Susan E. Rilliet

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VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS - Robyn Puffenbarger

VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS - Diane Lepkowski

SECRETARY: Anne Nielson

TREASURER: Audrey Shenk

MEMBERS AT LARGE: Katherine Cummings & Tom Lord

GOLDFINCH GAZETTE - Denise Hoodock

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