



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume XLV

Number 6

February 2020

FEBRUARY MEETING

DATE: Thursday, February 6, 2020

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: DETWILER AUDITORIUM, Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community, 1501 Virginia Avenue, Harrisonburg, VA 22802.

PROGRAM: Jewels of Ecuador: Birds, Butterflies and Ecotourism by Dr. Dave Wendelken

Dave takes us from the Amazon lowlands through cloud forests to the peaks of the Andes in these amazingly biodiverse regions. He concentrates on the national and private parks, refuges and ecotourism conserving endangered habitat. He will share his images of a few of the 600 species of birds he has seen on five trips there.

Dave retired in 1975 after 40 years at James Madison University where he taught publication writing, editing, design and photography. He has a bachelor's in history from Marietta College (Ohio), and a master's and Ph.D. in communication from Ohio University. As a member of the Rockingham Bird Club and Headwaters Chapter of Master Naturalists he contributes to citizen science projects including eBird and iNaturalist. His photography has appeared widely online and in guides to birds in Ecuador and Brazil, butterflies in Central America and moths in the southeastern U.S.

Join us for dinner with David before the meeting at 5:30 PM at Bella Luna, 80 W Water St, Harrisonburg, VA 22801. Please contact **Bill Benish, 540-908-7336** or wcbenish@gmail.com, in advance if you plan to attend.

SECRETARY NEEDED IMMEDIATELY!!

We need a volunteer to step into the role of Secretary for the club beginning in March 2020. We thank Anne Nielsen, our current club secretary, for her service to the Club. She will be moving and can no longer fill this role. Please contact Debbie Harrison at **540-856-3058** or woodshar@aol.com if you are willing to help the club in this capacity.

Treasurer's Report – Audrey Shenk

At the latest RBC Executive Committee meeting in January, the committee agreed to make donations to the following organizations using the proceeds from our Bird Seed Sale:

The Wildlife Center of Virginia (the organization that cares for sick or injured wildlife in our area), the American Bird Conservancy (conserving native birds and their habitats throughout the Americas), the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (protecting migrating birds), the Center for Conservation Biology at The College of William & Mary (preparing future ornithologists), the

National Audubon Society in recognition of their support for our local Christmas Bird Count, Massanutten Regional Library, the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia (promoting conservation of our local birds and their habitats), the Community Cloud Forest Conservation (working in Guatemala to alleviate poverty and protect the cloud forests where many of our local birds spend the winter), and the Virginia Society of Ornithology's *Breeding Bird Atlas 2*.

Thank you for your support of our annual fundraiser. By purchasing bird seed and volunteering on distribution day, you make these donations possible. Happy birding in 2020!

Bird Club Book Club: Meets on Thursday February 20, for a planned, carry-in dinner, to discuss "The Wonder of Birds" by Jim Robbins. Please contact Elizabeth Ihle at eliza51@aol.com if you're interested in attending.

FEBRUARY FIELD TRIPS - Diane Lepkowski

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

Highland County, Saturday, February 1st with Mike Shank: Along with enjoying the County's wonderful scenery, this may be your best chance to see wintering Golden Eagles. Meet at 7:30 AM at Bob-a-rea's parking lot on Rt. 42 in Bridgewater, across from the Bridgewater Volunteer Fire Department. We plan to return 3-4 PM. Bring lunch, snacks & drinks, and dress warmly; Highland is often ten degrees colder than Harrisonburg. Please contact Mike at tallwhiteoak@verizon.net or 540-810-7444 if you plan to attend.

Hillandale Monthly Walk, Friday, February 7, with Tom Mizell: Meet at the Children's Playground parking lot at 8:00 AM.

2020 Raptor / Waterfowl Count, Saturday February 8: This long-standing, annual Rockingham Bird Club count surveys the entire County, including Harrisonburg City. We tally waterfowl on area lakes and rivers along with raptors, including vultures. Other predatory birds, such as shrikes and kingfishers make the list, along with shorebirds we might encounter. The methodology is mainly car-birding with survey stops. We're in the process of securing sector leaders and helpers. Please contact Diane Lepkowski at dianelep1@yahoo.com if you'd like to participate.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Park Monthly Walk, Thursday January 23 – Tom Mizell

Five members of the Rockingham Bird Club gathered on Thursday 23 January for our first Hillandale Park walk of 2020. Our wish list included Brown Creeper, Fox Sparrow and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. No luck today, maybe we will see them next time! It was 19 degrees as we headed toward the cabin. Our morning began with American Robin and Mourning Dove. We soon heard Red-bellied Woodpecker, Fish Crow and Carolina Wren as their calls resonated loudly in the cold air. Among the first to be both seen and heard were the Blue Jays repetitively flying over the cabin from East to West and West to East. It's been noted in walks before that the east to west flyers carry whole peanuts in their bills whereas those flying from west to east do not carry extra baggage. Another park visitor routinely feeds the squirrels and birds at the shelter parking lot just east of the volleyball court. Apparently somewhere to the west there must be a tremendous cache of peanuts or peanut shells.

By 8:40 AM we approached the Northwest Corner of the trail. We added Northern Cardinal, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse and White-throated Sparrow. It seemed uneventful if one was expecting large numbers of species and a lot of bird activity. Perhaps that led us to notice other things during our walk. We were all concerned that many trees show the effects of infestation. Numerous Ash Trees are losing bark in sizable chunks and upon close examination evidence many bore holes. The Emerald Ash Borer has taken a toll at the Park.

We moved on towards the volleyball court and bird activity picked up. We enjoyed at least three Downy Woodpeckers in the trees near the Blue Jay peanut feeding location. Before we reached the cabin bridge a second time, we found a Northern Mockingbird, White-breasted Nuthatch, and we heard a couple American Crows as they flew southward. About halfway through the south loop we found our last additional sighting of the day, Blue Jays were in mass flying from one tree to another and sounding off as if they had surrounded an intruder. As we waded into the brush in hopes of seeing perhaps an Owl or a Hawk cornered by the Blue Jays, an Eastern Towhee popped up about 20 feet away at eye-level. It perched in the open for a couple minutes and gave us all good looks. Fifteen species in two hours for today's walk and a closing temperature of 29 degrees.

Since it was a walk with meager bird activity (other than the boisterous Blue Jays), I asked my companions to share any reflections they might have about the walk. They shared their thoughts in these anonymous quotes:

"I enjoyed the cold, slow walk yesterday. My memory is of watching three Downy Woodpeckers chasing and jousting over territory plus listening to their counter drumming."

"An enjoyable morning was had by all; in spite of the freezing weather. And, of all things, a tractor blowing leaves off of the trail most of the birding time. Who would have expected a "park manicuring activity" on January 23rd?"

"After a cold morning walk and not seeing any new species during the last hour or so it was a pleasant surprise when a Eastern Towhee popped up close by to check us out."

"The most eye opening event on our walk was the wide spread ash borer in our park trees. I had been on the property several times before our walk and never realized just how many trees had been affected. I hope that they can replace them with other trees that they can nurture to maturity. The city is getting ready to sell the golf course, I am hoping that the bird club can be a force to save some of that land for our use."

"Holy smokes it's cold out here! Brrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr Next time I'll get the right clothes for this cold weather."

As the comments above might imply the five that gathered had an enjoyable time together seeking the birds of Hillandale Park. Also, some notes are sobering as we pay closer attention to changes occurring in the habitat. We hope you can join us next time. Perhaps the birds hope so too as the number of birders they sighted may have been far less than the birds expected. So, please fly in when you are able and let's grow the 2020 Hillandale Park bird species list.

Bald Eagle Trip to Lost River, WV – Debbie Harrison

On Jan. 25, 2020, eleven of us traveled to WV searching for Bald Eagles, on a cold, cloudy day. After crossing into WV, we saw a flock of vultures rising and that gave us hope that the eagles would be moving. Our first stop revealed 5 adult Bald Eagles, all perched. Also seen was a Great Blue Heron

and Kingfisher. At Kimsey Run Reservoir we found 5 more eagles, some perched and some flying, along with Eastern Bluebirds, chickadee and sparrows. At Parker Hollow Reservoir we found only one Bald Eagle and one Blue Jay. Our return trip thru Baker, WV along Rt 259 included our “grand finale” of 20+ Bald Eagles (flying and perched – so the count is approximate!) and included two juveniles. We concluded our field trip with lunch at Lost River Grill in Lost City, WV. Also, along our travels we saw kestrels, ravens, crows and one hawk. Total Bald Eagles ~ 30 adults + 2 juveniles.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

The **Common Loon** at Lake Shenandoah, originally reported on Dec. 22, has remained at the Lake throughout January.

Matt Gingerich reported a **Fox Sparrow**, **Eastern Towhee**, **Hermit Thrush**, and at least a dozen **Chipping Sparrows** at Slate Lick Fields on Jan. 1.

A **Wilson’s Warbler** was reported at a private residence in the city of Harrisonburg on Jan. 3. The bird was seen over a period of at least four days.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski reported two **Snow Geese** at the Innovation Village ponds on Research Drive north of Harrisonburg on Jan. 4. These two geese, an adult and an immature, have subsequently been seen at other spots such as Lake Terrace, Lake Campbell, and Acorn Drive throughout the month.

Greg and Diane reported a **Rusty Blackbird** near Timberville on Jan. 4.

Robyn Puffenbarger and Bill Benish reported a **Winter Wren** at Bridgeview Park in Bridgewater on Jan. 6. Robyn and Bill have also had a male **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** visiting their yard in January. Robyn reported that she and her ornithology class saw **Gadwalls** and **Northern Shovelers** at Silver Lake on Jan. 9 before heading to Lake Shenandoah to see the continuing **Common Loon**.

Greg Moyers reported an **American Pipit** on South Whitesel Church Rd on Jan. 7.

Matt Gingerich reported 19 **Greater White-Fronted Geese** at a private farm pond in the city of Harrisonburg on Jan. 15. This group of geese continues to be reported at various spots around the area, including the Innovation Village Ponds and Lake Terrace.

Diane Holsinger reported two **Greater White-Fronted Geese** at the Weavers Rd pond on Jan. 16.

Marshall Faintich reported a **Merlin** on Western View Rd on Jan. 16.

Diane Lepkowski reported a **Lesser Yellowlegs** at the partially drained Lake Shenandoah on Jan. 17.

Herb Myers reported a **Hermit Thrush** and an **Eastern Phoebe** at his place in Keezletown on Jan. 17.

Sarah-Alice Coleman reported a **Purple Finch** at her place near Elkton on January 18. Since, lastly on January 27, she reported that two pairs continue.

Charles “Zig” Ziegenfus and Diane Lepkowski had a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** at Diane’s place near Harrisonburg on Jan. 19.

Ira Lianez reported the two aforementioned rare goose species, the two **Greater White-Fronted Geese** and two **Snow Geese**, along with five **Cackling Geese** at Lake Campbell on Jan. 23.

Mike Smith reported a dozen **Common Mergansers** on the Shenandoah River at Captain Yancey Rd near Elkton on Jan. 23.

Gabriel Mapel watched a **Bald Eagle** flush a **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Lake Shenandoah on Jan. 24. Gabriel also had two **Wood Ducks** at the Lake and reported that two of the **Greater White-Fronted Geese** were at the Sentara RMH ponds on the same date.

Herb Myers reported 23 **Wild Turkeys** along Betts Rd near Harrisonburg on Jan. 24.

Matt Gingerich reported three **Common Goldeneyes** near Timberville on Jan. 25.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski had a flock of 15-20 **Rusty Blackbirds** along Plains Mill Rd near Timberville on Jan. 25.

Did You Know?

Florida's dwindling population of Burrowing Owls is having trouble finding homes. So, one island town is letting the birds stay in residents' yards, rent-free. Those humans can then pocket an easy \$250 for being generous landlords. This week, the [Marco Island City Council](#) agreed to set aside \$5,000 every year to pay residents who host burrows for the vulnerable birds. Wildlife crews will dig the holes, and then it's up to the owls to move in. About 500 Burrowing Owls live on Marco Island, but they're exceedingly rare in the rest of the state, said Alli Smith, a biologist with Audubon of the Western Everglades, a conservation group.

Florida's Burrowing Owls were listed as threatened in 2017 by the [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission](#). Historically, the pint-sized birds inhabited the grasslands of central Florida that have been lost to developments and farmland, Smith said. Now, the owls have relocated to more urban spaces. Marco Island and Cape Coral, about 45 miles north on Florida's Gulf Coast, host the largest urban Burrowing Owl populations in the state. Read more here:

<https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/26/us/burrowing-owls-florida-pay-residents-yard-trnd/index.html>



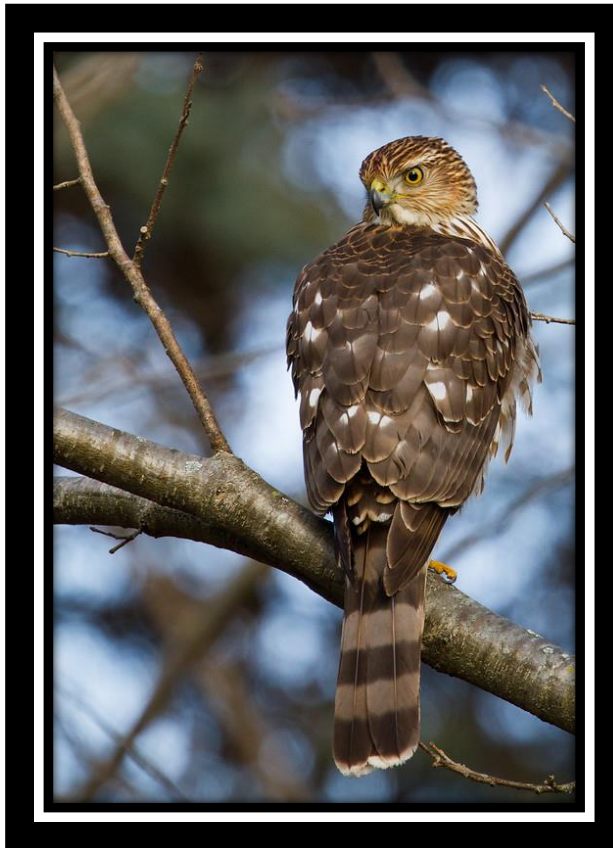
Burrowing Owl

PHOTO GALLERY



Lesser Yellowlegs, a winter rarity, at
Lake Shenandoah

Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski



Sharp-shinned Hawk

Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski



Snow Geese at Innovation Village (Rockingham Co.)

Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski



Bald Eagles – Kimsey Run, WV

Photo Credit: Joy Beaman

Editor's note: The Common Loon photo in the January 2020 issue of the Goldfinch Gazette was incorrectly credited to Diane Lepkowski. The photo was taken by Greg Moyers. Sorry, Greg!

Rockingham Bird Club
151 Deer Lick Lane
Broadway, VA 22815



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

VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS - Robyn Puffenbarger

VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS - Diane Lepkowski

SECRETARY: Anne Nielsen

TREASURER: Audrey Shenk

MEMBERS AT LARGE: Kathy Fovarge, Martha Faw

GOLDFINCH GAZETTE - Denise Hoodock

EMAIL: info@rockinghambirdclub.com



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