



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume XLV

Number 7

March 2020

MARCH MEETING

DATE: Thursday, March 5, 2020

TIME: 7:00 PM

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

PROGRAM: Breeding Birds of Rockingham County: *As documented by the second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas project* – presented by John Spahr

Rockingham County is one of the largest counties in Virginia with an impressive array of habitats. Consequently, it is home to a large variety of breeding birds. Over the last four years, a dedicated cadre of local birders has worked diligently in documenting the breeding status of more than 100 species as part of the second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas (VABBA2) project. John's program will highlight some of the common and not-so-common breeding birds. There are several species for which breeding had never been documented before the VABBA2. Also, several former breeding birds have declined to where they no longer reproduce here and may soon be extirpated. John will also explore the geography and habitats where species are breeding.

John is a regional coordinator for the second Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas project. His area of responsibility includes Rockingham County. Over the past four years he has worked with many of the local birders who participated in this project.

Join us for dinner with John before the meeting at 5:30 PM at Clementine Cafe, 153 S. Main Street, Harrisonburg. Please contact Robyn at rpuffenb@bridgewater.edu or 540-908-7335, 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.

Bird Club Book Club: Meets on Thursday evening March 19, for a planned, carry-in dinner to discuss "The Soil Will Save Us" by Kristin Ohlson. Please contact Elizabeth Ihle at eliza51@aol.com if you're interested in attending.

MARCH FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

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

American Woodcock Field Trip, with Diane Lepkowski: Tentative date: Saturday evening, March 14, with Diane Lepkowski. Time & location to be announced. Please contact Diane @ dianelep1@yahoo.com if interested.

Hillandale Monthly Walk, Friday, March 20, with Tom Mizell: It will be the first "full" day of Spring, which arrives at 11:50 PM on the 19th. Meet at the Children's Playground parking lot at 8:00 AM. With all the warm weather we've had we may have some early migrants. As of this edition it was noted that the Maple trees and others bloomed the last week of February.

TRIP REPORTS

Hillandale Park Monthly Walk, Friday February 7 – Tom Mizell

Think about it. About 3/4 inches of rain fell on Thursday, February 6. The weather forecast for Friday February 7 was rain with 20-30 mph winds. As I drove into Hillandale that Friday morning around 7:45, I wondered if anyone would show up. Never fear - the birds would be there, as were the birders. Six RBC members gathered with smiles and optimism. Our wish list carried over Brown Creeper from the January walk along with Winter Wren. Our safety message was to beware of ticks even in Winter. I found one on my clothes after a check of the rain gauge on Thursday.

At the parking lot, we noted American Crow, Carolina Wren, Mallards in the stream's high waters, Mourning Dove, and Turkey Vulture. The long-familiar log cabin across the stream was gone. Another old friend has become but a memory. Often a perch for Eastern Phoebes as well as a rain shelter frequented by birders in days gone-by. The cabin, with its limestone fireplace, will be missed.

After we crossed the bridge, we added Northern Cardinal, Blue Jays as usual; House Finches, White-throated Sparrows, and several of us heard Eastern Bluebirds. Kathy Byers joined the procession having seen Downy Woodpecker and Golden-crowned Kinglet as she entered the park from the north.

By 8:35 we added Red-bellied Woodpecker, giving us 13 species. About this time the sky had large patches of blue and the winds had diminished. A pleasant surprise! By 9:15 we added White-breasted Nuthatch, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, American Robins, European Starlings, Canada Geese and Black Vultures. The total species increased to five more than we had in January. A Song Sparrow raised our count to 21. The weather apps reported winds to be around 15 mph. We crossed the northwest-corner bridge at 9:20 and added Coopers Hawk. As we passed Shelter 12, Don Perkuchin sighted a gathering of birds along the woods edge. We saw several Downy Woodpeckers along with Juncos, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, House Sparrows, a Northern Mockingbird and Cardinals in the brush. Some were gathering food from tins. I heard someone; I believe it was Bill Benish say, "they are eating Kibbles!" The birds were taking advantage of cat food at what we deduced to be one of the cat feeding locations. Our group had started to dwindle. Kathy Byers phoned in a Red-tailed Hawk as she walked back home. As we left this "hot spot" and headed down to the stream, we spotted a Pileated Woodpecker raising our total to 27. By 10:07 we completed the first loop and, as we crossed the "Cabin site" bridge, only two birders remained. Dan Perkuchin and I walked the south loop and added Northern Flicker. This gave us 28 species for the day. We also found a small group of

Bluebirds which we were happy to see as their presence at the park has been noticeably absent for many years. It was sunny and 42 degrees as we finished our walk at 10:35.

Annual Raptor & Waterfowl Count, February 8 – Diane Lepkowski

Statewide and locally, the overall warm winter has not been conducive to a large influx of wintering waterfowl. Despite this, our teams turned up 36 species, six record highs, and two species new to the Count (which has run since 1994, with just three years missed.) Our six teams (seventeen participants) logged nearly 42 hours, covering 638.6 miles by car and 1.2 miles on foot. Temperatures ranged mid-20's to mid-40's (F) with skies overcast to partly cloudy. Rivers were high and muddy.

Two new Count species! We found a **LESSER YELLOWLEGS** (a continuing winter rarity that's been at Lake Shenandoah) and a **Black-crowned Night-Heron** near Silver Lake.

Record- highs included **Greater White-fronted Goose**, 23 (prior 2); **Peregrine Falcon**, 2 (prior 1); **Turkey Vulture**, 436 (prior 411); and **Common Merganser** 127 (prior 91, in 2019) -- kudos to Matt Gingerich for his early-morning stakeout of a flock of 105 departing a Timberville pond! **American Kestrels**, 84, made a fabulous showing, well surpassing 2008's record of 68. Not surprisingly, one of the two sectors with highest count (21) includes part of Jill and Lance Morrow's kestrel study / nest box area (the other was north-central, with 23 individuals.) **Common Raven**, 26 (prior 15) has shown an increasing trend County-wide, with none reported the first two decades of the Count but steady increases since. The first report, in 2015, was of two birds. This year, the species was reported in four of six areas, absent only in the two south-central sectors.

Red-tailed Hawks, at 94, tied the 2013 high. We found one lone **Snow Goose** (not a record.)

Notable misses included **American Coot**, **Great Horned Owl**, rare swans, and many rare ducks (i.e. Common Goldeneye, scaup, Long-tailed Ducks, Northern Pintails.) We found no **Northern Harriers**, which was disappointing after last year's high of 29 departing an Elkton roost site. Unfortunately, the switchgrass fields had been mowed. Many thanks to all who participated!

Highland County, Saturday, February 22 – Mike Shank

Ten people left Bridgewater for the Highland County Eagle trip. We stopped at the top of the mountain for a rest break and to a look for birds. We did see some birds but couldn't tell what they were. The next stop was at the bird feeders in McDowell. There we had American Goldfinches, Purple Finches, White-breasted Nuthatches, Brown-headed Cowbird, Downy Woodpecker and Red-bellied Woodpecker. We then turned right onto Doe Hill Road and headed north.

We saw various birds on this road but no eagles. We turned around and went to Monterey and north on Rt 220 to Blue Grass Valley. It was a slow day. On Wimer Mountain towards Margaret O'Bryan's place, there were no eagles. On the way back down, we stopped to look at a small group of Red-winged Blackbirds, just as we were getting ready to move on someone spotted a flying bird. It was a very brief look at a Golden Eagle.

On the other side going towards Snowy Mountain, we spotted a perched bird which was identified as our second Golden Eagle. They were the only two eagles we saw in Highland County. We left Highland and headed to Don and Stellie Wagner's place in West Virginia. On the way we saw a flock of Wild Turkeys. At their place there was one Bald Eagle on the nest. We saw two Bald Eagles flying while there.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Matt Gingerich reported a **Short-eared Owl** along Raders Church Rd near Timberville on Jan. 20.

Mike Smith had a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, an **Eastern Phoebe**, and a **Brown Creeper**, which was coming to suet, in his yard near Elkton during the last week of January.

William Leigh reported two **Cackling Geese**, **Fox Sparrows**, and two **Red-shouldered Hawks** at Slate Lick Fields on Jan. 26.

Mike Smith reported 17 **Common Mergansers** along Captain Yancey Rd near Elkton on Jan. 30.

Robyn Puffenbarger and her ornithology class had the following notable sightings on Jan. 31: **Common Loon**, **Wood Duck**, and **Red-shouldered Hawk** at Lake Shenandoah, mating **American Kestrels** on Faughts Rd, **Winter Wren** on Mossy Creek Rd, a **Bald Eagle** on the Donnelley Drive nest, and a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** near Robyn and Bill's. On Feb. 20, the group saw **American Wigeons** and a **Ring-necked Duck** at Lake Campbell, **Northern Pintail** and **Green-winged Teal** at Lake Shenandoah, and **Horned Larks** at Lumber Mill Rd.

A **Dickcissel** was reported visiting a feeder in the Mole Hill area in late January and early February.

An out-of-county record of interest for those who may have missed the club Eagle trip to the Kimsey Run/ Lost River area of WV: Randy Cline had 69 **Bald Eagles** there on Feb. 9!

A juvenile **Black-crowned Night Heron** has been seen throughout the month in the stream below the dam at Silver Lake.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski reported a **Red Crossbill** at the usual spot at the crossroads at the top of Briery Branch Rd on Feb. 15.

On Feb. 16, just south of Rockingham on Wise Hollow Rd, Charles "Zig" Ziegenfus and Bob Dean recaptured a banded **Red-tailed Hawk** that was at least three years old and banded Nov. 11, 2018 near Cape May Point, N.J. To recapture a banded hawk is not very common at all.

Shaphan Shank reported a displaying **American Woodcock** at his home at Union Springs on Feb. 18.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Archiving the RBC history --Art and Kathy Fovargue

We are off to a good start with copies of RBC newsletters, the Goldfinch Gazette, from January 1991 through June 2015. We also have Executive & General meeting minutes going back to 1998. And of course, there are electronic copies for the most recent years.

If you, or anyone you know, have any other newsletters or minutes going back to the Club's start in 1974, please let us know. If you don't want to donate them to be archived at JMU, we will be glad to copy them.

Also, if you are providing a nesting site or other habitat for any other documents or articles that you think talk about the history of our bird club, please let us know - art.fovargue@gmail.com

Bluebird Trail – Debbie Harrison

The Rockingham Bird Club, with the help and support of the Rockingham County Fair Association, has established a 'Bluebird Trail' of nest boxes at the Rockingham Fair Grounds and there are more requests to establish & monitor more trails. Any Trail needs MONITORS to check the boxes on a

weekly basis (April thru August) which takes about 1 hour.

People interested in volunteering **1 HOUR per MONTH**, will be joining a monitoring team (including mentoring) & given an orientation on nest box monitoring and the protocol used for collecting and reporting data.

If you have a home nest box (or trail) that you monitor, you can register your trail as well.

A sign-up sheet will be available at the club meeting, or contact Debbie at woodshar@aol.com or call her at 540-856-3058.



Northern Cardinals and Red-shouldered Hawk – 1/30/20

Photo credit: Art Fovargue



Bob Dean studies Red-tailed Hawk leg band – 2/16/20

Photo credit: Charles Ziegenfus

Rockingham Bird Club
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VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS - Robyn Puffenbarger

VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS - Diane Lepkowski

SECRETARY: VACANT

TREASURER: Audrey Shenk

MEMBERS AT LARGE: Kathy Fovargue, Martha Faw

GOLDFINCH GAZETTE - Denise Hoodock

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