



**Goldfinch Gazette**  
**The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club**  
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**DUE TO THE CURRENT CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK,  
THE MAY MEETING IS CANCELLED.**

**SECRETARY NEEDED IMMEDIATELY!!**

We need a volunteer to step into the role of Secretary for the club. Please contact Debbie Harrison at 540-856-3058 or [woodshar@aol.com](mailto:woodshar@aol.com) if you are willing to help the club in this capacity.

**Vice President for Programs Needed**

As you may already know, our current VP for Programs, Robyn Puffenbarger, will be completing her 2-year commitment in June. Therefore, the club needs a volunteer to step forward and fill this role. Robyn has some programs already scheduled for the 2020-2021 program year.

**Election of Officers Postponed**

Election of officers was supposed to be held at the May meeting; however, considering the current cancellation, the existing officers will continue until we meet again, except for Secretary.

**MAY FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski***

As of now, there are no scheduled field trips. Club members will be notified by email of any future trips we may be able to offer. We encourage birding only at, or close to, home. Stay safe, everyone, and we'll look forward to gathering in the future!

**TRIP REPORTS**

**Hillandale Park – *Tom Mizell, Randy Cline, Karen Shank, Annie Shank***

Thank you, Karen and Annie Shank and Randy Cline, for sharing your bird sightings with us during this time of social distancing as we try to keep ourselves and our neighbors safe from the Corona Virus. Your lists give us a good appreciation that Spring has indeed arrived!

There are a goodly number of migrants in the respective lists along with the old faithful. Karen and Annie's list for April 1 and April 5 gives us the Spring Creek area (except for the 3 sightings at the Nazarene Wetlands) whereas Randy's March 28 list is for Hillandale Park. Randy's April sightings were from his travels out and about in the city and the county on at least 12 separate days. Randy was kind enough to send several emails of his new species sightings as the month advanced.

We certainly miss our group field trips, especially at this time of year when Spring announces itself in blooming splendor accompanied by the singing of both resident and migrating birds. Chipping Sparrows, Gray Catbirds, Brown Thrashers and Tree Swallows have shown up in my neighborhood. The White-throated Sparrows are still around. I'm waiting for Hummingbirds, and Orchard Orioles to visit our Red Buckeye as it is in near full bloom.

I imagine we all have welcomed at least one migratory bird and seen the evidence of nest building. Hopefully, none of us has been injured due to the territorial "Robin jousts" in our yards and neighborhoods. Are there more Robins around this Spring than usual? I have several nests in my yard and there are at least 3 nests in one of our trees.

I miss the Rockingham Bird Club Meetings and the field trips along with such things as impromptu trips to see a special bird that has been sighted. All the fun stuff we do as members of the RBC is in a holding pattern. I miss the conversations, the laughter, the smiles, seeing folks strike out in certain directions upon hearing a call and just the nice walks along the trails. One never knows what is around the bend. Also, there is something to be said for those times when we synchronize our movements in group binocular drills as we try to focus on a special bird. I also miss the anticipation of a second chance to see a special bird when I missed seeing it the first time. There is certainly a greater appreciation for all the many aspects of our times in the great outdoors together. I'm grateful for the past experiences and look forward to days ahead. Echoing the words of dear birding friends "certainly hope it won't be too long until we can enjoy the field trips again." I can't wait to schedule a field trip but, in the meantime, may you all stay safe and continue to enjoy the birds of Spring.

*Hillandale Park 3/28/20 – Randy Cline*

Eastern Blue Bird, Brown Thrasher, Mallard, Dark-eyed Junco, Song Sparrow, Eastern Phoebe, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Tree Swallow, Eastern Towhee, Turkey Vulture, Carolina Chickadee, Common Grackle, Tufted Titmouse, Brown Creeper

*April Sightings – Randy Cline*

Rock Pigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Red-breasted Merganser, White-crowned Sparrow, Pine Warbler, Black-crowned Night Heron, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Red-shouldered Hawk, Blue-headed Vireo, Eastern Meadowlark, American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Purple Martin, Mute Swan, Belted Kingfisher, Barred Owl, Ring-billed Gull, Common Raven, Hairy Woodpecker, Barn Swallow, Broad-winged Hawk, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Gray Catbird, Orchard Oriole, Eastern Kingbird, Killdeer, Ruby-throated Hummingbird

*April Sightings – Karen and Annie Shank*

April 1, 2020 – Blue Jay, Northern Cardinal, Hairy Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, House Finch, White-throated Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Tufted Titmouse, Mourning Dove, House Sparrow, Downy Woodpecker, Common Grackle, American Goldfinch, European Starling, Rock Pigeon, American Robin, Brown-headed Cowbird, Tree Swallow, Field Sparrow, Carolina Wren,

Turkey Vulture, Eastern Bluebird, Common Raven, Great Blue Heron, Carolina Chickadee, Eastern Towhee, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Chipping Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird

April 5, 2020 – Eastern Phoebe, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlarks, Dark-eyed Junco, Turkey Vulture, Red-shouldered Hawk, Brown Thrasher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Eastern Towhee, Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay, White-breasted Nuthatch, Tufted Titmouse, Mourning Dove, Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, White-throated Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Bluebird, Brown-headed Cowbird, European Starling, Wood Ducks, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Tree Swallow, Blue-headed Vireo, Carolina Wren, Pileated Woodpecker, Fish Crow, American Goldfinch, House Finch, White-crowned Sparrow, House Sparrow, Hermit Thrush, Red-winged Blackbird, American Robin, Common Grackle, Belted Kingfisher, Northern Mockingbird, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Black Vulture

Nazarene Wetlands – Killdeer, Canada Geese, Least Sandpiper

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

Mike Smith heard a **Blue-headed Vireo** and a **Pine Warbler** at his place near Elkton on March 21. On March 23, Mike hosted a pair of **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** and a **Fox Sparrow** and had a singing **Brown Thrasher** in Elkton. On March 26, Mike had a **Northern Rough-winged Swallow** in Elkton and a **Common Merganser** and **Wood Duck** along Captain Yancey Rd. Mike added **Louisiana Waterthrush**, **Hairy Woodpecker**, and **Golden-crowned Kinglets** to his yard list on March 28 and **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** on April 5.

Steve Talley reported **Tree Swallows** at Edgebriar Park in Bridgewater and **Ruddy Ducks** and a **scaup** at Silver Lake on March 23.

Matt Gingerich had a number of good yard birds at his place in Linville during the final days of March. Highlights included **Vesper Sparrow**, **Savannah Sparrow**, **Palm Warbler**, and **Osprey**. During the first week of April, Matt added **Broad-winged Hawk**, **Chimney Swift**, and **Grasshopper Sparrow**.

Kevin Shank reported a **Whip-Poor-Will** calling at his place at Union Springs on March 28. The following day, Shaphan Shank reported the Shanks' first **Blue-gray Gnatcatcher** of the season.

Diane Holsinger reported a **Vesper Sparrow** on March 28.

Debbie Harrison reported a **Whip-Poor-Will** calling at her place near the Shenandoah/Rockingham Co. line on April 4.

Mike Smith reported a **Double-crested Cormorant** along the Shenandoah River near Elkton on April 5. On April 6, Mike reported a **White-eyed Vireo** near Elkton.

Lance and Jill Morrow have a small rookery of **Great Blue Herons** nesting on their property. This is likely the first confirmed nesting record for this species in the county.

Kevin Shank reported the first **Chuck-Will's-Widow** of the season calling at his place at Union Springs on April 8.

Shaphan Shank reported a **Black-throated Green Warbler** at Union Springs on April 11 and their first **Hooded Warbler** on April 19. April 23 brought **Scarlet Tanager**, **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, and **Red-headed Woodpecker**. A **Baltimore Oriole** was added on April 24 and a **Red-eyed Vireo** and **Great Horned Owl** were reported April 25.

Diane Holsinger reported an **Eastern Kingbird** on April 15.

Mike Smith reported two **Vesper Sparrows** on Berrytown Rd near Elkton on April 16. Mike saw an **Osprey** and **Chimney Swift** near Elkton on April 21.

Greg Moyers reported an **Orange-crowned Warbler** at Paul State Forest and a **Sora** at the Nazarene Church Rd Wetland on April 18. Later that day at the Wetland, **Diane Lepkowski** reported a **Northern Harrier**. On April 19, Greg reported **Blackburnian Warblers**, **Northern Parula**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, and **Wood Thrush** at Switzer Dam and a **Hooded Warbler** along Rt. 33 at the base of the mountain.

Karen Shank reported an **Upland Sandpiper** at the Shanks' home at Spring Creek on April 18.

Bob Eggleston reported a **Forster's Tern** at Silver Lake on April 24.

William Leigh reported a **Prairie Warbler** near Briery Branch Dam on April 25.

Greg Moyers reported **Prairie Warbler**, **Black-throated Blue Warbler**, **Red-headed Woodpecker**, and **Scarlet Tanager** at Paul State Forest on April 25.

Mike and Evelyn Shank reported a **Red-headed Woodpecker** along Beaver Creek on April 26.

Greg Moyers reported a **White-eyed Vireo** at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at JMU on April 26.

Diane Lepkowski reported a **Baltimore Oriole**, **Orchard Oriole**, and **Eastern Kingbird** at Lake Shenandoah and a **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** at her home near Harrisonburg on April 26.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Lawns versus Wildlife Landscapes – Robyn Puffenbarger**

In January 2019, Ashley Kennedy spoke to the Rockingham Bird Club on “*What Do Birds Eat? Investigating Birds' Insect Prey Preferences to Improve Avian Conservation Efforts*” as part of her Ph.D. research. She worked with Dr. Doug Tallamy at the University of Delaware. Dr. Tallamy has several books out, **Bringing Nature Home** (2007) and his newest, **Nature's Best Hope** (2020). Dr. Tallamy's thesis is simple, as homeowners we have more land and space than all our national parks combined. If we make our yards more friendly to wildlife, we can make a difference in the abundance and biodiversity of our areas. This message could not be more relevant, as the 2019 Science article by Rosenberg et al. showed 3 billion birds are missing from North America (links below). What can a homeowner do to make an impact?

First and foremost, it is time to end our love affair with the lawn, a monoculture that takes more water and fertilizer than most US based agriculture. Lawns are not a habitat with ecosystem support services. Dr. Tallamy's work says, “*We can reconnect viable habitats by expanding existing greenways, building riparian corridors, and by changing the landscaping paradigm that dominates our yards and corporate landscapes. Replacing half the area that is now in barren lawn with plants that are best at supporting food webs would create over 20 million acres of connectivity and go a long way toward sustaining biodiversity in the future. How we landscape today will determine what life looks like tomorrow.*” The message is clear, it is time to change our lawns into wildlife landscapes.

How would you make a significant change without significant cost? According to Dr. Tallamy, just plant one oak, “*Oaks are superior trees for suburban restoration projects because of their many ecological and aesthetic attributes...in terms of their ability to support animal diversity, protect watersheds, sequester carbon dioxide, and restore lost plant communities.*” Another interesting aspect

of Dr. Tallamy's work is that an oak planted from an acorn (free), often out-grows a tree purchased at the neighborhood nursery.

The other urgent need in wildlife friendly landscapes is native plants. Plants and insects are the basis of all ecosystems. Plants and insects are the food that moves energy from the ecosystem base to the higher trophic levels, including birds. If you want a bigger challenge in changing your landscape, check out the Virginia Native Plant Society and remove that butterfly bush (*Buddleja*) for butterfly weed (*Asclepias*)! Dr. Tallamy's research is clear, "*Introduced plants are not the ecological equivalents of the native plants they displace because they do not support the diverse and stable food webs that run our ecosystems.*" Native plants support the native insects' which birds depend on, not only to feed themselves but to raise another generation of chicks.

The message is clear, the birds are at a critical point with species losses imminent. We can change this future by shifting our aesthetic, yards with trees and native plants are more beautiful than a lawn. Many of us are gardening to enjoy this spring, and simple changes like adding one native tree, asking your local nursery to stock native plants will make this a 'green revolution.'

Dr. Doug Tallamy's Website - <http://www.bringingnaturehome.net/>

Science 2019 summary link - <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/09/three-billion-north-american-birds-have-vanished-1970-surveys-show#>

Rosenberg et al. 2019 link - <https://science.sciencemag.org/content/366/6461/120>

Science summary of water use by lawns link - <https://scienceline.org/2011/07/lawns-vs-crops-in-the-continental-u-s/>

Virginia Native Plant Society link - <https://vnps.org/>



### **Bird Bangles by Zig(!)**

**White-crowned Sparrows**, two of over 100 that Charles Ziegenfus has banded in Diane Lepkowski's yard. His numerous recaptures of both this species and White-throated Sparrows have documented them returning winter after winter to the very same place!

*Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski*





Red-winged Blackbird

*Photo credit: Tom Mizell*



Great Blue Heron

*Photo credit: Tom Mizell*

Spring around the Valley  
*Photo credit: Tom Mizell*



SPRING

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