



Goldfinch Gazette
The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club
<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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CLUB POSITIONS STILL NEED TO BE FILLED:

SECRETARY

VICE PRESIDENT for PROGRAMS

Please contact Debbie Harrison at **540-856-3058** or woodshar@aol.com for more information and/or if you are willing to help the club in either of these roles.

**THE JANUARY VIRTUAL CLUB MEETING IS
CANCELLED.**

FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

**** Field trips have been postponed due to concerns regarding the pandemic.**

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Diane Holsinger reported a blue morph **Snow Goose** at the Nazarene Church Rd Wetland on Nov. 27. William Leigh reported the bird at the same site on Dec. 5.

Herb Myers reported a **Rusty Blackbird** on Happy Valley Rd on Nov. 28.

Shaphan Shank reported a flock of approximately 85 **Tundra Swans** flying over the Shank's place at Union Springs on Nov. 28.

Mike Smith has had a number of good yard birds at his place near Elkton over the past month, including a **Belted Kingfisher** on Dec. 2, **Hermit Thrush**, **Eastern Phoebe**, and **Red-breasted Nuthatch** on Dec. 3, and **Golden-crowned Kinglets**, **Brown Creeper**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, nine **Purple Finches**, and 36 **Pine Siskins** on Dec. 4.

Evelyn Shank reported 15 **Evening Grosbeaks** at the Shank's place in Spring Creek on Dec. 11.

Herb Myers reported a **Hermit Thrush** and **Purple Finches** at Hensley's pond on the west side of the Massanutten on Dec. 13.

Ken Ranck reported a **Barn Owl** during the week of Dec. 14 and, after obtaining permission from the local farmer, found an adult with four young in the farmer's silo on the CBC on Dec. 19. Another CBC-day Barn Owl, an immature bird, was found by Diane Lepkowski in a field southwest of Bridgewater.

Greg Moyers reported four **Lapland Longspurs** as well as **American Pipits** and **Horned Larks** on Lumber Mill Rd on Dec. 18.

Diane Lepkowski reported yard **Rusty Blackbirds** on Dec. 18, 19 & 21, with a high count of 30 on Dec. 18.

Mike Smith reported a **Lapland Longspur**, along with a **Bald Eagle**, **American Pipits**, and **Horned Larks** on Nicholson Rd near Elkton on Dec. 18. On Dec. 19, Mike reported a **Palm Warbler** and a **Brown Creeper** in his CBC sector in the Hinton area and two **Peregrine Falcons** in Harrisonburg.

Matt Gingerich made recordings of Type 10 Sitka Spruce **Red Crossbills** he found while covering his CBC sector west of Harrisonburg on Dec. 19. The usual valley crossbills are Type 1 Appalachian birds. Matt also found two **Lapland Longspurs**, **Evening Grosbeak**, **Gray Catbird**, and numerous **Savannah Sparrows**.

Jason Myers-Benner spotted a flock of gray birds that may have been **Sandhill Cranes** flying over Keezletown on Dec. 19.

William Leigh reported a **Lapland Longspur** in a flock of **Horned Larks** on Dry River Rd west of Dayton on Dec. 20.

Greg Moyers reported 11 **Wild Turkeys** in a field on Joes Creek Rd on Dec. 26. On Dec. 27, Greg reported a **Tundra Swan** at Lake Shenandoah.

Sharon and Jay Landes broke up a vicious fight between two juvenile **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** at their place on Dec. 28.

Birding from Home: A Yard Big Year – Matt Gingerich

Each year I like to pick a goal or a focus for my birding adventures. Sometimes I attempt to find a particular species or cover a certain geographical area. For the past 5 years I have been working on the Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas. This involved exploring new parts of Rockingham County and observing bird breeding behavior. 2020 was the final year for the Atlas and most of the fieldwork in the county had been completed. I decided that I needed a new "project" and figured my family would appreciate it if I stayed closer to home. A Yard Big Year sounded like a good idea. Little did I know just how much time I would spend at home this year!

I am a stay-at-home father and I typically work part time. However, since March, I have been home most of the time. Our family lives near Linville on 15 acres of open pasture. We have gardens and livestock that require daily chores and I spend a lot of my time outdoors. These daily routines and patterns fit nicely into a Yard Big Year.

Our place lies on the western side of the Linville Creek Watershed and looks out to the east over the Valley. Our view spans from Broadway all the way to Harrisonburg. The land is mostly open and there are very few trees aside from a wooded riparian strip along our small creek and a tree-lined abandoned roadbed behind our house. Despite this lack of woodlands, this combination of open land, big horizon and some narrow-wooded corridors has allowed me to find a diverse array of birds from our property.

In previous years, I have seen more than 110 species from our property. I figured a goal of 140 would be a good challenge. To reach this number, I would need a variety of strategies and tactics. The best strategy would prove to be getting up before sunrise almost every morning to do chores. In these early morning hours, I heard or saw numerous birds that I would have otherwise missed.

Almost-daily walks through the fields and on the pathways around our property helped me keep track of the new arrivals during migration. There were many birds that I saw only one time. It would have been easy to miss them. And there were plenty that I missed, for sure. I didn't find some birds that I would have expected.

Warblers and other woodland birds are hard to come by at our place. We just don't have enough wooded areas. Regular walks along the creek or behind the house turned up a few good ones. An Ovenbird under the cedars was a surprise! Canada Warbler and a Yellow-breasted Chat along the creek were also quite unusual. Fall migration brought my first Bay-breasted Warbler for the yard as well.

Sky Watching from our yard on the hill picked up migrants passing overhead or even far off in the distance. While there are no bodies of water that are visible from our place, Linville Creek is nearby and there are a handful of farm ponds in the area. Groups of ducks and geese can be seen flying around in search of the waters. I frequently scan the eastern horizon in search of birds moving through. The spotting scope is often set up, ready for a quick glimpse at some passing bird, and occasionally it pays off. In late February, flocks of Canada Geese were starting to head north and a tiny Cackling Goose was spotted amongst one group. In March, I picked up a new bird for the Yard List, a pair of American Black Ducks flying off in the distance. Another incredibly lucky find was a small group of shorebirds flying in to land at a nearby pond that included both Lesser and Greater Yellowlegs! Had it just been one or the other species, I would have been hard pressed to make a positive ID. Having both together made it possible to compare their size and identify them both.

A new realization for me was that I found Fall Migration to be much more exciting than I expected. Spring Migration often gets all the hype, but the sheer numbers of birds that I saw this fall blew me away! Incredible morning flights of Purple Finches were by far the highlight. On several mornings in the middle of October I witnessed counts of 108, 178, 281, and 118 birds flying over. I never thought that seeing 30 Purple Finches in a day would be mediocre.

Large numbers of Blue Jays were common in September with a high count of 1,182 on 9/23. On the evening of September 4, a nice movement of 279 Common Nighthawks passed by. Pine Siskins, Cedar Waxwings, American Robins, Red-headed Woodpeckers, Red-breasted Nuthatches, and many others were also seen moving south throughout September and October.

Listening for migrants calling at night or in the early pre-dawn hours was a bit of a new strategy for me. I haven't had a lot of experience with identifying nocturnal flight calls, but there are many resources available to help one learn. Also, a simple app on a phone allows a person to record calls and compare them (and their spectrogram) to other recordings. I was able to pick up several species of migrants this way. A flyover Spotted Sandpiper, a Whip-poor-will, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Veery and Wood Thrush were all heard in the predawn darkness.

There were some incredible mornings of listening to thrushes migrating overhead. On one particular morning in early October, while walking out to the milk shed, thrushes (mostly Swainson's Thrush) were calling almost constantly. Stopping to listen, I tried to count the call notes that I heard. My poor attempt exceeded 1,100 calls! For twenty minutes, thrushes called constantly at rates of at

least one call per second. There is no way of knowing just how many birds were passing over that morning, but the count suggests an incredible flight of birds.

One of the greatest joys of birding from home is sharing the fun and excitement with my family. On many occasions, I would call the children out into the yard to see a passing Nighthawk or a Purple Martin that would come to inspect our yet unoccupied houses. We all ran out into the yard to see the first large skein of Tundra Swans fly over our house in early November. Our oldest son, Reuben (7), watched his favorite bird, the Peregrine Falcon, through the scope at close range for several minutes one fall afternoon. Micah (4) enjoyed watching our nesting Eastern Screech-owls and thanks to the Morrrows, we were able to watch them band the four chicks. Our youngest, Lydia (almost 2), names and points out Cardinals and Turkey Vultures.

As the end of the year approached, I offered a reward to any of the children if they would find me a Golden Eagle. The bribe didn't work. Throughout the year I was able to add 13 new species to my Yard Life List (currently 172) and ended the Yard Big Year with 155 species! Some of the best finds were Alder Flycatcher, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, Evening Grosbeak, and flyby Lapland Longspur, both Yellowlegs, and two American Wigeon.

While a Big Year may seem primarily about listing and keeping track of numbers, the real thrill for me was seeing new things, and especially learning new things! Knowing when, where and how to find a particular bird involves a lot of practice and perhaps a good bit of luck. There is so much to learn, from understanding how and when different birds migrate, where they nest, to what flight calls they make at night. I look forward to what this next year has to teach me!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

2021: Bald Eagles in West Virginia – *Debbie Harrison*

Since our Club field trips are canceled until further notice (due to COVID-19) I wanted to provide some info for those who may want to try on their own. Eagles seem to congregate around Lost River, WV, between January 15th thru the month of February.

Please be aware of snowy/icy conditions (the back roads are gravel/dirt). Please be aware of the traffic on Rt. 259 & Rt. 55: the speed limit is 55 MPH, but don't be surprised to be passed, even on double yellow lines! Do not attempt to "bird while driving"!

Generally, we carpool from Broadway, VA, (9:30am) drive north on Rt.259 & stop at Misty Valley (convenience store/gas) past Mathias, WV. Restrooms available here. Check the skies for flyovers. Next stop is Kimsey Run Reservoir (search ridge tops for perched and soaring eagles and ravens). A spotting scope is helpful here. Parker Hollow Lake also has perched and/or soaring eagles. Come back by Baker Store (restrooms available here).

Our final stop (and usually the grand finale!) is at Lost River Animal Hospital. Park in their parking lot (be considerate of employees & clients) and scan the trees across Rt. 259 (the river runs at the base of the hills, across the fields). There should be lots of perched AND flying eagles.

Let me know if you'd like exact directions. Happy New Year and happy birding!

2020 Bluebird Trail Results

Our Bluebird Trail at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds produced the following results:

Bluebird nest attempts = **7**

Number of bluebirds fledged = **27**

Tree Swallows (which also use bluebird houses) nest attempts = **5**

Number of Tree Swallows fledged = **19**

RBC member, Charles "Zig" Zigenfus has a trail of 138 boxes & produced the following results:

Bluebird nest attempts = **133**

Number of bluebirds fledged = **311**

Tree Swallows nest attempts = **81**

Number of Tree Swallows fledged = **286**

House Wrens (which also use bluebird houses) nest attempts = **4**

Number of House Wrens fledged = **9**

Christmas Bird Count - 121st Season – *Bill Benish*

We were fortunate to be able to hold our count December 19. Unfortunately, we couldn't join into groups without multiple cars. The pandemic limited the opportunities to participate afield, but several households contributed by feeder watching. Snow and ice cover made some birds easier to find at a few safe places to pull over from the roadway. Bill Benish is compiling the totals as of this writing. A few of the highlights include immature Barn Owls, Merlin, Wild Turkey, Palm Warbler, Lapland Longspur, Gray Catbird, Evening Grosbeak and Red Crossbill. Matt Gingerich obtained sound recordings of both the Appalachian "type 1" and what may be the first county record of Sitka Spruce "type 10". Thank you to everyone who helped with planning, scouting and bird data contributions!

On Yard Year Lists – *Robyn Puffenbarger*

Every year, January 1st is the day of excitement for us, far exceeding December 31st. We are not good at staying up late, and it is January 1st that is the start of the new year yard list. In this era of pandemic, birding locally holds even more attraction! Maybe this is the year you start an annual yard list.

Our annual lists started in 1999 on paper on Cherry Street in Richmond. One lesson we have learned over the years is chasing is fun, but just wait to see what shows up in the yard. In Richmond, we went to Henricus park to chase a life-bird, a Wilson's Warbler. Not too long after the chase, we had one in the backyard! Same thing during our stint in New York, we went to Jamaica Bay to find a Bay-breasted Warbler that showed up the next day in the backyard oaks of our rental home!

We start our list every January 1st and we count every bird we see or hear in, over or from our yard. Set your rules however you like! While we were in Bridgewater, sitting on the front porch, we could get an Osprey or Bald Eagle flying down the North River, which was not in our yard but seen from our yard. I will never forget Bill running in and out to get his binoculars because some wonderful bird was

zooming over our airspace. We got Common Nighthawks, Broad-winged Hawks, both species of vultures, Snow Goose, and Great Egret this way!

If you need more inspiration, think about slow birding (<https://www.birddiva.com/slow-birding>). This fall on the ABA podcast host Nate Swick had Bridget Butler on for an interview of her take on slow birding (<https://www.aba.org/secrets-of-slow-birding-with-bridget-butler/>). I realized how much fun and enjoyment we get every year from our 'slow birding' year list.

If you need a New Year's resolution, how about a yard, year list? We are anticipating how much fun it will be in our new patch, and will this be the year we finally get 100 species in our yard in a year? We've been close with 97 in 2018 at College Street - what will 2021 bring? Only one way to find out, keep the binoculars close by to see what is out there!

Excerpts from Living Bird Annual Report, Autumn, 2019 (Cornell University)

(<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/living-bird-autumn-2019-table-of-contents/>)

“In the past 50 years, more than 1 in 4 birds across North America had disappeared.”

Reciprocity – While we all know to try to use shade-grown coffee because it is better for the environment than coffee grown where the soil is totally torn up to grow *just* coffee beans, this article discusses how the birds reciprocate the diverse groves by eating the very borer beetles that would otherwise spoil the beans. (p. 20, Story by Gustave Axelson)

Because this means quality beans, the growers can ask a premium price for their produce – which is an incentive for bird lovers to pay a little more for shade-grown coffee.

Outdoor cats are second only to habitat loss as the cause of bird mortality.

Stickers on windows that reflect in a way that encourages birds to think they can fly thru that space helps to minimize collisions.

Did you know....

Trump has voided the Migratory Bird Treaty. This was the legal defense used to discourage corporations from erecting projects that killed migrating birds. It has been disclosed that EPA career officials are stalling or refusing to follow thru on the late anti-environmental moves of the President; we can hope that the same is happening in the Fish & Wildlife Agency.



Eastern Bluebird – December 25, 2020 – Hillandale Park

Photo credit: Art Fovargue

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