



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.

VIRTUAL CLUB MEETING via ZOOM

DATE: Thursday, February 4, 2021

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: VIRTUAL via ZOOM

PROGRAM: *Caught in the SNOWstorm* presented by Scott Weidensaul

The winter of 2013-14 saw the largest invasion of snowy owls into the eastern United States in perhaps a century -- and marked an unprecedented opportunity to learn more about these mysterious Arctic hunters. Author and researcher Scott Weidensaul will share the story of Project SNOWstorm -- how a huge, collaborative research effort focused on Snowy Owls came together in a few frantic weeks, funded with the help of people from around the world, and continues to make discoveries and unexpected insights into the life and ecology of this great white raptor.

Scott Weidensaul is the author of more than two dozen books on natural history, including the Pulitzer Prize finalist "Living on the Wind." His newest book, "A World of Wings" about global migration, will be released in March by W.W. Norton. Weidensaul is a contributing editor for Audubon, a columnist for Bird Watcher's Digest and writes for a variety of other publications, including Living Bird. He is also an active field researcher, studying Saw-whet Owl migration for more than two decades, as well as winter Hummingbirds, bird migration in Alaska, and the winter movements of Snowy Owls through Project SNOWstorm, which he co-founded.

Join us via Zoom:

<https://bridgewatercollege.zoom.us/j/96655881995?pwd=bEp4Q1lYc1JsZGxQTjBrSF10NTI1QT09>

Meeting ID: **966 5588 1995**

Passcode: **383973**

One tap mobile
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+19294362866,,96655881995#,,,,*383973# US (New York)

FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

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

2021 Raptor / Waterfowl Count, Saturday, February 13 (Feb 20, rain date)

This long-standing, annual RBC count surveys the entire County, including Harrisonburg City. We tally waterfowl on area lakes and rivers along with raptors, including vultures. We also include other predatory birds such as shrikes and kingfishers, along with shorebirds we might encounter. The methodology is mainly car-birding with survey stops. We are in the process of securing sector leaders; as with the Christmas Count's protocol, due to limited carpooling for Covid-19 safety, participation will be restricted. Please contact Diane Lepkowski at dianelep1@yahoo.com with questions.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Diane Lepkowski reported two **Black-Crowned Night-Herons** near Silver Lake on Dec. 26. These birds have been seen sporadically throughout January.

Kathy Fovargue reported that a **Bullock's Oriole** visited her bird bath in Harrisonburg on Dec. 29. Kathy got a photo, and the bird was confirmed by John Spahr. This appears to be the first record of this species in Harrisonburg/Rockingham County. The bird made another visit to the Fovargue yard in late January.

Greg Moyers reported a **Peregrine Falcon** on Model Rd near Elkton on Dec. 30.

For the third time in the last eight years, a **Snowy Owl** made a visit to the Bridgewater/Mt. Crawford area at the turn of the year. On Dec.31 Mike Shank relayed that Kenny and Ethel Showalter spotted the owl their farm. The Showalters graciously welcomed numerous birders, who were able to view the bird both from the farm and in the fields along Dinkel Avenue until the last sighting on Jan. 4.

Herb and Sarah Myers reported a **Golden Eagle** on Happy Valley Rd near Keezletown on Jan. 7. They had a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** and an **Eastern Phoebe** at their Keezletown residence on the same date and **Pine Siskins** and **Purple Finches** on Jan. 14.

Greg Moyers reported a **Snow Goose** at Lake Campbell on Jan. 7.

Matt Gingerich found a **Blue-winged Teal** at the Oakwood Drive farm pond near Mt. Crawford on Jan. 8. Matt also reported two **Wilson's Snipe** along Bowman Rd in Dayton on the same date.

Greg Moyers reported a flock of **Wild Turkeys** along Betts Rd in Harrisonburg on Jan. 18.

Matt Gingerich reported two **Palm Warblers** on Raders Church Rd north of Timberville on Jan. 20.

The **Rufous Hummingbird** that spent the last few months in the Keezletown area was last reported on Jan. 21. The bird was first reported by Herb Myers on Oct. 30 and, more recently, had been visiting Victor Buckwalter's feeder.

Diane Holsinger reported a **Greater White-fronted Goose** near Timberville on Jan. 22.

Mike Smith reported an **Eastern Screech-Owl** calling at Lake Shenandoah and a pair of **Great Horned Owls** near Bridgewater on Jan. 24.

Greg Moyers reported a **Common Goldeneye** near Timberville on Jan. 24.

Art Fovargue reported two adult **Bald Eagles** on the nest west of Bridgewater near Rocby Drive on Jan 24.

Dave Wendelken reported a **Northern Pintail** at Lake Shenandoah on Jan. 25.

The **Mute Swan** and **Tundra Swan** continue at Lake Shenandoah as of Jan. 26. The Mute Swan was first reported on Dec. 15, the Tundra on Dec. 27. A group of **Wilson's Snipe** is also being routinely reported at Lake Shenandoah.



Snowy Owl and Rufous Hummingbird

– photos: Diane Lepkowski

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Treasurer's Report – Audrey Shenk

At the latest RBC Executive Committee meeting in December, the committee agreed to make donations to the following organizations even though we were unable to hold our annual 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*.

Our expenses have been minimal this year due to the pandemic, allowing us to continue making these annual donations. Happy safe birding in 2021!

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

Our Christmas Bird Count submission pending review and approval by our regional editor includes an impressive count of 76 species. This is only 6 fewer than our All Time High (ATH) of 82 species in 2017. We tallied 12,436 individual birds which is roughly 5,400 higher than last year, but less than half of our ATH of 27,366 from the 1978 count.

Although 22 field participants were the fewest in a decade, this was a magnificent effort considering ice and snow on the ground in combination with pandemic safety protocols. Also, thankfully, 13 people monitored feeders from their homes within our count circle area. Our previous ATH for Feeder Watchers was 11, so this contribution effort was superb.

This year Swamp Sparrow and Bufflehead appear as “CW”. Some years we have “CW” (Count Week) birds which are those found three days before or three days after our count day but not on our count day itself - December 19, 2020. CW is a bit like a mention in honor of scouting since CW birds are not added to the total numbers.

Lapland Longspur (5) finally made it to our official species list in two sectors as this was upgraded from two years as CW in 2001 and 2010.

The following species tied or surpassed previous All Time High numbers, listed here as “species # (previous high #)”: Gadwall 41 (40), Wild Turkey 43 (23), Red-shouldered Hawk 6 (3), Barn Owl 6 (2), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker 20 (14), Horned Lark 1,288 (832), Red-breasted Nuthatch 17 (16), Carolina Wren 85 (78), Hermit Thrush 8 (5), Gray Catbird 1 (tied at 1), American Pipit 667 (235), Palm Warbler 4 (2), Savannah Sparrow 28 (13), Fox Sparrow 10 (5), Dark-eyed (Slate-colored) Junco 732 (694), Lapland Longspur 5 (new species as previously only CW), Northern Cardinal 248 (216), and Red Crossbill 4 (3).

Thanks again for supporting and celebrating this annual count. Please feel free to reach out to Bill Benish, wcbenish@gmail.com, with any questions or about planning for next year!

Pine Siskins in Trouble

Recently, reports of sick or dead birds at backyard feeders is prompting advice to temporarily discontinue feeding wild birds or take extra steps to maintain their feeders. The current die-off of finches — such as Pine Siskins — as well as other songbirds, is attributed to salmonellosis, a common and usually fatal bird disease caused by the salmonella bacteria. “When birds flock together in large numbers at feeders, they can transmit the disease through droppings and saliva,” according to Veterinarian Kristin Mansfield.

The spread of the disease this winter could be exacerbated by what appears to be a food-driven migration of winter-roaming finches. Some years, including this year, bring huge numbers of Pine Siskins south. These movements, called “irruptions,” are triggered by lack of food in the north; Pine Siskins appear to be responding to poor spruce, fir, and hemlock cone crops in the Northeast.

The first indication of the disease for bird watchers to look for is often a seemingly tame bird on or near a feeder. The birds become very lethargic, fluff out their feathers and are easy to approach. This kind of behavior is generally uncommon to birds, Mansfield said.

“Unfortunately, at this point, there is very little people can do to treat them,” Mansfield said. “The best course is to leave the birds alone.”

Members of the public can help to stop the spread of salmonellosis by discontinuing backyard bird feeding until at least February, to encourage birds to disperse and forage naturally.

Cleaning Seed Feeders

Cleaning your bird feeders regularly helps keep your backyard birds healthy. Moldy or decomposing seeds and hulls that accumulate on feeder trays can make birds sick. Bird droppings and other contaminants may also spread infectious bird diseases. Clean your feeders about once every two weeks, more often during times of heavy use or wet weather or if there have been reports of salmonella in your area or you have seen sick birds in your yard. To clean your feeder, take it apart and use a dishwasher on a hot setting or hand wash either with soap and boiling water or with a dilute bleach solution (no more than 1 part bleach to 9 parts water). Rinse thoroughly and allow to dry before refilling.

Clean the ground below your feeders, too, to prevent a build-up of hulls, uneaten seeds, and other waste. Moldy or spoiled food is unhealthy both for birds and for your outside pets. And bird food scattered on the ground can attract unwanted rodents.

Also, reduce the number of feeders offered to a quantity that is maintainable with daily cleanings, use feeders that accommodate fewer birds (such as tubes rather than platforms) and spread-out feeder locations. Keeping bird baths and fountains clean is also important.

It is possible, although uncommon, for salmonella bacteria to transfer from birds to humans through direct contact with infected birds, droppings or through domestic cats that catch sick birds. When handling birds, bird feeders or bird baths, it is best to wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly afterward.



Pine Siskin

Photo credit: Rachel Hudson

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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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