



# Goldfinch Gazette

## The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

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### WE'RE TAKING AN "EARLY VACATION" THIS YEAR SO NO CLUB MEETINGS ARE SCHEDULED FOR JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST.

We plan to be back September 2nd and depending on what happens between now and then, stay tuned to whether this would be a virtual meeting on Zoom or in person. Have a wonderful summer!

### BIRD SIGHTINGS

William Leigh reported a **Bank Swallow** along with six **Lesser Yellowlegs** at Leonard's Pond on April 25. Mike Smith added five **Wood Ducks**, two **Blue-winged Teal**, and five **American Pipits** at this site the following day. Mike reported a female **Wood Duck** with eight chicks there on May 23.

**Red Crossbills** have been reported in good numbers at the usual spot at Briery Branch Gap. A couple of April reports had up to 97 birds. Up to 20 have been reported throughout May.

Mike Smith saw an **Osprey** at Briery Branch reservoir and had a calling **Whip-Poor-Will** at his place near Elkton on April 26.

Ken Ranck saw a **Wild Turkey** getting a drink at Leonard's Pond on May 1.

The Oakwood Drive farm pond near Mt. Crawford was good for shorebirds in May prior to drying up. William Leigh counted 25-30 **Yellowlegs** (mostly Lesser), a **Pectoral Sandpiper**, and **Spotted** and **Solitary Sandpipers** on May 1. Greg Moyers reported two **White-rumped Sandpipers** on May 8. William Leigh reported **Semipalmated Plovers** on May 10 and a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** on May 16. Several **Least Sandpipers** were also present in mid-May.

Many good birds were reported at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at JMU from late April-mid May. Highlights included **Gray-cheeked Thrush**, **Least Flycatcher**, **Wilson's Warbler**, **Blue-winged Warbler**, **Tennessee Warbler**, and **Northern Waterthrush**. Perhaps the best find was a **Marsh Wren**, reported on May 12 and seen by many over the next couple of days.

Mike Smith reported a **Yellow-breasted Chat**, **Blackpoll Warbler**, **Yellow-throated Vireo**, and several of our local warblers on a hike on the Gap Run Trail in Shenandoah National Park near Elkton on May 14. On May 18, Mike got a singing **Winter Wren**, **Veery**, **Canada Warblers**, **Prairie Warblers**, and **Ruffed Grouse** among others on a hike up Shenandoah Mtn to Reddish Knob.

Two **Red-necked Phalaropes** were reported at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on May 18. Up to six phalaropes were reported over the next few days. The **Eared Grebe**, which had been seen at the plant since early February, was last reported on May 12.

Greg Moyers reported **Common Nighthawks** at the Broadway Community Park on May 14. On May 15 Greg reported a **Mourning Warbler** at Hillandale Park.

Karen, Everett, and Annie Shank reported that their flock of wintering **Evening Grosbeaks** dwindled to 10 birds by May 12. Their only sighting thereafter was a lone bird on May 16.

**Bobolinks** have been reported at several locations, including Grist Mill Rd and Goods Mill Rd, throughout May.

Matt Gingerich and others reported a **Mourning Warbler** near Briery Branch Gap on May 16. Many other birders reported the bird along FR 85 just south of FR 539 over the next several days. This area has also been good for **Prairie Warblers, Chestnut-sided Warblers, Common Yellowthroats, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Veeries, and Red-breasted Nuthatches.**

Mike Smith reported a **Bald Eagle** at Briery Branch reservoir on May 19 and a **Cerulean Warbler** at Swift Run Gap on May 20.

William Leigh reported **Prairie Warblers** in a hillside cut area along Briery Branch Rd just past the Hone Quarry Road on May 23.

Herb Myers reported a **Blue Grosbeak** at Tangly Woods near Keezletown on May 25.

Matt Gingerich reported a **Wilson's Phalarope** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on May 26. A **Semipalmated Sandpiper** was also present at the wastewater plant and two were reported on the same date at Leonard's Pond.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Pollinator Lives and Native Plants – Robyn Puffenbarger**

As you think about your garden patch, from a patio with containers to larger yards, make plans whenever you can to add native plants. While the horticultural trade has brought incredible plants to our nurseries from all over the planet, native plants are the basis of the local ecosystem. An ecosystem is just the habitat with food, water, and shelter for the interconnected organisms that live there. One familiar story to North America is the desperate need for milkweeds (*Asclepias* genus), the host plants for Monarch butterflies. While Monarchs, and many other species, can get nectar from a perennial like butterfly bush (*Buddleja* genus) or annuals like zinnias, it is only the milkweeds that support caterpillar growth so another generation of Monarchs can take to the sky.

Our gardens need to provide the host plants for our native insects, both for pollination and as the food source for our birds! Most of our songbird species must have caterpillars as the protein-rich food source to raise their chicks. So, building a garden for the insects will benefit our birds as well!

What can you do? Very simply, add native plants to your patch. The Virginia Native Plant Society has excellent references (<https://vnps.org/>) as does the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (<https://dwr.virginia.gov/wp-content/uploads/media/Habitat-at-Home.pdf>). If you have a sunny spot for a container or two, add plants to your yard thinking about blooms that last from early spring to deep fall. The pollinators are 'up early', and some species are active well into October! These plants all prefer well-drained soil with lots of sun.

- SPRING: Red Columbine, Golden Alexander, Spiderwort & Yarrow
- SUMMER: Butterfly Weed, Orange Coneflower & Aromatic Aster
- FALL: New England Aster & Bluestem Goldenrod

What if your space is shady? Do not worry, there is a native plant for your space! All the spring ephemerals, plants that come up and do not last very long, are all adapted for shady spots. Think about adding bloodroot, Virginia bluebells, wild ginger (this is not the food ginger!), and native ferns! There are several native ferns to slip in a shady spot.

If you have more space, think about layers. Some taller trees, an oak (*Quercus* genus) if you can do it supports over 500 species of caterpillars; a native black cherry (*Prunus serotina*) is an excellent selection as well. Then think about the shrub layer, with smaller trees like dogwood (*Cornus florida*), chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*), buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*), and there are so many other choices! If possible, make this a ‘tree bed’ where the leaves that come down in fall stay right there. This is an excellent mulch, keeps the soil moist, adds nutrients, and is habitat for many overwintering insects.

Just a few more hints – watch that Latin! Whenever possible, plant straight natives. An excellent example of this would be a redbud (*Cercis canadensis*). The Latin without any modifiers helps you recognize this as the straight native. What you might find at a nursery is a redbud with a tag *Cercis canadensis* ‘Forest Pansy’ – the quote marks tell you this is a cultivar of the redbud. Is there anything wrong with a cultivar is a common question -- well “it depends” is the answer. If the cultivar is just named for the collector or place it is from, it should have all the properties of the native. However, many cultivars were bred or selected to have a significant difference from the native, in this case the Forest Pansy redbud has pronounced red/purple leaf color. If the selected feature makes this plant quite different from the native, then it might not be host for its insects! Leaf color, flower color, and flower structure (doubles for example) are all features of a plant that need to resemble the native or straight species as much as possible to be the best host for insects. The last Latin hint, make sure you check genus and species to get a native plant. In my case, I wanted beautyberry and purchased *Callicarpa japonica*, an Asian introduction, rather than the native, *Callicarpa americana*.

I love seeing the swallowtails, such large and impressive butterflies. I found the caterpillars on parsley and knew something must be going on, as parsley as an herb is not native to North America – it comes from the Mediterranean and is mentioned in ancient Greek and Roman writings. So, parsley must be closely related to something native, and I found it, golden Alexander (*Zizia aurea*)! I added golden Alexander to my garden and found the swallowtail caterpillars on it. I found that golden Alexander self-seeds and spread quickly so I had a nice patch in no time, and the caterpillars could not eat as fast as the plant could grow.

So, check out the references and think about your garden. Is there a space where some grass could come out or a spot amongst your trees where you could add some native, perennial plants? There are many local purveyors of native plants – check out the Virginia Native Plant Society and Plant Virginia Natives (<https://www.plantvirginianatives.org/>) for more information.

## **SHENANDOAH VALLEY RAPTOR STUDY AREA – Lance & Jill Morrow**

(Excerpt from “3<sup>rd</sup> Update – May 5, 2021)

The past few seasons were excellent for producing kestrels, but nothing close to what we are experiencing so far this year. We check each box every 3 weeks until kestrels occupy them. Every day

out in the field we are still finding more newly occupied boxes! And we've counted 320 kestrel eggs to date. That includes the 9 eggs in 3 boxes that failed (so far). Unless May weather turns nasty with several continuous days of cold rain, we expect to produce our highest number of kestrels ever!

**Bluebirds** - For several years now we have been installing bluebird boxes near kestrel nest boxes to determine: 1) if bluebirds will use boxes near active kestrel boxes, and 2) whether bluebirds end up being fed to young kestrels. Thus far, the evidence suggests bluebirds and kestrels can nest nearby without conflict. We are banding bluebirds, tree swallows and wrens who use our bluebird boxes but have not yet found any of those bands in our kestrel nest boxes to date. Bluebird box mounted on fence is about 30 feet from active kestrel box on the utility pole. The kestrel box has 4 kestrel eggs while the bluebird box has 4 tree swallow eggs, so both are active at the same time.

**Other Kestrel Research in Virginia** - For years we have wanted to figure out exactly where our local kestrels are traveling, whether they migrate, where exactly they forage for food, and all their other secrets. Dr. Joe Kolowski (Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute (SCBI)), Alan Williams and Dr. Bert Harris are putting GPS backpacks on kestrels at the Clifton Institute near Warrenton Virginia to monitor their every movement. We are so jealous that they are not using "our" SVRSA kestrels, but we're excited that this new technology is being deployed to learn more about kestrels in our region. Can't wait to see the results! Here is a link to their exciting research:

<https://www.facebook.com/clifton.institute/posts/5370831779625030>

Also, it is exciting to have other kestrel nest box programs locally, especially the long running Highland County folks who'll be banding like crazy this year (John Spahr and Patti Reum) and, hopefully, we'll see some of their banded birds come to our study area next year. Alan Williams has found our banded kestrels in his study area in the Luray area, but he hasn't sent us any of his banded kestrels (yet). And, Zig has just begun his kestrel box program (and he is also banding bluebirds in his 140 boxes) to our southeast. Good luck to all.

If you would like to be added to their email list, please contact Lance & Jill Morrow at their email address: [saltlick2003@gmail.com](mailto:saltlick2003@gmail.com)

## **VSO Fall Field Trip: Chincoteague, VA - September 10-12, 2021**

(from <https://www.virginiabirds.org/>)

We're excited to announce that we WILL have the VSO trip to Chincoteague September 10-12, 2021. VSO is committed to ensuring the health and safety of all participants. By registering for this event, you agree to abide by the policy VSO has adopted for attendees: Participants at all VSO meetings, field trips, and properties, shall follow all CDC and federal, state and local guidelines regarding Covid-19. Additionally, participants shall respect the Covid-19 requirements of businesses where VSO activities take place. We'll provide instructions later about other precautions that may need to be in place, based on guidelines in place closer to the date.

### **Trip Registration:**

To help us plan for the weekend, please register in advance. Provide the names of participants in your party with your mobile number and email address so we can contact you if needed. Register with Meredith Bell, trip coordinator, at [merandlee@gmail.com](mailto:merandlee@gmail.com) or 804-824-4958.

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