



# Goldfinch Gazette

## The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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### WE ARE BACK TO “IN PERSON” MEETINGS!!!

We need for a "public address system" for May's meeting. If anyone can help with this or knows a DJ, etc., please let Debbie know ASAP ([woodshar@aol.com](mailto:woodshar@aol.com) or 540-856-3058 or cell 703-216-2585).

### CLUB MEETING

**DATE:** Thursday, May 5, 2022

**TIME:** 7:00 PM

**PLACE:** Rockingham County Fairgrounds in the Horticulture Building\*\*

**PROGRAM:** “Bluebirds in Virginia” by Valerie Kenyon Gaffney

Our speaker will be Valerie Kenyon Gaffney, President of the Virginia Bluebird Society. She will give us an overview of bluebirds in Virginia and what the VBS does. She will also touch on the actual bluebird nest box monitoring that provides data on each breeding season. Our Club established and monitors a trail of 10 nest boxes on the Fairgrounds.

Join us for dinner with Valerie before the meeting at 5:15 PM at Vito's Italian Kitchen, 1047 Port Republic Road, Harrisonburg. Please contact Debbie at [woodshar@aol.com](mailto:woodshar@aol.com) or 540-856-3058 or cell 703-216-2585, in advance if you plan to attend.

\*\*Horticulture Building at Rockingham Fairgrounds: Follow the drive straight up towards the hill, past Gate 2. Turn left towards the big archway. Pass Gate 4. At the archway (Gate 5) turn left. The Horticulture Building will be the third one on the right. Park in the grassy area across from the Poultry Barn. We hope to have some RBC signs set out to help.

### FIELD TRIPS - *Diane Lepkowski*

**Hillandale Monthly Walk, Thursday, May 5, 2022, with Tom Mizell:** Meet at the Children's Playground parking lot at 8:30 AM for our migratory and seasonal park visitors.

**Paul State Forest, Friday May 6, 8:30 AM with Greg Moyers:** Join Greg as we seek warblers and other migrants along with returning breeders such as Red-headed Woodpeckers. A nice mix of forest and open habitat has turned up many surprises in years past. This is a three-mile round trip on a hilly gravelled road (no facilities.) Please contact Greg in advance if you plan to attend:

[gwmoyers@msn.com](mailto:gwmoyers@msn.com) or 540-434-3029.

## TRIP REPORTS

### **Madison Run Fire Rd, Shenandoah National Park, Saturday, April 9 – Greg Moyers**

Six members of the RBC attended the walk at Madison Run Fire Rd on April 9. The weather was chilly but sunny. The group got good looks at a cooperative Blue-headed Vireo on our way up the road. We heard our target Louisiana Waterthrushes calling at multiple locations. After making the turn and heading back down the road, we finally got nice looks at a pair of Louisiana Waterthrushes squabbling and chasing along the edge of the stream. We also got a nice, if brief, look at a Pine Warbler. Other birds seen or heard included Eastern Phoebe, Golden-crowned Kinglet, American Goldfinch, Tufted Titmouse, and Pileated, Hairy, and Downy Woodpeckers.

### **Hillandale Park Monthly Walk, Thursday, April 14, 2022 – Tom Mizell, Kathy Byers, Randy Cline**

At 8:30 AM on the morning of Thursday April 14, a nice group of folks gathered at the playground at Hillandale Park. Kathy Byers, the interim greeter/leader, led introductions, accepted birds for the morning's "Wish List" and reminded folks of a few safety tips. The group appeared quite happy to see each other and to be out birding again, with smiles and laughter all around.

Before traveling too far, the usual feathered friends were checked off the list; American Robin, Mourning Dove, and Blue Jay to name a few. After a quick flyover of a pair of Mallards, the group enjoyed watching and listening to a Brown Thrasher. A pair of Yellow-rumped Warblers were seen and "any warbler" was checked off our Wish List.

Thank you, Kathy, for starting the walk and this writeup! At 9 AM I arrived at the parking lot, and it was almost 70 degrees when I got out of my car. A pleasant breeze was blowing. I gazed across the stream looking and listening for the group of birders. I heard a Brown Thrasher in the vicinity of the Fork in the Trail behind the old log cabin site. Also, a Carolina Wren was singing cheerfully, and Mourning Doves called from all directions. I crossed the new Bridge and walked upstream in my search for birders. The search was somewhat like looking for Easter Eggs when I was a kid. As I walked along the stream channel towards the concrete slab just below the Osage Orange Trees, I found a lone Mallard in the stream. Still on my way to rendezvous with the group I saw Northern Cardinal, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Carolina Wren. I caught up with the group of 10 at the concrete slab around 9:06 AM as they were heading towards the park's northwest corner. I was primed for warblers and asked what had been seen so far. Building on the parking lot sightings they unleashed a generous list of sightings for me to note. Yellow-rumped Warbler, White-throated sparrow, American Goldfinch, Fish Crow, Carolina Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown-headed Cowbird, Downy Woodpecker and Tree Swallow. As I was writing down the additions an Eastern Towhee moved along the golf course boundary fence singing and making itself very visible to the group. So, the first half hour we were greeted by 18 species!

As we reached the northwest corner of the park, Dave Wendelken spotted a small bird flitting about, and Greg Moyers found it in his sights as a bespectacled Blue-headed Vireo. It paused in the area and gave us all good looks as it appeared to feast on insects. Within a few moments of the Vireo another bird sporting eye rings greeted us in the same area. A Ruby-crowned Kinglet showed up in the area that Randy Cline had said we should be seeing them. Back-to-back spectacled species was an enjoyable time.

After crossing the northwest pedestrian bridge, I compared my list with Jonathan Drescher-Lehman, and I added Common Grackle, Northern Flicker and Tufted Titmouse. So, by now, we had 23 species.

It was here that the group of 10 formed three smaller groups. One group found a Swamp Sparrow along the stream channel. A second group paused to greet a park visitor walking a dog and it appears they recruited a new member for the RBC. The third group found themselves in the wooded picnic area east of the Children's Playground as there was hope in finding a Screech Owl. No luck there just some reminiscing of the Red-morph Screech that had been enjoyed last year. All groups somehow wandered back together perhaps due to some circling raptors. A Red-tailed Hawk led us back towards the new Bike Trail Bridge. It perched atop one of the tall concrete power poles for some time. It sat there looking intently at its talons, perhaps remnants of breakfast? Turkey Vulture and Song Sparrow made the list. A few of the folks departed and the rest walked the Bike Trail. Two walked out of sight and the remaining 6 made it as far as the walnut trees overlooking the golf course fairway. House Sparrows were seen on the power lines and a couple Black Vultures soared to the South. A Field Sparrow was heard not too far from the trail. As we discussed the mornings sightings it was noted that I needed to add the Coopers Hawk seen earlier.

As is often the case we expect to add a least one new species when the walk draws to a close as we head back to the parking lot. Randy Cline took us towards the maintenance building hoping to see Chipping Sparrows and, on the way, Jonathan spotted Eastern Bluebird as well as European Starlings. I had to leave early and the last birds I sighted was a pair of Cowbirds grazing in the lush green grass. Randy was successful in leading the remaining folks to see the Chipping Sparrow. A nice day and a total of 34 species. Hope to see you next month. May we find many warblers in May when we gather again at Hillandale Park.

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

Sharon and Jay Landis reported **Tree Swallow, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Towhee**, and all seven local **woodpeckers** while hosting a bird walk at Starry Meadows near Singers Glen on March 26.

Cory Taylor reported a **Common Loon** at Lake Shenandoah on March 27.

Mike Smith saw two **Bald Eagles** while hiking on Massanutten Mtn on March 27. On March 29, Mike hosted two **Pine Warblers, Purple Finches, Fox Sparrows, Pileated Woodpecker, and Brown Creeper** at his place near Elkton. On April 4, Mike added **Eastern Towhee** and **Brown Thrasher** and had a **Pine Warbler** coming to suet.

Reports of **Purple Finches** began increasing in late March and early April after there were relatively few birds around this winter. Ken Ranck, Diane Holsinger, Clair Mellinger, Mike Smith, Karen and Everette Shank, Diane Lepkowski, and Dave Wendelken all reported **Purple Finches** visiting their feeders.

William Leigh reported two egrets at the Oakwood Drive farm pond on April 2. William didn't have time to stop and ID but they were likely **Great Egrets**. Peter Norment reported a **Great Egret** at the Nazarene Church Rd wetland area on the same date. Randy Cline had a **Great Egret** at the Heritage Oaks Pond on April 3.

Matt Gingerich had a **Vesper Sparrow** at his place near Linville on April 2.

Herb Myers heard an early **Wood Thrush** singing at Starry Meadows near Singers Glen on April 2.

Diane Lepkowski reported a **Forster's Tern** at Lake Shenandoah on April 5.

Jonathan Drescher-Lehman reported two **Ospreys** at Silver Lake on April 5.

Greg Moyers reported a **Greater White-fronted Goose** at Oakwood Drive on April 5. A few days later, on April 8, Dave Wendelken reported a **Greater White-fronted Goose** at Lake Shenandoah.

Randy Cline reported an **Osprey** at Heritage Oaks on April 6 and a **Blue-winged Teal** at the same location on April 10. Randy had a **Palm Warbler** at Cooks Creek Arboretum in Bridgewater on April 13.

Karen Shank reported a pair of **Golden Eagles** soaring near her place at Spring Creek on April 7.

Herb Myers had a Palm Warbler at his place in Keezletown on April 12.

William Leigh reported a **Forster's Tern** at Silver Lake on April 12.

Karen Shank reported a **Yellow Warbler** at her yard water feature in Spring Creek on April 13. This was a new early record for Karen.

Stephani Moore reported a pair of **Red-tailed Hawks** working on a nest at the Rockingham County fairground in mid-April.

Sharon Landis reported a **Yellow-throated Vireo** and a **Pine Warbler** at Starry Meadows near Singers Glen on April 15.

Karen Shank saw a **Yellow-throated Warbler** (pictured below) at her parents' place near Bridgewater on April 15.



Greg Moyers reported a **Black-and-White Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Ovenbird, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and Louisiana Waterthrush** at the Madison Run Fire Rd on April 15.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski reported **Blackburnian Warbler, Northern Parula, Prairie Warbler, and Red-breasted Nuthatch**, among others, at Hone Quarry on April 16.

Diane Lepkowski and Dave Wendelken saw and photographed a **Virginia Rail** at Lake Shenandoah on April 17. On April 22, Greg Moyers and Dave Wendelken reported both the rail and a **Sora** at this location.

Herb Myers reported his first **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** of the season at his place in Keezletown on April 20.

Denise Hoodock had a **Brown Thrasher** in her yard on April 20.

Sully Sullivan reported and photographed an **Orange-crowned Warbler** at Lake Shenandoah on April 21.

Diane Lepkowski, Dave Wendelken, and Greg Moyers reported **Black-throated Green, Palm, Worm-eating, Black-and-white, and Hooded Warblers** plus **Great Crested Flycatcher** and **Broad-winged Hawk** at Paul State Forest on April 21. Greg and Diane added **Pine** and **Black-throated Blue Warblers, Wood Thrush, and Scarlet Tanager** at the forest on April 23.

Sharon Landis reported that she and Jay had a **Rose-breasted Grosbeak** at their place near Singers Glen on April 22.

Herb Myers reported **Blue-winged Teal, Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers**, and an **Osprey** at Lake Shenandoah and an **Eastern Kingbird** at Lake Campbell on April 23.

Jonathan Drescher-Lehman reported a **Gray-cheeked Thrush** at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum on April 23.

Ken Ranck reported **Warbling Vireos** singing along the North River on April 24.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **VSO Summer Field Trip: Blacksburg, VA, June 17, 2022 – June 19, 2022**

The New River Valley Bird Club will host the VSO summer field trip June 17-19, 2022, featuring some of the best birding areas in the New River Valley and Southern Appalachians. The varied topography and the river valley offer a wide variety of habitats and bird species. Field trips will be offered Friday afternoon, all day Saturday, and Sunday morning. Bill Akers and Jerry Via will be our trip leaders, and they are organizing some terrific activities for us!

*VERY Important!* All VSO field trips are open to members at no charge. If you have not renewed your dues for 2022 or have not joined yet, you can RENEW or JOIN at <https://www.viriniabirds.org/join-renew>

*TRIP REGISTRATION* – Please register online. Provide the names of participants in your party with each person's telephone number and email address so we can contact you as needed. If you have any questions, contact Meredith Bell, trip coordinator, at [merandlee@gmail.com](mailto:merandlee@gmail.com) or 804-824-4958.

### **Want to support the Rockingham Bird Club while you shop?**

Visit AmazonSmile and select the Rockingham Bird Club as your charity of choice. Remember to go to <https://smile.amazon.com/> to do your Amazon shopping. The Rockingham Bird Club will earn a percentage from the purchases you make. It's absolutely FREE to you and does not increase the cost of what you buy in any way.

### **Eagle vs. Osprey by Bruce Stambaugh**

At first, I did a double-take. My wife and I had just turned the corner from Rawley Pike south onto Erickson Avenue, just west of Harrisonburg on Sunday. As we passed the Word Ministries Christian Church entrance, I noticed two large birds to my left, south of the church. Both birds furiously flapped their wings. But there was something extraordinary about what we were seeing. My wife observed that they both appeared to have white heads.

I initially thought we were watching two bald eagles interacting. But the eagle was riding the back of the other bird, steadily forcing it to the ground. I tried to keep an eye on the plummeting birds while slowly driving. Fortunately, there was no traffic.

The birds, still locked together, disappeared from view because the roadway was below the level of the sloping land. We were on our way home from church, so I dropped off my wife at the house, grabbed my camera and binoculars, and hurried back to the scene.

The birds had flown northwest over the woods behind the Crossroads Heritage Center on Garbers Church Road. The hostile interaction began when they got to the clearing south of the church. I drove to the southwest corner of the parking lot and, from my vehicle, immediately spotted the bald eagle sitting in the open field. Through my binoculars, I saw the other bird. It was an osprey, looking directly toward the eagle.

Within a minute, the eagle flew up and began circling overhead in vast swaths. I drove closer to the osprey. It was clear that this beautiful bird of prey was severely injured. Ospreys and bald eagles often use the same habitat because both species are skilled at plucking fish from bodies of water. If one catches a fish, the other will pester the bird with its lunch to get it to drop it. Usually, it's the eagle that chases the osprey.

But we were nowhere near a large stream, lake, or pond. I wondered what happened to cause the eagle to be so aggressive toward the osprey. I took some photos and then turned my attention to finding help for the poor bird. I posted on the Rockingham Bird Club Facebook page about my dilemma. Within minutes, birders suggested I contact the Wildlife Center of Virginia in Waynesboro. That's what I did. Because it was a Sunday, I expected the call to go to voicemail. But on the second ring, a woman answered. I explained the situation, and she sent me a text with five names and phone numbers of trained wildlife rescue transporters to contact.

Meanwhile, word quickly spread in the local birding network. Black vultures, American crows, and common grackles began circling overhead. A Cooper's hawk zoomed by and landed in a nearby tree. The eagle was gone. The first transporter I called answered right away. Unfortunately, she couldn't help because she was driving to her daughter's bridal shower. None of the other people responded. Then I thought of Clair. I should have called him right away. Clair Mellinger is a retired biology professor emeritus from Eastern Mennonite University, and he lives just a quarter of a mile away. Fortunately, he was home, and he told me that he was a trained transporter and had taken birds to the Wildlife Center before. He and his wife arrived in a few minutes.

Ospreys have razor-sharp talons and a sharp beak designed to tear apart the flesh of the prey they catch. Mellinger was ready. His pants were tucked into his hiking boots. He wore a thick jacket and gloves and carried a blanket to throw over the bird. As he approached the osprey, he could see just how badly injured the bird was. Its left wing was broken, and it wasn't able to walk. So, picking up the bird was easier than we had expected. The bird didn't squawk or even try to move as Mellinger carefully carried the Osprey to the trunk of his car. He placed it in a plastic milk crate, put another one on top, and bound the two with bungee cords.

Before he left, Mellinger told me that he had never known an eagle to be so aggressive. The injuries were that serious. I hoped the osprey and its human escorts were on their way to a good outcome. The Virginia Wildlife Center is a noted rehab center.

Unfortunately, the eagle so severely injured the osprey, there was nothing the veterinarian at the center could do. An email informed me that the bird died in surgery the next day.

As an avid amateur birder, the news saddened me. I was happy to have an expert and trained birder like Clair Mellinger to call on in this time of urgent need. And I was grateful to the rehab center for their efforts in trying to save the osprey.

Mellinger told me that he figured that the osprey was on its northern migration and passed through the eagle's territory. Nesting eagles in the Shenandoah Valley are either currently incubating eggs or

feeding young that have hatched. That might have accounted for the once-in-a-lifetime altercation that my wife and I witnessed. We only wished the events would have had a better outcome for the osprey.



Clair Mellinger carefully walked the injured osprey to his car.  
Photo credit: Bruce Stambaugh



Eastern Bluebird – Wintergreen, VA

Photo credit: Jake Hoodock

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