



# Goldfinch Gazette

## The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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Jan 2023

**DATE:** Thursday, January 12, 2022

**TIME:** 7:00 PM

**PLACE:** Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

**PROGRAM:** “*Beautiful South Africa*” with Robyn Puffenbarger, Professor Bridgewater College

In May 2022, Robyn and Bill Benish, along with other Virginia Society for Ornithology members, went with Birding Africa on a tour from Cape Town to Kruger. Robyn will highlight an incredible array of habitats, birds, plants, and other animals seen on their trip.

### FIELD TRIPS – *Diane Lepkowski*

**Hillandale Monthly Walk, Thursday, January 19, with Tom Mizell:** Meet at the Main shelter parking lot at 8:30 AM. Questions? Contact Tom - [ztomvaz@cs.com](mailto:ztomvaz@cs.com) 540-810-5898 or Kathy - [kkbyers77@gmail.com](mailto:kkbyers77@gmail.com) 540-820-6517

**Lost River, WV (Kimsey Run & Eagles), Saturday, January 21 with Randy Cline:** Meet at the 7-11 in Broadway on Rt 259 (261 W Lee St), at 8:00 AM. Bring snacks and dress warmly. Spotting scopes are especially helpful, so if you have one, please bring it. Contact Randy Cline if you plan to attend and provide phone (cell) and email. Call or text Randy at 540-442-0348, or email if before Jan 20 [randy\\_cline@comcast.net](mailto:randy_cline@comcast.net) . (Randy does not have mobile email access.) We will carpool from Broadway and return shortly after noon. Rain/snow date to be determined later.

### TRIP REPORTS

#### **Hillandale Park Last Walk of Fall, December 21 – Tom Mizell**

Nine members of the Rockingham Bird Club gathered at the main shelter in Hillandale Park at 3:30 PM on Wednesday December 21, 2022. It was a pleasant afternoon. The sun was shining, and it was 44 degrees. Our wish list birds included Evening Grosbeak, owl and Brown Creeper. As we started our walk a Red-bellied Woodpecker called, and some Black-eyed Juncos flitted about. We watched a large raptor with broad strong wing beats pass overhead on its way North. Mike Donaldson was able to capture a few pics and we were happy that an immature Bald Eagle had flown over to begin our walk.

We followed the eagle's flight direction and headed towards the northwest corner. By the time we got to the pedestrian bridge we added Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse, Canada Goose, Northern Cardinal,

Mourning Dove, White-throated Sparrow, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Robin and American Crow. A flock, possibly European Starlings or Cedar Waxwings, blitzed overhead so quickly we did not get good looks. We added Northern Mockingbird at the old Cabin site along with Carolina Chickadee and a Song Sparrow along the stream channel. By now it was 4:36 and winter was fast approaching. We were heading west on the bike trail.

As we got closer to Winter, we saw a Woodpecker in a Walnut Tree. A Red-bellied Woodpecker somehow turned into a Northern Flicker as we got a bit closer. We crested the hill, and the high school was now in view. It was 4:46 almost Winter!

The Northern Flicker tried as best it could to be the last bird sighted during Fall. However, a flock of American Robins had other plans. Even when we looked away from the Robins to hopefully see another species, part of the Robin Solstice Party flock flew into our fields of view. That's it! At 4:47 PM Robins were the last birds to be seen in the Fall and the first birds to be seen in Winter. As the sun set at 4:58 it began to get dark quickly and we headed along the bike path back to our cars. On the way back we once again saw a very quiet and for the most part motionless Mockingbird perched in a cedar tree. In that Mockingbird way it somehow seemed bemused by the Robins zeal to be both the last and the first.

The temperature was 40 degrees at 4:59. We enjoyed 17 species in the "Fall" part of the walk. Red-bellied Woodpeckers were very numerous this day and were calling all along the walk. During the remaining 20 minutes of "Winter" birding, we saw three repeats from Fall. American Robin, Mourning Dove and Northern Mockingbird.

We heard church bells ring at 5:00 as we neared the parking lot and by 5:07 our first walk of Winter was over.

Hope to see you soon in the new year. Join us in January. We should easily increase our Winter bird sightings count that currently stands at three. What will be the first bird we encounter in 2023? You might make note of your own sighting and share that with us as we gather for the walk. Happy New Year!

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

The **MacGillivray's Warbler** at Lake Shenandoah, which was found by Peter Norment on Nov. 27, resurfaced on Dec. 3 and attracted numerous birders until the final sighting on Dec. 21. With all of the additional eyes and ears at the lake, a number of other notable birds were reported, including a male **Cape May Warbler**, which was reported for over two weeks through Dec. 18. A late **Gray Catbird** has been reported throughout the month. Several birders reported a **Virginia Rail** calling on Dec. 3-5, and there was report of a heard-only **Common Gallinule** on Dec. 3. Two **Great Egrets** were reported on Dec. 10, one continued to be seen for over a week. An **American Tree Sparrow** was reported and photographed on Dec. 13.

Cory Taylor reported **Snow Geese** and **Cackling Geese** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on Nov. 29.

The **Eared Grebe**, which had been at the Broadway Wastewater Plant since late Oct., was last reported on Dec. 2.

Herb Myers reported a pair of **Bald Eagles**, **Ring-billed Gulls**, and the continuing **Great Egret** at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 12.

Matt Gingerich reported a small group of **Tundra Swans** moving around the area on Dec. 14. Matt also relayed a report of a probable **Snow Goose** at Lake Terrace on the same date. Mike Donaldson checked for the goose, with no luck, but reported a **Northern Pintail** on the lake. Mike then found an immature **Ross's Goose** at the Weavers Rd pond on the same date.

Cory Taylor reported a fencepost-perched **Short-eared Owl** on Green Hill Rd near Grist Mill Rd on Dec. 15. Cory reported that there were possibly two owls there the previous weekend, but he was unable to confirm. Since Cory's sighting, as many as three owls have been reported several times in the area. This is the same area where owls were routinely seen last winter.

Mike Smith had a **Brown Creeper** and a **Pileated Woodpecker** visit his suet feeder on Dec. 15. Other birds at his place east of Elkton included **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Hermit Thrush**, **Cedar Waxwings**, and **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**.

Diane Holsinger found a **Say's Phoebe** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on Dec. 16. The bird was photographed later that day but, unfortunately, didn't stick around.

Karen, Everette, and Annie Shank had a single female **Evening Grosbeak** in their yard at Spring Creek on Christmas Bird Count Day, Dec. 17.

On Dec. 20, Herb Myers had a small flock of **Evening Grosbeaks** visit his feeder near Keezletown. Unfortunately, Herb was running errands and got word of the birds from his son-in-law. The birds had departed by the time Herb returned and he was unable to add them to his little big year yard list. Oh, the joys and frustrations of birding!

Matt Gingerich reported a **Cackling Goose** at Lake Terrace on Dec. 21.

Two **Tundra Swans** were reported at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 24.

Greg Moyers reported two **Greater White-fronted Geese** near Timberville on Dec. 25.

Mike Smith reported five **Red Crossbills** at the VA/WV state line on Rt. 33 on Dec. 28.

Matt Gingerich watched eight **Sandhill Cranes** circling low near Linville on Dec. 28.

Several birders reported five **Tundra Swans** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on Dec. 28. Greg Moyers reported two **Greater White-fronted Geese** at the same location on Dec. 31.

**Important Note:** There were a couple of unfortunate instances involving birders not obeying the posted guidelines at the Broadway Wastewater Plant during the month of Dec. The area was briefly closed to birders entirely. After discussions with the plant administrators, they have posted larger signs and very graciously agreed to give the birding community another chance. While the offenders were not local birders, it is imperative that all of us respect the posted signs at all times. This is one of the best hotspots in the state for waterfowl and rarities and could be permanently closed to all birders if there are any further incidents.

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## **Christmas Bird Count – *Bill Benish***

On Saturday, December 17, 2022, for our “VARC” annual Christmas Bird Count (CBC), we contributed the effort of nine parties afield consisting of 26 participants in addition to 16 Feeder Watchers at their homes. Our effort yielded 75 bird species identified out of 10,428 individual birds counted. These numbers will be subject to review and acceptance by our next level editors such as Rexanne Bruno who contributes her great effort to guiding CBC compilers statewide. Though this year’s weather was fairly mild, last year we reached a record high temperature of 68F which again allowed for many comfortable party hours by foot. Time afoot tends to allow for more detection by sound. Our highest ever species count was 82 about 5 years ago, but if our numbers hold, we will tie last year’s species count even though we had about 2000 more individual birds this year.

A few highlights follow:

- Three owl species- Barn Owl with two individuals each in two areas (scouted by Ken Ranck and by Mike Shank), Great Horned Owl and Eastern Screech-Owl.
- Single birds across the entire count include Evening Grosbeak (thanks to Annie Shank), Tundra Swan & Eastern Meadowlark (William Leigh’s party), Peregrine Falcon & Savannah Sparrow & Swamp Sparrow (my party), Black-crowned Night-Heron (Mike Smith’s party just across the border of his coverage area in Dayton along Rte. 42), Wilson’s Snipe (Robyn Puffenbarger’s party), Fish Crow & Palm Warbler (Mike Shank’s party).
- Other species spotted in only one area included American Green-winged Teal (Cook’s Creek near Rte. 11), Ring-necked Duck (Silver Lake), and Chipping Sparrow (William Leigh’s Area 5 in the SSW of our circle).
- One of our new All Time High (ATH) was 9 Eastern Towhees with an amazing 7 found by Matt Gingerich’s party in Area 1 in the NW. Another ATH was 39 Common Ravens with more than half found in the west by Matt’s party and by Kathy & Art Fovargue.
- I also like to watch the numbers of Purple Finch which are present most years but are also an irruptive species. Five of our 12 Purple Finches were found by Bob Eggleston’s party in Area 4 in the SSE of our circle.

Great thanks to all participants and those who considered contributing but were unable this year. Our leaders this year included Matt Gingerich, Ken Ranck, Mike Smith, Mike Shank, Robyn Puffenbarger, Bob Eggleston, Bill Benish, William Leigh, and Kathy & Art Fovargue.

## **Thank you!**

Thank you to Stephanie Gardner, Special Collections Librarian at Bridgewater College’s John Kenny Forrer Learning Commons, for her presentation “When Archives Take Flight: The Bridgewater College Birding Journal, 1918 and 1947-1950” at the December RBC meeting. If you want to delve into the details, the subject of her talk, the composition book labeled “Birds of Bridgewater” can be downloaded from this site: [https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/digitized\\_primary\\_sources/1/](https://digitalcommons.bridgewater.edu/digitized_primary_sources/1/) A summary of the presentation can be found in the Headwaters Master Naturalist’s January newsletter: <https://headwatersmn.org/2022/12/24/rockingham-bird-club-meeting/>

And thank you to all who brought cookies and goodies to the meeting.

## RBC in the News

Thanks to Rockingham Christmas Bird Count coordinator Bill Benish for running another successful count and for enhancing public awareness of the event by arranging for press coverage.

*The Citizen*, an independent source of news for the people of Harrisonburg, produced a lovely article and video covering the count in general and Bill's sector of the count circle in particular:

<https://hburgcitizen.com/2022/12/19/brown-creepers-golden-crowned-kinglets-and-tufted-titmice-appear-for-annual-bird-count/>. Thanks also to all CBC participants—I know we all look forward to seeing the official results.

## Call for presenters

The Edith J. Carrier Arboretum has approached our Club about providing one or more presentations for an event highlighting the Great Backyard Bird Count, February 17–20, 2023. Such presentations could be introductions to birding in general (what you need, how to get started, etc.), local birds, feeding birds, or some similar topic. The presentations are generally intended for all ages, but a kids-oriented presentation would also be welcome.

This is a great opportunity for club members to engage with the community and help the club revitalize its collaboration with the arboretum. Mike Donaldson will be available that weekend to assist presenters. For additional details, please contact him as soon as possible at (301) 906-5758 or [mike.donaldson@outlook.com](mailto:mike.donaldson@outlook.com).

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

Visit AmazonSmile and select the Rockingham Bird Club as your charity of choice by going 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 FREE to you and does not increase the cost of what you buy in any way.



Common Ravens dutifully waiting their turn for breakfast near Briery Branch – Dec 17, 2022  
Photo Credit: Art Fovargue

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**PRESIDENT: Mike Donaldson**

**VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS – Kathy Byers**

**VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS – Diane Lepkowski**

**SECRETARY: Stephani Moore**

**TREASURER: Audrey Shenk**

**MEMBERS AT LARGE: Kathy Fovargue, Herb Myers**

**GOLDFINCH GAZETTE – Denise Hoodock**

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