



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume XLVIII

Number 4

Dec 2023

DATE: Thursday, December 14, 2023

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, **FIREPLACE ROOM****

***We will meet in the FIREPLACE ROOM at the church instead of fellowship hall this month. Use the lower-level doors to the left of the doors we usually use. These will take you directly into the Fireplace Room.*

PROGRAM: **Feathers and Plumage** presented by John Spahr

John's program will explore the structure and function of feathers with images and illustrations. It will also highlight some amazing plumage adornments of birds (e.g., hummingbirds, birds of paradise), some of which are truly "eye candy."

John is a retired pathologist with a life-long interest in birds and conservation. For the last 10 years he's been doing field research on Eastern Screech-Owls in Highland County, where he and Patti Reum are also monitoring 60+ American Kestrel nest boxes. Since receiving his banding permit a few years ago, John has banded more than 350 kestrels (mostly nestlings) and over 40 screech owls. John is the regional eBird reviewer for Rockingham, Rockbridge, Augusta, Bath, and Highland counties.

FIELD TRIPS – *Diane Lepkowski*

Hillandale Bird Walk, Tuesday, December 12 AND Friday, December 22 (our last Fall walk): We will meet at Shelter 12 at 8:30 AM. Contact Tom Mizell at ztomvaz@cs.com or 540-810-5898, or Kathy Byers at kkbyers77@gmail.com or 540-820-6517 for questions or more info.

**Additional trips that may be scheduled will be announced via email to members.*

TRIP REPORTS

November Hillandale Walk – *Tom Mizell*

A dozen birders showed up for our Tuesday 14 November 2023 Hillandale walk. It was sunny and 37° at 8:30 AM. Wish list birds included Brown Creeper, Snow Bunting, Eastern Screech Owl, and Turkey. Our initial sightings, as we gathered in the parking lot, included Bluejay, Carolina Wren, American Crow, American Robin, Downy Woodpecker and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

We passed the northwest pedestrian bridge about 8:55 AM and added Red-bellied Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker and Northern Cardinal. Woodpeckers were quite evident this

day. Before we reached the slab, we added White-throated Sparrow and Hairy Woodpecker. The Hairy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers were dueling in the same dead tree where last month's Yellow-bellied Sapsucker proudly posed for a photo shoot. I guess word must get around (Tweets?) to the birding community and the Hairy and Red-bellied were likely hoping for possible photos in the Goldfinch Gazette.

A "Turkey" Vulture passed overhead at 9:20 AM. That flyover was the closest we got to a wish list bird. Can that count as a Turkey, one of our wish list birds? Just wondered?

Chris and Kathy spotted at least a pair of Golden-crowned Kinglets in a cedar tree along the trail around 9:30 AM. Other little birds, Carolina Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse, were active as we lingered near the concrete slab. We arrived at the Bike Trail at 9:50 AM and observed distant Black Vultures and a Red-tailed Hawk circling miles away to the east. The temperature was a comfortable 52° at about 10 AM and eight birders remained.

As we headed Southwest on the Bike Trail, we added House Finch, American Goldfinch, House Sparrow, and Dark-eyed Junco. Near the nice wooden bench on the Bike Trail, we found White-crowned Sparrows and Song Sparrows. In the walnut trees near the bench, we saw one of last month's stars, the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker along with Eastern Bluebirds. A Northern Mockingbird was seen in the field near the high school.

Common Ravens were calling near a group of kettling Turkey Vultures. Around 11 AM, we began to disband and head back to the parking lot. Part of the group saw a Hermit Thrush and another part added White-breasted Nuthatch near the volleyball court. We enjoyed a total of 30 species for the day. Six out of thirty were woodpeckers. Our walk concluded about 11:30 AM.

Hope you can join us Tuesday 12 December and then again Friday 22 December for our last Fall walk at Hillandale Park.

Northern Saw-whet Owl Banding – *Debbie Harrison*

On Friday, Nov 10, 2023, twelve RBC members visited the Highland Retreat Saw-whet Owl Banding station. We were hosted by bander Ben Spory & others. Clair Mellinger, who established the station and coordinated banding for 20+ years, joined us as well.

While we waited for the banders to return from the nets, Clair mentioned that Martha, who was helping, had first visited the banding station as a child and is now assisting. He told us about the station's history, which began in 2001 as part of Project Owl-net. "Zig" (Charles Ziegenfus) joined Clair in 2006. Ben & Chris, who now devote efforts there, started with them in 2018.

The only owl captured that night was one that already had a band – a "foreign" recapture! Martha learned that the owl was banded in Canada in 2021 (at Prince Edward Island)! Clair told us that they don't know precisely when the owls return north, but that one year Zig set up nets for three nights in February & caught 7 owls that they had banded in November.

On Sunday, Nov 19, two members of RBC and 3 guests returned to the Banding station. There were three owls captured. Each was weighed, measured, banded & photographed before being released back to the wild.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

The Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant continues to host a nice variety of species. The **Ruddy Duck** and **Northern Shoveler** numbers have increased into the hundreds and the pair of **Snow Geese** reported last month continued into Nov. Four **Dunlins** were reported on Oct. 27 and at least two stuck around for over a week. William Leigh reported a **Herring Gull** on Oct. 31, Cory Taylor reported a **White-rumped Sandpiper** and the continuing **Dunlins** on Nov. 7, William reported six **Bonaparte's Gulls** on Nov. 10, Diane Holsinger reported 17 **Tundra Swans** on Nov. 26, Justin Carter reported an **American Coot** on Nov. 30, and William Leigh reported a **Dunlin**, 12 **Common Mergansers**, and three **Hooded Mergansers** on Nov. 29.

Herb and Sarah Myers reported their first **Purple Finch** of the season at their Keezletown feeders on Oct. 31. They also reported hearing a pair of **Great Horned Owls** in the woods above their place. The following day, Herb reported a **Brown Creeper** on their Walnut tree. On Nov. 28, Herb reported a **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** at his suet feeder. On the same date, Herb's son-in-law saw a **Downy Woodpecker** fly out of their blocked off Bluebird box. Apparently, the woodpecker had built its own entrance!

Robyn Puffenbarger and Bill Benish also reported their first **Purple Finches** of the season at their place in Verona on Oct. 31. Robin reports they also had a **Hermit Thrush** on Oct. 30 and are having their best year ever for **Yellow-rumped Warblers**.

Huck Hutchens reported a **Dunlin** at Leonard's Pond on Nov. 7.

Herb Myers reported a number of good birds at Duck Run Natural Cemetery on Nov. 9, including **Eastern Meadowlarks**, **Horned Larks**, **Purple Finch**, **Hermit Thrush**, **Yellow-rumped Warblers**, and a "Gray Ghost" male **Northern Harrier**.

Sarah Alice Coleman photographed a female **Painted Bunting** at her feeder at the base of the Blue Ridge just over the county line in Page Co. on Nov. 12.

Diane Holsinger had a pair of **Purple Finches** at her Timberville feeder on Nov. 12 and a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** feeding on Juniper berries on Nov. 28.

Matt Gingerich has had several good birds at his property near Linville over the past month. Matt heard a **Snow Bunting** calling as it flew over on Nov. 14. The following day, Matt's son Micah flushed an **American Woodcock** from their dry streambed. A **Merlin** flew over on Nov. 23. On the 24th, a **Great Horned Owl** flew over carrying prey. Matt counted a total of 95 **Tundra Swans** flying over on Nov. 25.

Justin Carter reported **Fox Sparrows** and **Red Crossbills** at Dry Run off Rt. 33 west of Harrisonburg on Nov. 17.

Diane Lepkowski reported **Hooded Mergansers**, a **Ring-necked Duck**, and a **Wood Duck** at Lake Shenandoah on Nov. 18.

Greg Moyers reported **Pine Siskins**, **Fox Sparrow**, **Hermit Thrushes**, **Brown Creepers**, **Red-breasted Nuthatches**, and a **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at Hone Quarry on Nov. 19.

Randy Cline reported a pair of **Buffleheads** at the pond on Heritage Oaks Golf Course on Nov. 24. The pond is viewable from the Friendly City Trail at the north end of Hillandale Park. Jonathan

Drescher-Lehman reported seeing seven **Buffleheads** at Lake Shenandoah, as well as the continuing pair of females at Silver Lake, the previous day.

Justin Carter reported **Ring-billed Gulls** at Lake Shenandoah and **Hooded Mergansers, American Wigeon, Lesser Scaup**, and around 89 **Gadwalls** at Silver Lake on Nov. 29. On Nov. 30, Justin found two **American Coots** at Lake Shenandoah and an immature **Snow Goose** at Silver Lake.

Mike Smith reported a pair of juvenile **Bald Eagles** at the Merck Marsh south of Elkton on Nov. 30. Mike also has a **Hermit Thrush** coming to his bird bath to drink – typically around 10:00 AM!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bird Club Book Club – *Maureen Gallagher-McLeod*

The BCBC will meet via Zoom on Thursday December 21st, at 6:00 PM to discuss the first half of *A World on the Wing* by Scott Weidensaul. We maintain a list of nature-related books and welcome suggestions for future reading. The Club generally meets the third Thursday of the month. If interested in joining us, email Elizabeth Ihle at elizaihle@gmail.com.

Welcome to Our New Secretary

We are very pleased to announce the appointment of new Club member Allie Sawyer as Secretary of the Rockingham Bird Club. As an officer of the Club, Allie will be eligible for reelection annually at the Club meeting each May.

Many thanks to Allie for stepping forward to fill this important role, both in recording meeting minutes and serving as a voting member of the Executive Committee

Birds of Rockingham County Virginia, 2nd ed., for sale at December meeting (Great gift idea!)

This beautiful, informative book contains accounts for each of 314 reported species and includes more than 90 crisp, color photos. The book follows the format of Editor Clair Mellinger's 1998 first edition and is a valuable resource for birders interested in detailed information about birding in the County along with when, where, and which species to expect; and which to be surprised by!

The book describes current information on 21 popular birding locations, detailing access, and species occurrence at each. It also provides interesting information on the geography and geology of the County and describes frequency and population trends of species using a host of data sources and the knowledge of our experienced birders. The data includes local and digital (eBird) reports, Christmas Bird Counts, Goldfinch Gazette reports, and data comparisons between the first (1985–1989) Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas and eBird field reports for the 2nd Breeding Bird Atlas project (2016–2020.) (Please note that this book is not a field guide and does not delve into details of species identification, although it does frequently touch on suitable habitat.)

We are pleased to announce a discount (below-cost) price of \$27.50 for current RBC members. The non-member price is \$30. Both prices include sales tax. Sales will begin at 6:45 pm and will be by **cash or check only**. Books may also be ordered by mail by downloading an order form at <https://rockinghambirdclub.com/birds-of-rockingham-county/>.

RBC Bird Seed Sale News – *Kathy Byers*

We still have two 10 lb. bags of Nyjer seed for sale for \$25 each. Please contact Kathy Byers if you are interested. kkbyers77@gmail.com. 540-820-6517

Christmas Bird Count (CBC) UPDATE! – *Bill Benish*

Thanks again to the leaders and other volunteers helping with this year's Christmas Bird Count planned for Saturday, December 16. All the areas afield are currently covered. If someone lives inside the circle area and wants to report birds as a Feeder Watcher from their own home, please coordinate ahead of time with compiler Bill Benish via wcbenish@gmail.com.

In memory of Dan Perkuchín

We extend our deepest sympathy to the friends and family of Dan Perkuchin, especially his brother and fellow RBC member Don Perkuchin and his wife, Carol. Dan passed away on November 11, 2023. He was an active RBC member, regularly attending Hillandale walks and participating in counts, including the winter raptor and waterfowl count. He was active with the Augusta Bird Club as well. His kind demeanor, devotion, and generous spirit will be remembered by all of us who were blessed to know him. A memorial service was conducted on Saturday, December 2, 2023.

<https://mclaughlinandyoung.com/dan-norman-perkuchin/>



Northern Saw-whet Owl – Banding Station, Nov 10, 2023
Photo credit: Zack Perdue



Northern Saw-whet Owl being examined – Banding Station, Nov 10, 2023
Photo credit: Debbie Harrison



Hermit Thrush – Lake Shenandoah, Nov 5, 2023
Photo credit: Greg Moyers

Rockingham Bird Club
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PRESIDENT: Mike Donaldson

VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS – Kathy Byers

VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS – Diane Lepkowski

SECRETARY: Allie Sawyer

TREASURER: Audrey Shenk

MEMBERS AT LARGE: Andrew Troyer, Herb Myers

GOLDFINCH GAZETTE – Denise Hoodock

HISTORIAN: Art Fovargue

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