



# Goldfinch Gazette

## The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

Volume XLVIII

Number 5

Jan 2024

**DATE:** Thursday, January 11, 2024

**TIME:** 7:00 PM

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

**PROGRAM:** **Gardening for Birds and Wildlife** presented by Robyn Puffenbarger

By making our yards more bird, pollinator, and wildlife friendly, we encourage other creatures to linger in our spaces. Just a few additions can make your backyard into an interesting, welcoming environment for birds. Dr. Puffenbarger will talk about the ecosystem and building your plant community, whether you have sun or shade, a patio, or acres to enjoy. Following some of Robyn's suggestions just might help you add some new birds to your personal Backyard List!

Dr Robyn Puffenbarger is professor and chair of the Department of Biology and Environmental Sciences at Bridgewater College. She and her husband Bill, birdwatch in the yard and all over the world. Robyn has been a Virginia Cooperative Extension Master Gardner since 2011 and is contributor to the VPM PBS program VA Home Grown.

### **FIELD TRIPS** – *Diane Lepkowski*

**Hillandale Bird Walk, Tuesday, January 9:** We will meet at Shelter 12 at 8:30 AM. Contact Tom Mizell at [ztomvaz@cs.com](mailto:ztomvaz@cs.com) or 540-810-5898, or Kathy Byers at [kkbyers77@gmail.com](mailto:kkbyers77@gmail.com) or 540-820-6517 for questions or more info.

**2024 Raptor / Waterfowl Count, Saturday February 10:** This long-standing, one-day, annual Rockingham Bird Club 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're in the process of securing sector leaders and helpers. Please contact Diane Lepkowski at [dianelep1@yahoo.com](mailto:dianelep1@yahoo.com) with questions or if you're interested in participating.

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

# TRIP REPORTS

## December Hillandale Walks – *Tom Mizell*

It was 26° and sunny on Thursday December 22, 2023. As I got out of the car, I heard a Pileated Woodpecker call and then saw two Pileated woodpecker's flying just to the east of the shelter. Almost simultaneously Randy Cline reported a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and some in the group were looking at a Red-bellied Woodpecker. A nice beginning as three Woodpecker species greeted us before the walk even got underway. Eastern Bluebird and Blue Jays also were in the initial viewings. Nine members were ready to go this last morning of Fall 2023 and our wish list included: Winter Wren, Shrike, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Christmas color birds, American Robin, and Brown Creeper.

In the initial minutes of the walk, we had Tufted Titmouse, Dark-eyed Junco, American Robins, Carolina Chickadee, Downy Woodpecker and Yellow-rumped Warbler. By 9:00 AM we reached the NW corner pedestrian bridge and added Northern Cardinal (our first Christmas color bird) and European Starlings. As we paused after crossing the bridge, Zach Perdue spotted a White-breasted Nuthatch and Mike Donaldson sighted a Northern Flicker. Our Woodpecker species total now up to five.

As we proceeded about 200 feet west from the Northwest Corner a Hermit Thrush gave us some fleeting glimpses as it moved in the undergrowth. It flushed and flew around the group almost describing a complete circle, allowing us even more glimpses. White-throated Sparrow, American Crow, Mourning Dove and American Goldfinch pushed our total to 20. Kathy Byers spotted an accipiter as it sped through the trees.

It was cold and some of us talked briefly about our cold feet. We then heard a Carolina Wren calling very loudly and cheerfully as they often do in the cold. That is certainly one of their hallmarks and welcoming songs of wintertime. More birds calling-What's this ahead? As we drew nearer to the old log cabin site American Crows were calling much louder than the Wren. What's all the fuss? We searched their tree and we saw they were surrounding an accipiter and were wishing it Merry Christmas perhaps. It tolerated the noise but eventually flew!

Soon Blue Jays were in boisterous conversation. Guess what they were greeting? They had spied the Hawk too and they encircled it in a tree. The now identified Coopers Hawk was once again subjected to more Seasons Greetings. Here come the Crows again to join in as the Blue Jays dive bombed the Coopers Hawk. Blue Jays can be relentless. It was time for us to move on. A Mockingbird flitted about in the cedars.

We headed west on the Bike Trail around 10:00 AM. The temperature was rising but still in the 30s. Turkey Vultures circled. We reached a far corner of the Bike Trail (beyond the open field to the south and where the trail breaks sharply to the right). Mike spotted something in the corner cedars. We were soon enjoying a Fox Sparrow as it not only perched for some great views, but it sang for us. Have you heard one sing? A very enjoyable time as we listened to its singing. A House Finch flew into the area and seemed to enjoy this last song of Fall as well. It was 39 degrees as we wrapped up the walk around 11:15 AM having enjoyed 26 species this day.

The Tuesday, December 12, the Hillandale walk was a cold walk as well. The temperature was 21 degrees at 8:30 AM. Nine members of the RBC enjoyed 28 species. In addition to what was seen on 22 December we saw Purple Finches and a host of big guys: Canada Goose, Red-tailed Hawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Common Raven, and Black Vulture. A particular highlight of the 12 December

walk was a feeding frenzy in the Cedar Trees between the shelters and the NW corner bridge. House, Purple and American Goldfinches, Eastern Bluebirds, Tufted Titmouse, and Yellow-rumped Warblers very actively feasted on cedar berries. A few minutes later, near the Northwest corner of the park, we enjoyed watching a Hermit Thrush hanging upside down at times and enjoying the Cedar berries. Likewise, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker took its share of Cedar berries. Mark your calendars to check out the Cedar trees in early December.

Happy New Year! May we all enjoy more wonders of bird song and sightings and enjoyable walks together in 2024. Hope to see you in January!

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

The **Snow Goose** first reported at Silver Lake on Nov. 30 continues to be seen.

Greg Moyers reported a **Short-eared Owl** on Grist Mill Rd on Dec. 6.

Herb Myers had his first **Pine Siskin** of the season at his feeder in Keezletown on Dec. 7.

Diane Lepkowski reported a **Double-crested Cormorant** at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 9.

Greg Moyers reported a **Hermit Thrush, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and Fox Sparrow** at Hillandale Park on Dec. 9.

Mike Smith reported a **Bald Eagle** on Captain Yancey Rd, a **Wood Duck** and an **Eastern Phoebe** at the Merck Marsh, and a **Fox Sparrow** in his yard east of Elkton on Dec. 14.

Cory Taylor reported a female **Surf Scoter** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on Dec. 16. Vic Buckwalter reported a **Snow Goose** and 25 or more **Cacking Geese** at the same location on Dec. 18. On Dec. 24, Greg Moyers reported two **Tundra Swans**, a blue morph **Snow Goose**, 78 **Ring-necked Ducks**, 54 **Common Mergansers**, and 16 **Northern Pintails**.

Matt Gingerich relayed a report from his mother that there was a **Ross's Goose** at Lake Terrace on Dec. 20. Multiple birders saw the bird later the same day and pictures were posted on eBird.

Diane Lepkowski reported a pair of **Great Horned Owls** calling at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 24.

Greg Moyers heard and then spotted a male **Common Yellowthroat** while birding with Diane Lepkowski at Silver Lake on Dec. 24. On Dec. 25, Greg reported a **Canvasback, Redheads, Common Mergansers, and American Wigeons** at a pond near Timberville.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Bird Club Book Club – Maureen Gallagher-McLeod**

The BCBC will meet via Zoom on Thursday, January 18, at 6:00 PM to discuss the second half of *A World on the Wing* by Scott Weidensaul. In February, we will discuss *Creatures of the Kingdom* by James A. Michener. Anyone is welcome to join a book discussion if the month's selection is of interest to you. We maintain a list of nature-related books and welcome suggestions for future reading. The BCBC meets using Zoom every third Thursday of the month. If interested in joining us, email Elizabeth Ihle at [elizaihle@gmail.com](mailto:elizaihle@gmail.com)

## ***Birds of Rockingham County Virginia, 2nd ed., for sale at January meeting***

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/>.

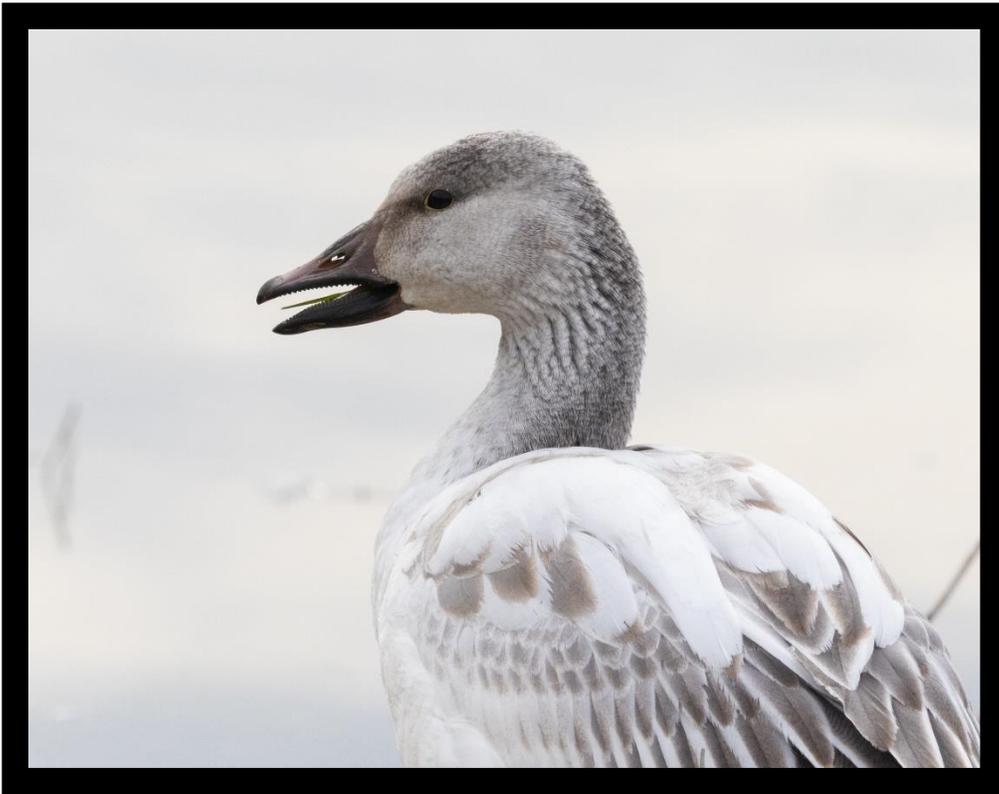
## **Christmas Bird Count (CBC) UPDATE! – *Bill Benish, Compiler***

All the CBC reports are in! Thanks for everyone's support and contribution efforts in your yard or afield! 32 participants afield is our highest in six years. Another 5 folks were able to watch their yard birds as "Feeder Watchers". Our number of Feeder Watchers varies widely yearly, from 2 to 72(!) over the last ten years. We identified and counted 74 species total matching last year, but our total number of individuals counted was 7,528, about 30% lower than last year. We had three owl species without an Eastern Screech-Owl! We had Great Horned Owl, Barn Owl, and Barred Owl, a first in 9 years. I haven't submitted the data yet and am still reviewing, so I'll include more details with the next newsletter as well as in a finalized summary. Thanks again!



Red-shouldered Hawk – JMU Arboretum, Dec 31, 2023

Photo credit: Greg Moyers



Snow Goose – Silver Lake  
Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski



Fox Sparrow – Friendly City Trail, Dec 9, 2023  
Photo credit: Mike Donaldson

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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