



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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Number 6

Feb 2024

DATE: Thursday, February 8, 2024

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: **Butterfly Journeys, Near & Far** presented by Mark Adams

The presentation will explore and compare the numerous spectacular butterflies that inhabit these varied ecosystems, and will feature many of Mark's photographs from Peru, Colombia, Ghana, Thailand, and Virginia. This is a nice follow-up to our January program that focused on improving our backyard habitats for birds and pollinators. Come join us and get ready for spring!

Mark Adams is a professional astronomer, recently retired, who led the National Radio Astronomy Observatory's Science Communications Office for more than a decade. He was the Assistant Director for West Texas Operations for the University of Texas–McDonald Observatory for a decade prior to his January 2004 move to Charlottesville.

FIELD TRIPS – *Diane Lepkowski*

Hillendale Bird and Brunch Walk, Tuesday, February 13: We will meet at Shelter 12 at 8:30 AM for a bit of birding. Then join us at Kathy's house (around 10:30 am) for coffee, bagels and more! 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. Kathy's address is 521 Ridge Rd.

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 with questions or if you're interested in participating.

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

TRIP REPORTS

January Hillandale Walk – *Tom Mizell*

On 23 January 2024 as I got out of my van at 8:30 AM at Hillandale Park I heard someone say, “Pileated Woodpecker”. That sounded familiar as a Pileated Woodpecker pair were the first to be seen when I got out of my van at our December walk.

After two consecutive walk cancellations due to inclement weather, seven folks showed up and braved snow-covered trails in Hillandale Park. It was sunny and the temperature was 24° at 8:30 AM. Wishlist birds were Brown Creeper, Red-shouldered Hawk, Palm Warbler, and Winter Wren.

Before we left the shelter area we saw Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Juncos, and Blue Jays as American Crows were calling in the distance. Red-bellied Woodpecker, Mourning Doves, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers were four more early birds. I heard someone say, “Maybe we will see all the woodpeckers.” Within a minute of that statement a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Northern Cardinal, American Robin, and Northern Flicker appeared. Thus with 6 of the local seven woodpeckers being sighted in the first 25 minutes of the walk we were hopeful to see 7.

As we drew near the pedestrian bridge, we saw several species either along the stream banks or in the trees and shrubs fluffing their feathers and preening themselves after bathing in the fast-flowing stream. After a very dry year with little or no flow in the channel it was good to see the runoff! The birds were quite active!

Still in the vicinity of the bridge we added Cedar Waxwings, American Goldfinches, Red-winged Blackbirds, White-throated Sparrows, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Northern Mockingbird and European Starlings. Also, many birds were splashing about and bathing along the stream channel about a hundred yards just upstream of the new Bike trail bridge. Before heading west on the Bike Trail, we spotted the first of at least three Fox Sparrows.

As we reached the Bike Trail, we checked out the large transmission tower corridor and added Carolina Wren, House Sparrow, and Carolina Chickadee. A Red-tailed Hawk was seen perched atop one of the tall poles. A flock of several dozen Robins was seen flying to the East. Then we noticed a Cooper’s Hawk was in hot pursuit of the Robin flock. A great scene of predator and prey. After enjoying the Cooper’s Hawk chase, we headed west on the bike trail towards the school. We added House Finch, Field Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, and House Sparrow bringing total species to 31 at 10:50 AM. Near the elementary school we found Eastern Bluebirds. We turned back towards the main park around 11:00 AM and completed our January walk at 11:25. The temperature was now a toasty 38 degrees. We did not see any of our wish list birds today but, we did enjoy 32 species and a nice winter walk with snowy scenes. Hope you can join us on Tuesday 13 February!

P.S. Since about 4 inches of snow caused the cancellation of the 16 January walk folks were offered an opportunity to share their special “Snow Day” feeder observations. Checkout Art Fovargue’s Mockingbird story elsewhere in the Gazette. Thank you, Art!

BIRD SIGHTINGS

The **Snow Goose** and **Common Yellowthroat** previously reported at Silver Lake continued to be seen throughout January.

Herb Myers reported a calling **Great Horned Owl** at his place in Keezletown on Jan. 1.

Diane Holsinger reported two **Greater White-fronted Geese** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on Jan. 11.

Diane Lepkowski reported two **Greater White-fronted Geese** at Lake Campbell on Jan. 13.

Justin Carter reported **Bonaparte's Gulls**, **Red-breasted Mergansers**, and **Common Goldeneyes** at Lake Shenandoah on the snowy morning of Jan. 15. The same day, Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski counted 162 **Lesser Scaup** plus **Ring-billed Gulls**, **Buffleheads**, **Ruddy Ducks**, **Green-winged Teal**, **Northern Shoveler**, **Hooded Mergansers**, and **Ring-necked Duck** at the same location. The following day, Justin added **Redheads**, a **Canvasback**, and a **Horned Grebe** to the list.

There were several other storm-related bird sightings on Jan. 16. Randy Cline reported **Buffleheads** and a **Ring-billed Gull** at Newman Lake, Peter Norment reported six **Gadwalls** at the Heritage Oaks golf course pond, and Diane Lepkowski reported a **Lapland Longspur** on Scholars Rd.

Greg Moyers reported two **Redheads**, three **American Black Ducks**, and two **Ring-necked Ducks** at Lake Terrace and several **Savannah Sparrows** along Grist Mill Rd on Jan. 17.

Justin Carter photographed a **Lapland Longspur** at the Shenandoah Valley Produce Auction fields on Lumber Mill Rd on Jan. 18. Cory Taylor reported a possible longspur on Water Wheel Rd near Timberville on the same date.

Diane Holsinger found an **American Tree Sparrow** on Piney Woods Rd near Timberville on Jan. 19.

Tom Mizell reported a **Common Goldeneye** at Silver Lake on Jan. 19.

Diane Lepkowski reported an **American Coot** at Lake Campbell on Jan. 19.

Diane Lepkowski and Greg Moyers reported 22 **Common Mergansers** on the Shenandoah River at Plains Mill Rd near Timberville on Jan. 20.

Greg Moyers reported 30 **Wild Turkeys** on Betts Rd on Jan. 21.

Diane Lepkowski reported **American Pipits** on Lewis Byrd Road and Scholars Rd on Jan. 21.

Cory Taylor reported a **Common Goldeneye** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant and a **Common Merganser** on the river at Plains Mill Rd on Jan. 22.

Diane Lepkowski reported six **Common Mergansers** on North River at Bridgewater on Jan. 23 and three **American Black Ducks** at Lake Campbell on Jan. 24.

Mike Smith had four **Pine Siskins** visit his feeders at his place east of Elkton on Jan. 28.

On January 29, Matt Gingerich reported four **Canvasbacks** along with three **Lesser Scaup** and two **Ring-necked Ducks** at Lake Terrace.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Volunteers sought for Nominating Committee

The Club will be holding its annual elections this May, and it is the duty of the Executive Committee to name a Nominating Committee of three members at the Club's March meeting. The Nominating Committee will consist of immediate past president Mike Donaldson as chair and two volunteer Club members. The committee will prepare a slate of one nominee for each of the following positions:

- Officers: President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer (these officers serve one-year terms)
- Two Members-at-large, who serve two-year terms and may serve one successive term.

Additional information about the elections and duties of the officers can be found within the Club's [Constitution and By-laws](#). Please help the Club move forward by volunteering to serve on the Nominating Committee. To do so, or to express your interest in one of the leadership positions, please contact Mike Donaldson at mike.donaldson@outlook.com. You may also express your interest in person at the February meeting.

Great Backyard Bird Count programs at Edith J. Carrier Arboretum

The Arboretum is excited to join the Cornell Lab of Ornithology for the Great Backyard Bird Count February 16–19. Participate in this community science blitz for 15 minutes or more, from wherever you are—details at www.birdcount.org. Stop by the arboretum's Frances Plecker Education Center the week of Feb. 12 to pick up a free checklist of local birds you're likely to spot, or [register your interest](#) with us to have it emailed to you.

You can also join us at the Frances Plecker Education Center on Saturday, Feb. 17, for one of our educational programs ([free registration required](#)):

Birding Basics with the Rockingham Bird Club Saturday, Feb. 17, at 10:30 a.m. (program designed for adults, but interested kids are welcome)

Meet at the Frances Plecker Education Center (please dress for the weather). The Rockingham Bird Club will give an overview of local birds and how to find them, then we'll venture out into the Arboretum to do some scouting for the bird count!

Soundscapes of Backyard Bird Communities Saturday, Feb. 17, at 12 p.m. (program designed for adults, but interested kids are welcome)

JMU ornithologist Dr. Dana Moseley will discuss how bird communities and soundscapes change from urban to suburban to rural habitats, and how these differing communities can impact individual species' behaviors. Dr. Moseley and her JMU students investigate how birdsong, behavior, and nesting success are affected by urban noise pollution.

Bird Feeding Frenzy Saturday, Feb. 17 at 1:30 p.m. (Program designed for kids, but interested adults are welcome)

We will learn about what foods birds need to survive—what they eat and why, how different beak shapes benefit birds, and what's important to know about setting up a bird feeder. Participants will make a bird feeder out of recycled materials to take home.

Birds of Rockingham County Virginia, 2nd ed., for sale at February 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/>.

Treasurer's Report – Audrey Shenk

At the latest RBC Executive Committee meeting in late January, the committee agreed to make donations to the following organizations using the proceeds from our annual Bird Seed Sale:

The Wildlife Center of Virginia (the organization that cares for sick or injured wildlife in our area), the American Bird Conservancy (conserving native birds and their habitats throughout the Americas), the Coastal Virginia Wildlife Observatory (protecting migrating birds), the Center for Conservation Biology at The College of William & Mary (preparing future ornithologists), the National Audubon Society in recognition of their support for our local Christmas Bird Count, Massanutten Regional Library (in honor of long-time Bird Club members who passed away in the previous year), the Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia (promoting conservation of our local birds and their habitats), the Community Cloud Forest Conservation (working in Guatemala to alleviate poverty and protect the cloud forests where many of our local birds spend the winter), and the Virginia Society of Ornithology's Breeding Bird Atlas 2 sponsor a species program. Appropriately, we are sponsoring the American Goldfinch.

Thank you for your support of our annual fundraiser. By purchasing bird seed and volunteering on distribution day, you make these donations possible. Happy safe birding in 2024!

Bird Club Book Club – Maureen Gallagher-McLeod

The BCBC will meet via Zoom on Thursday, February 15, at 6:00 PM to discuss *Creatures of the Kingdom* by James A. Michener. In March, we will discuss *In Defense of Plants* by Matt Candelas. 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, usually using Zoom, on every third Thursday of the month. If interested in joining us, email Elizabeth Ihle at elizaihle@gmail.com

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

Great thanks to our additional field party leaders this year including **Matt Gingerich** (Area1), **Ken Ranck** (A2North), **Herb Myers** (A2S), **Mike Shank** (A3East), **Robyn Puffenbarger** (A3W), **Bob Eggleston** (A4BE), **Clair Mellinger** (A4Bridgewater), **William Leigh** (A5), **Kathy & Art Fovargue** (A6UnionSprings), **Bill Benish** (A6HoneQuarry), and **Kathy Byers** (A6BrieryBranch). Thanks also to the helpers in the parties! These other field participants help the leaders with essential roles such as driving, data recording, photography, spotting, and fun conversation.

Thanks also to **Greg Moyers** for his patient scouting and keen knowledge of our less frequently encountered birds. Near Silver Lake, Greg found a Black-crowned Night-Heron which was our only “CW” (found during Count Week, not on Count Day) species this year.

The total of 74 species matched our 15-year average even though the number of individual birds was 7,528 - about 30% fewer than last year.

20 species were only seen in one of our six main areas listed below. The starred (*) species were not seen last year.

Area 1 (North to NNW): *American Black Duck, Great Horned Owl, Eastern Towhee, Savannah Sparrow

Area 2 (North to NNE): *Snow Goose (White form), *Bufflehead, *Northern Harrier, *Merlin (photographed eating prey at Mole Hill), Barn Owl, Brown-headed Cowbird

Area 3 (East): *Gadwall, Ring-necked Duck, *Barred Owl

Area 4 (South to SSE): American Green-winged Teal, *Hooded Merganser, Purple Finch

Area 5 (South to SSW): *Wild Turkey

Area 6 (West): Black-capped Chickadee, Hermit Thrush, *Pine Siskin (only a few at Hone Quarry)

Let me know via wcbenish@gmail.com if you would like me to email you the final tally sheet PDF.

“Snow Day” Story – *Art and Kathy Fovargue*

Since the first of the year, the neighborhood N Mockingbird has been a regular visitor to our suet feeder with Annie's peanut butter suet. She would nibble for long spells. We noticed that often after a feeding, she would come directly to the water to perhaps unstick the roof of her beak. So, the evening before the second, already cancelled, Hillandale bird walk, knowing mockingbirds eat citrus, and to offer a more juicy alternative, we cut up some oranges and placed them in another suet feeder. We hung this from the PB feeder so it would be easy to find.

With 2-1/2 inches of fresh snow on the ground the next morning we eagerly waited to see if the Mockingbird would enjoy our offering. Yes, she did! Although the oranges remain untouched, it provided a new and improved perch for accessing the bottom side of the PB.



Northern Mockingbird – Harrisonburg, January 16, 2024
Photo credit: Art Fovargue



Red-shouldered Hawk dining on a snake – Harrisonburg, January 26, 2024
Photo credit: Art Fovargue

Rockingham Bird Club
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PRESIDENT: Mike Donaldson

VICE PRESIDENT: PROGRAMS – Kathy Byers

VICE PRESIDENT: FIELD TRIPS – Diane Lepkowski

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HISTORIAN: Art Fovargue

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