



# Goldfinch Gazette

## The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>

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Apr 2024

**DATE:** Thursday, April 11, 2024

**TIME:** 7:00 PM

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

**PROGRAM:** **Birding and Much More in Panama** presented by Dave Wendelken

Drawn by the glowing reviews he had read of two Panamanian ecolodges, Dave visited them for two weeks in 2011. He returned for another two weeks the next year and again in 2022, while adding a third week and another lodge that year. In this program he will share the beauty and diversity of the birds and other animals and insects he has photographed there and explain why a visit to Panama should be on your bucket list if it isn't already. He will provide tips for travelers and a look at three of the county's premier birding locations.

Dave has a life-long interest in natural history and conservation photography. He was already birding when he got the two-volume Audubon guide to the birds of Eastern and Central America for his ninth birthday and read it cover to cover. He taught journalism at JMU for 40 years with an emphasis on writing, editing, and design. For the past two decades he has traveled throughout the Caribbean, Central America, and northern South America, drawn by the region's amazing biodiversity. He contributes regularly to eBird and iNaturalist. He designed and co-edited the recent *Birds of Rockingham County Virginia*.



Two Keel-billed Toucans – Canopy Tower Observation Deck in Panama  
Photo Credit: Dave Wendelken

## FIELD TRIPS – *Diane Lepkowski*

**Madison Run / Browns Gap Fire Road (Shenandoah National Park), Saturday April 6, with Greg Moyers** – Join Greg at 8:45 AM to seek some of our earliest returning warblers and more. Targets include Louisiana Waterthrush and Pine Warblers. Other new arrivals are possible, as are lingering wintering species and our year-round Barred Owl. This is a fairly easy walk alongside a lovely creek on a well-maintained gravel fire road with just a slight incline. Expect about a 3.5-4-mile round trip. There are no restroom facilities. Bring water, and snacks if you wish. We expect to return by 12-1 PM. Please contact Greg if you have questions and to sign up ([gwmoyers@msn.com](mailto:gwmoyers@msn.com) or 540-434-3029) and include the number in your party and your cell phone number, along with your email in case of changes or cancellation.

**Hillandale Bird Walk, Tuesday, April 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.

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

## TRIP REPORTS

### **March Hillandale Walk** – *Tom Mizell*

Ten birders joined us for our Tuesday 12 March Hillandale walk. We had 32 species for that walk. Species that did not appear on the last day of winter walk on March 19th included: Song, Field and Fox Sparrows, Tree Swallow, Brown Creeper and Red-shouldered Hawk.

### **March “Last day of Winter” Hillandale Walk** – *Tom Mizell*

On Tuesday 19 March, the last day of winter, 13 members of the Rockingham Bird Club coldly set out on their Hillandale Park Walk. Wish list birds this day included Brown Creeper, Pine Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, and Screech Owl (gray phase). As often is the case, the Blue Jays were the first to be seen as I passed through the park gate. Canada Geese were heard, American Robins, American Crow, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Northern Cardinals, Dark-eyed Juncos, European Starlings, Carolina Wren, Mourning Dove, Eastern Bluebirds, Rock Pigeons, and Tufted Titmouse were quickly seen. The total species numerically equaled the number of birdwatchers before we started walking. At 8:45 AM it was quite cold, so I went back to my vehicle to get another layer of warm clothing. When I caught up with the group, they had added Golden-crowned Kinglet, Cedar Waxwings, Yellow-rumped Warbler and Carolina Chickadees pushing the species total to 17. Other early birds seen were White-breasted Nuthatch, White-throated Sparrows, Mallards, House Sparrow, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. The group was locked on Purple Finches near the northwest pedestrian bridge when I interrupted them to take pictures. (See photos below) Not sure that was wise on my part. Once again, the Screech Owl was a crowd pleaser. By about 9:15 AM we were at the (still unnamed) concrete slab. Randy Cline was intently watching some movement along the stream and suddenly what could only be described as a primal scream pierced the cold winter air. Randy spotted a Rusty Blackbird and was quite pleased with that sighting. A first! We all enjoyed this special happening on the trail. Turkey Vultures were seen by the time we reached the fork in the trail just west of the old log cabin site. American Goldfinches were quite brilliant as they captured the bright sun while they perched in the tree that just last month was a sunny showcase of Cedar Waxwings. And the species total is now 27 as we reached the bike trail. We added Brown-headed Cowbirds and Northern

Mockingbird.

As we headed west on the bike path we had a pair of Red-tailed Hawks, Black Vultures and White-crowned Sparrows for 32 species. The temperature was now 35 degrees, and the wind was 10 miles an hour. The remaining 9 birders added House Sparrow, Fish Crow, Common Grackle, Downy Woodpecker, Killdeer and Meadowlarks by 10:50 AM. Species total now 38. Several Northern Mockingbirds seemed to be happy to follow us along the bike path. At 11 AM it was 37° and felt like 30°. As we headed back to the shelter we observed many Vultures in the direction of EMU. As they lifted and streamed in different directions, we estimated the total to be greater than 200. I then left the group. While they were walking back, they spotted a Northern Flicker. Also, as Art and Kathy Fovargue were returning earlier to the Parking Lot they spotted a Hairy Woodpecker. So, we enjoyed 40 species. My walk was over around 11:13 AM and it was 37 degrees and windy. It felt like 31! Well, it was still Winter! Hope you can join us in Spring on Tuesday April 9!

### American Woodcock Trip, March 25 – *Diane Lepkowski*

Clear skies, no wind, and cooperative birds offered seven RBC members a wonderful show! We convened at Madison Run Fire Road, then headed north on Ore Bank Road to a spot that has offered good views in years past. Two or three minutes after sunset, one bird began peenting. Not long after, the aerial displays began. We had great looks at the birds as they fluttered high above us and to our west, backlit by the evening's waning light, with their wings twittering as they returned to earth and resumed their peenting. This was a "life-bird" for some, which of course added to the excitement! Before sunset, we perused the nearby area and were treated to a Barred Owl calling in the distance, along with several other species. Andrew Troyer spotted a Hermit Thrush; well-camouflaged by its colors, it revealed itself with its enthusiastic foraging as it flipped and tossed leaves to uncover "goodies." As night fell and the woodcocks became silent, another sound pierced the air – a frog, we thought! It was clearly quite close by, at a water-filled roadside ditch. Some of us approached the sound, scanning with flashlights. But even with the critter seeming nearly underfoot, our efforts were in vain. We settled for the music and said our farewells, ending this most enjoyable evening adventure.

## BIRD SIGHTINGS

Justin Carter reported an early **Spotted Sandpiper** at the JMU Farm east of Harrisonburg on March 4.

There were multiple reports of a **Chukar** in Bridgewater the first week of March. The bird was almost certainly an escapee.

Greg Moyers reported nine **Tundra Swans** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on March 6.

Karen and Annie Shank reported singing **Pine Warblers** in their yard west of Bridgewater on March 7 and 8.

Greg Moyers reported a **Rusty Blackbird** at Lake Terrace in Harrisonburg on March 9.

Mike Smith's yard list at his place east of Elkton included **Eastern Phoebe** and **Eastern Towhee** on March 3, a **Fox Sparrow** on March 9, a **Pine Warbler** feeding on suet on March 10, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** and **Hermit Thrush** on March 18, **Chipping Sparrow** and **Purple Finch** on March 19, and **Brown Thrasher**, **Blue-headed Vireo**, and a flock of 42 **Dark-eyed Juncos** on March 31.

Greg Moyers photographed a **Eurasian Wigeon** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on March 10. The wigeon was in the company of several **American Wigeons**. Other notables included **Red-breasted Merganser, Redheads, and American Coots**.

Bill Benish and Robyn Puffenbarger had two **Rusty Blackbirds** at their place in Verona (Augusta Co.) on March 14. Bill reports they've also had **Pine Siskins** at their place.

Mike Donaldson reported four **Bonaparte's Gulls** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on March 15.

Mike Smith reports that **Great Blue Herons** are again nesting at the Merck Swamp south of Elkton as of March 18. A few days later, Mike reported a second active nest.

Greg Moyers heard his first-of-season **Blue-headed Vireo** at Madison Run Fire Rd on March 17.

Justin Carter reported two **Blue-winged Teal** at Leonard's Pond on March 18.

Herb Myers reported **Chipping Sparrows** at his place in Keezletown on March 19. On March 21, Herb and Sarah had **Eastern Meadowlarks** and a **Barn Swallow** along Happy Valley Rd.

Mike Donaldson reported a **Pectoral Sandpiper** at Leonard's Pond on March 20. Diane Lepkowski reported two Pectorals at this location on April 1.

Ken Ranck reported that the windstorm on March 20 blew down the **Bald Eagle** nest on Imboden Rd, killing three eaglets. Ken reports that the nest had been there for 15 years.

William Leigh reported a **Rusty Blackbird** and around 20 **American Pipits** at the Crist Farm Trail in Bridgewater on March 21. William reports the winds blew down a **Cooper's Hawk** nest at this location.

Greg Moyers reported three **Pectoral Sandpipers** at the Fort Lynne Rd pond on March 22.

Ben Spory reported a pair of **Wood Ducks** on a pond at Dale Enterprise on March 22. Ben reported a **Northern Pintail** and **Redhead** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on March 23. On March 24, Ben found a **Cooper's Hawk** on a nest at Silver Lake.

Greg Moyers spotted a roosting **Barred Owl** while walking the Madison Run Fire Rd with Diane Lepkowski on March 24. A short while later, Diane flushed an **American Woodcock** and heard two **Barred Owls** dueting along Ore Bank Rd.

Herb Myers reported seven **Purple Finches** at his feeder in Keezletown on March 25. On March 28, Herb reported an **Osprey, Red-shouldered Hawk, Tree Swallows, Lesser Scaup, Wilson's Snipe,** and the continuing **Virginia Rail** at Lake Shenandoah. Upon returning home that evening, Herb spotted a **Pine Warbler** on his suet feeder. On March 29, Herb and Sarah reported **Fox Sparrows, Blue-headed Vireo,** and **Golden-crowned Kinglet** while hiking the Western Slope of Massanutten Mtn.

Diane Lepkowski reported an **Osprey** at Lake Shenandoah on March 31.

Greg Moyers reported two **Bonaparte's Gulls** and four **Double-crested Cormorants** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on Easter Sunday – March 31.

A **Horned Grebe** at Lake Shenandoah was reported to eBird on March 31. Diane Lepkowski and Greg Moyers saw the bird on April 1.

Diane Holsinger reported a **Red-headed Woodpecker** at her peanut feeder, an **Eastern Towhee**, and 10 **Purple Finches** at her place in Timberville on April 1. Diane reports that her **American Goldfinches** are transitioning into their bright yellow plumage.

Greg Moyers reported a **Green Heron** at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum on April 1.

As of April 1, the two young **Great Horned Owls** at the Edith J. Carrier Arboretum at JMU have yet to fledge, though it appears that could happen any day now!

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### **Virginia Big Day, May 4: a birding event / fundraiser to benefit VSO's 2<sup>nd</sup> Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Fund**

Xavier Gitre, a young birder from Blacksburg, Virginia, is coordinating a fundraiser for the VSO's Virginia Breeding Bird Atlas Fund, which will pay for the publication of the Atlas. For this one-day event, teams in different categories will compete for the most species in the state or their region. The fundraising aspect refers to pledging; entities may pledge a certain sum for each species (or just a flat pledge), all of which will go directly to the atlas project. More information at: <https://vabirdingbig-day.org/>.

### **Election reminder**

The Club will hold its annual elections at the May meeting. The slate of six nominees, the preparation of which remains in process, will consist of the following positions:

- Officers: President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer (These officers serve one-year terms.)
- Member-at-large (This position has a two-year term. The Club has two Members-at-large whose terms are staggered; one is voted on each year.)

Additional information about the elections and duties of the officers can be found within the [Club's Constitution and By-laws](#).

### ***Birds of Rockingham County Virginia, 2nd ed., for sale at April 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/>.

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

The BCBC will meet via Zoom on Thursday, April 18, 2024. at 6:00 PM to discuss the book *What An Owl Knows: The New Science of the World's Most Enigmatic Birds* by Jennifer Ackerman. In May, we will discuss *Better Living Through Birding: Notes from a Black Man in the White World* by Christian Cooper. 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](mailto:elizaihle@gmail.com)



Hillandale Park Birders on the last day of winter walk – March 19, 2024

Photo credit: Tom Mizell





Horned Grebe at Lake Shenandoah, April 1, 2024

Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski



Eurasian Wigeon – Wastewater Treatment Plant on March 10, 2024

Photo credit: Greg Moyers

Rockingham Bird Club  
9 Louise Drive  
Bridgewater, VA 22812



**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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