



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com>
A Goldfinch Jubilee – 50 years

Volume L

Number 5

Jan 2025

DATE: Thursday, January 9, 2025

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: Katie Fallon returns to present *The Cerulean Warbler: West Virginia's Unofficial State Bird*

More than 70% of the world's Cerulean Warblers nest and raise their young in the hardwood forests of Central Appalachia, with 35% in West Virginia, more than any other state. Sadly, the Cerulean Warbler is the fastest-declining Neotropical migrant songbird, losing 3% of its population every year since 1966. In addition to sharing tips for finding and identifying Cerulean Warblers while birding, this presentation will discuss what makes West Virginia appealing for these and other migratory songbirds and what we can do to help them here. We will also discuss the threats and challenges Cerulean Warblers face in their migratory and winter ranges, and you will find out how something as simple as your morning cup of coffee can help conserve Cerulean Warblers, Wood Thrush, Scarlet Tanagers, and other birds that make West Virginia their summer home.

Katie Fallon is the author of the nonfiction books [Vulture: The Private Life of an Unloved Bird](#) (2020, 2017) and [Cerulean Blues: A Personal Search for a Vanishing Songbird](#) (2011), as well as two books for children. She is Executive Director of the [Avian Conservation Center of Appalachia](#), a nonprofit organization dedicated to conserving the region's wild birds through research, education, and rehabilitation. She has served as President of the [Mountaineer Chapter of the National Audubon Society](#). Katie is a Certified Professional Bird Trainer and has worked with birds since 1998; over the last twenty years she has given educational presentations featuring live raptors, vultures, parrots, and corvids. She also writes the column WINGBEATS for Bird Watcher's Digest and has taught writing at West Virginia University, Virginia Tech, and elsewhere. Her first word was "bird." For more: www.katiefallon.com.

Audio Aides will be available for use. The church is also equipped for anyone using T-coil technology devices.

FIELD TRIPS – Diane Lepkowski

Hillandale Bird Walk, Tuesday, January 14, 2025: 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.

TRIP REPORTS

December Hillandale Walk – *Kathy Byers*

We were pleasantly surprised by the number of bird lovers that showed up on this chilly December morning. Fourteen Bundled Up Birders! It was cold enough that we could see our breath as we introduced ourselves and announced our “wish birds” for the walk. One birder must have gotten us mixed up with Santa Claus, as he wished for new binoculars. Ho Ho Ho!

The group couldn't help but notice how long it seems to take the birds to get moving on cold late-fall days. So very different from early spring mornings! Some nice views of a Northern Flicker, a Red-bellied Woodpecker and a couple of White-breasted Nuthatches inspired the group to keep going.

As the birds started rousing, Craig Zook spotted a Hermit Thrush. This bird is one of the more exciting birds for this time of year and the group tried its best to keep it in sight. Before long we had added Golden-crowned Kinglet to our list of sixteen.

We followed our regular routine and went to check out the old cabin site. A sapsucker was playing Peek-a-boo around the trunk of the Bradford Pear. As our group focused our attention on it, we were treated to some amazing views of this intriguing bird. One birder was amazed at how yellow its belly really is!

Turning up the bike path we added Yellow-rumped Warblers, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird and Cedar Waxwing to our list. A smaller group continued further up the path and added Meadowlark, White-crowned Sparrow and Song Sparrow, bringing our final species count to thirty. Not bad for December, but the species count always seems secondary to the camaraderie of these walks.

Hillandale Winter Solstice Walk – *Kathy Byers*

Nine folks joined us for our second walk in December to observe our last birds of fall. The chilly temps left no doubt that winter would officially arrive early the next morning. Even a few snowflakes were seen.

As our first couple of species were being added to the list, the group enjoyed a flock of mallards that circled over us, probably settling back down in the golf course pond. The common winter birds of the park gave us some nice views as the group chatted and moved up the trail. White-throated Sparrows were scratching up a storm in the leaf litter when a Hermit Thrush tried to mix in but was detected by Hope Getman. Craig Zook was the first to spot the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker that appears to prefer the area by the old cabin site. A Downy Woodpecker was seen very close by.

Kathy Byers refers to the large (oak?) tree across from the bench along the bike path as “The Bluebird Tree,” and it lived up to the title that morning. The group enjoyed three beautiful Bluebirds as they took turns flying down to the ground and back again.

Ironically this last field trip of 2024 yielded 24 species. Hope to see you in 2025!

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Herb Myers reported a **Northern Harrier** hovering over a field at the corner of Liberty Street and Mt. Clinton Pike on Dec. 1.

William Leigh reported a **Bonaparte's Gull** and a **Common Merganser** at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on Dec. 3.

Diane Holsinger and Doug Ruby each reported seeing a **Great Egret** at Silver Lake between Dec. 7 and Dec. 10.

Diane Lepkowski reported three **Redheads** at Lake Campbell on Dec. 7. Also at the Lake, Karen Seward photographed a pair of scaup on December 19 that had been reported since December 15. Her photos showed them to be **Greater Scaup**. The birds had been reported beginning on December 15.

Ken Ranck reported four male **Common Mergansers** on North River behind his house in Mt. Crawford on Dec. 16.

Diane Holsinger had a **Brown Thrasher** in her yard in Timberville on Dec. 16.

Bill Benish and Robyn Puffenbarger reported a female **Evening Grosbeak** at their place in Verona on Dec. 22.

Herb Myers reported a **Hermit Thrush** under his feeder in Keezletown on Dec. 22. Herb reported five **American Kestrels** between Harrisonburg and Keezletown on the same day.

Mike Smith had several good yard birds at his place near Elkton on Dec. 23, including **Brown Creeper, Hermit Thrush, Fox Sparrow, Hairy Woodpecker, and Purple Finches**.

Peter Norment reported an **American Tree Sparrow** at Lake Shenandoah on Dec. 28.

Diane Lepkowski photographed a **Great Horned Owl** at her place near Harrisonburg on Dec. 28. The following day, Diane reported four **Common Goldeneyes** at Lake Campbell.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Bird Seed Extras for Sale

The following bird seed will be available at the meeting or contact Kathy Byers 540-820-6517, kkbyers77@gmail.com

1 – 5 lb. Shell-free Mix	\$7.50 each
2 – 5 lb. White Millet	\$8.00 each
2 – 10 lb. Nyjer	\$25 each
3 – 5 lb. Safflower	\$8.00 each

RBC 50 Years Ago – Art Fovargue, club historian

Fifty years ago on January 9, 1975, the Rockingham Bird Club held its first meeting. After the election of officers and a report on the Christmas Bird Count, the group toured the D. Ralph Hostetter Museum of Natural History on the Eastern Mennonite College campus.

Meetings were held throughout the year except for June, July and August. As it was stated back then, the Rockingham Bird Club had “fledged”.

Christmas Bird Count Compilation Update – *Bill Benish*

Thanks to the efforts of at least 47 people (33 afield and 14 yard birders), we pulled off another great count. We found 76 bird species (2 more than last year) and 11,127 individuals (about 3,600 more than last year).

Eleven field parties ventured out in fairly pleasant weather. Four different field parties found a total of four owl species, including Barn Owl (2), Eastern Screech-Owl (4), Great Horned Owl (2), and a Barred Owl. Mike Smith’s Hone Quarry party found Ruffed Grouse (4). I predicted a chance at a record high year for Purple Finches, and we found 49 compared to only one last year, but our record high still stands at 184 in 1981. Since the last of our reports filtered in barely in time for this month’s newsletter, I will produce a more in depth review for the next newsletter.

Bird Club Book Club

The BCBC will meet on Thursday, January 30th at 6:00 PM via Zoom to discuss the book *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, by Cheryl Strayed. Our February book selection is *The Comfort of Crows: A Backyard Year* by Margaret Renki. If a particular month's book selection is of interest to you, feel free to attend that month's discussion. We maintain a list of nature-related books and welcome suggestions for future reading. The BCBC usually meets on the third Thursday of each month via Zoom. If interested in joining us, email Elizabeth Ihle at elizaihle@gmail.com

Club Condolences

Tom Mizell's wife Suzanne passed away on December 23, 2024, with her family surrounding her. Suzanne enjoyed club meetings, the Hillandale Walks and checking the Bluebird boxes at the fairgrounds with her granddaughters, Emma and Lilly, and fellow club members. Her beautiful smile will be missed. A Celebration of Life will be held on January 25th, at 11:00 AM at the Bridgewater Presbyterian Church.

What is your Best Bird memory? – *Art Fovargue, club historian*

As part of the Rockingham Bird Club's (RBC) 50th anniversary, we want to make a collection of the best bird memories in the last 50 years in Rockingham County. Please be part of this. It is not a contest; just a collection of fun memories. Only one submittal per person. To participate, go to this webpage: <https://forms.gle/jpHgkWwBy5Zk1uWb9>

Basically we want to know the “what, when, where and why” of your best bird memory. The **what** is what one species of bird made your memory. It can be more than one bird, but it is limited to one species.

The **when** is on what date since January 1, 1975 did this occur. If you can get as precise as the hour and minute that's great. If the best your recollection can come up with is a year estimate, that's fine too.

The **where** is where in Rockingham County or Harrisonburg this occurred. Again, please be as precise as possible (town, park name, road name or number, your yard, friends yard, etc.). Whatever location details you can recall and are comfortable revealing are fine.

The **why** is what made this your best bird memory. It's your choice on how you define “best bird”. What is it that spoke to you, got you excited or was meaningful? Perhaps the beauty or the behavior of the bird(s). Here are some “made up” examples:

- perhaps it was the most uncommon bird you've seen
- perhaps it was the first bird you saw in Rockingham Co. after moving here
- maybe it was that Crow whose sweet melody serenaded you while on a first date picnic with your significant other
- you were taken in by a huge European Starling murmuration
- perhaps that duck that dabbled and nested one spring in your birdbath
- the observing of a robin feeding her day old chicks in that tree you had planted 5 years ago
- the behavior & devotion of a pair of hawks bringing nesting material to a nest box

We're asking you to write a few sentences as to why this memory/event/happening was special. If you can include all 4 **W**'s in the narrative that would be great, but you will see on the form there are separate questions for each **W** too. If this was part of an RBC event, please mention that in the narrative.

The opportunity to submit will end June, 30, 2025. Then the narratives will be summarized in a document that will be given to the James Madison University Libraries Special Collection for archiving. Also they will be posted on the RBC website for all to enjoy. Here's an example of what a submittal may look like in the summary:

Great Blue Heron

Paul Heron, Bridgewater, VA

In June 2010, I was hiking in Wildwood park in Bridgewater and 2 Great Blue Herons flew over. The way they stood out in the sunlight was quite spectacular. They landed in the North River there and I was able to get great looks and watch them fish for awhile. Some children asked me what I was doing and I was able to share the experience with them which also made it memorable.

This is not limited to RBC members or residents of Rockingham County, so please encourage friends and family to submit. Anyone can participate as long as the memory was in the last 50 years in Rockingham County. If you need any clarification or have other questions, feel free to contact me (art.fovargue@gmail.com).

If you change your mind after submitting your best bird, go ahead and make another submission, but let me know which you want to be your “best” bird. Otherwise I'll only include the first submission.

VSO Winter Field Trip to North Carolina Outer Banks; January 31, 2025 - February 2, 2025

Make plans to join the VSO's Winter field trip at the Outer Banks of North Carolina January 31-February 2! The weekend's leaders include Bill Akers and Jerry Via, as well as VSO field trip co-chairs Lee Adams and Meredith Bell. We always have a great variety of birds—and often a few surprise species, too—no matter what the weather. Learn more about the trip and how to register here: <https://www.virginiabirds.org/vso-events/obx-2024>

All VSO field trips are open to members at no charge. If you have not renewed your dues for 2025 or have not joined yet, you can renew or join here: <https://www.virginiabirds.org/join-renew>



American Tree Sparrow – Lake Shenandoah, December 28, 2024
Photo credit: Greg Moyers



Hermit Thrush – Keezletown, December 22, 2024
Photo credit: Herb Myers



Common Goldeneye – Lake Campbell, December 29, 2024
Photo credit: Diane Lepkowski

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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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