



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

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

Volume L

Number 6

Feb 2025

DATE: Thursday, February 13, 2025

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: *30,000 Miles in Search of Godwits, from the Mexican Border to the Arctic Ocean*
presented by Bruce Beehler

Between 2019 and 2022, Bruce completed five field trips in search of Hudsonian Godwits. He visited stop-over sites through the Great Plains; visited breeding habitat in western Alaska, Churchill, Manitoba, and the High Arctic of western Canada; and did field surveys at a famous autumn staging site in James Bay. In all, Bruce traveled solo by car more than 30,000 miles, encountering Hudsonian Godwits in 10 states and provinces. In his presentation, Bruce will recount the highlights of his more than five months in the field, from Nome and Point Barrow to Tuktoyaktuk, Moosonee, and Monomoy Island.

Bruce Beehler is an ornithologist, conservationist, and naturalist. He is currently a Research Associate in the Division of Birds at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, and a Scientific Affiliate of the American Bird Conservancy.

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

FIELD TRIPS – Diane Lepkowski

Bald Eagle Trip to Kimsey Run, Saturday, February 8: Randy Cline will lead a trip to Kimsey Run in West Virginia to view Bald Eagles on Saturday, February 8, 2025. We will meet to carpool at the J. Frank Hillyard Middle School parking lot at 226 Hawks Hill Dr in Broadway at 8:00 AM.

Bring warm clothes, water, and food. We should be back by approximately 2:00 PM. Please contact Randy directly if you are going via email (randy_cline@comcast.net) or phone 540.442.0348.

Hillandale Bird Walk, Tuesday, February 11: 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.

2025 Raptor / Waterfowl Count, Saturday, February 22: 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 over the entire area, 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.

TRIP REPORTS

January Hillandale Walk – Tom Mizell

On Tuesday, January 14, the day after a full moon, 10 members of the Rockingham Bird Club gathered at Hillandale Park for our first walk of 2025! The turnout surprised me as there was still at least 4 inches of snow and the temperature was 23° at 8:30 AM. Our Wish list birds included Brown Creeper, Screech Owl, American Tree Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Pine Grosbeak. Due to the lingering snow, we proceeded from Shelter 12 along the main park road directly to the Bike Trail. The Bike Trail was free of snow and ice (for the most part). Early sightings included: Northern Flicker, Northern Cardinal, Northern Mockingbird, Bluejay, Dark-eyed Junco, Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Crow, American Robin, White-throated Sparrow, Carolina Chickadee, Carolina Wren, Tufted Titmouse and White-breasted Nuthatch. By 9 o'clock we had 13 species.

After crossing the Bike Trail bridge, we lingered near the old log cabin site. As usual the Yellow-bellied Sapsucker greeted us, and we saw flashes of even more yellow as a Yellow-rumped Warbler flitted about! A Red-tailed Hawk and European Starlings flew overhead. It was now 9:30 and the temperature cranked up to 24°. Now heading west on the Bike Trail, we observed Eastern Bluebirds, House Finches, Fish Crow and Mourning Doves. About 10 o'clock White-crowned Sparrow, Song Sparrow and House Sparrow were seen. Turkey Vultures were to the west. Black Vultures made their presence known as well. By 9:47 AM the temperature was soaring like the Turkey Vultures to 25°.

Craig and Kathy spotted an accipiter near our turnaround spot which incidentally is at the stretch of Bike trail that is enclosed with screen due to the golf course driving range and where various bird houses decorate a fenced back yard. It was about 10:15 as we headed back to shelter 12. An American Kestrel visited us as we returned. On the way back we also enjoyed 3 Red-tailed Hawks circling high overhead. The sky was a brilliant blue and the undersides of the hawks appeared snowy white. I think our group was now 6 and we were all quite impressed with this aerial show as the hawks seemed intent to dazzle us. We completed our walk around 11:10 AM. 27 species and 27 degrees! Hope you can join us on February 11!

Short-eared Owl Field Trip – Robyn Puffenbarger

On Thursday, January 23, twelve intrepid birders met at the Bridgewater "park and ride" to head down to Bells Lane in Staunton to try to view the Short-eared Owls. It was a 'balmy' 33F when we headed south. We had permission to enter the gated area to get better looks at the hills, were joined by Allen Lerner of Augusta Bird Club (our 'permit holder'), and we got to say hello to the property owner too. It was a raptor show with Red-tailed, Red-shouldered, Kestrels, and Northern Harriers while the sun was up. We had some great discussion about the owls, they typically arrive mid to late November or on into December and leave early March. Short-eared Owls do not breed in VA and come to the state for the winter months. Allen said owls have been coming to Bells Lane very reliably for decades, only missing a year or two here and there.

We were getting chilled to the bone when the Short-eared Owls started to fly, and we had three owls total - thanks Mike Donaldson for his intense work with the bins and scope. I found it very interesting that Wednesday 22nd, when Bill Benish and I were on Livick Road in Swope, we had a Short-eared Owl up and hunting in much better light at 3:15 PM. Allen and Bill thought there might be two factors, the intense diurnal hawk pressure at Bells Lane - the owls have to compete against many day-active hawks in a smaller area, and prey availability. Allen said he's had the Swope owls earlier too, and the snow cover is much thicker out there than at Bells Lane right now so maybe the owls in Swope have to start hunting earlier because they are hungry! We did get an owl in the scopes sitting on a fence post that Allen was sure had prey.

Well, we had a lovely if chilling evening with the owls - we found them just before 6 pm and headed back about 6:10 PM. If you want to try to see the owls at Bells Lane, stopping at the stone posts with the black gate, stay outside the fence and gate please (private property!!) to look towards the red barn as the sun goes down. There might be a look once the owls are up from further down staying on the asphalt pavement of Bells Lane, looking up between the hills towards the barn, but there is quite a bit of tree/scrub on that side to block a view.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

Diane Lepkowski reported a **Peregrine Falcon** on Honey Run Rd west of Dayton on Jan. 1. Presumably the same bird has been spotted in this area on multiple dates in the past month.

Herb Myers reported **Red-headed Woodpeckers** at Starry Meadows near Singers Glen on Jan. 1.

Randy Cline reported **Wilson's Snipe** at the Northend Greenway in Harrisonburg on Jan. 2.

William Leigh reported 144 **Common Mergansers**, along with two **Northern Pintails**, at the Broadway Wastewater Treatment Plant on Jan. 4. William reported a **Tundra Swan** and a female **Common Goldeneye** at the same location on Jan. 15.

Cory Taylor reported a **Greater White-fronted Goose** on the river at Plains Mill Rd near Broadway on Jan. 7.

Matt Gingerich found a **Lapland Longspur** in a flock of **Horned Larks** on Lumber Mill Rd on Jan. 10.

Greg Moyers reported a **Rusty Blackbird** on Plains Mill Rd on Jan. 11.

Ben Spory reported a **Lapland Longspur** on Old Bridgewater Rd in Mt. Crawford on Jan. 12. Mike Donaldson also had a **Lapland Longspur** at this location on Jan. 20.

Matt Gingerich reported two **American Tree Sparrows** in his neighbor's weedy field in Linville on Jan. 12.

While checking on an unconfirmed report of two **Rough-Legged Hawks** on Acorn Drive in Harrisonburg, Clair Mellinger spotted a **Northern Harrier**. Clair was unable to find the hawks.

Cory Taylor reported an **American Tree Sparrow** on Raders Church Rd in Timberville on Jan. 13.

The bird of the month has been a **Say's Phoebe**, initially reported by Mike Donaldson on Jan. 15 at the Shenandoah Valley Produce Auction on Lumber Mill Rd west of Dayton. The bird has often been seen feeding in and around the buildings at the produce auction as well as hunting from the roof and

gutters of a nearby turkey house along Lumber Mill Rd. It seems to have weathered the snows and bone-chilling temperatures in fine form. The bird was still being reported as of Jan. 28.

Shaphan Shank reported a **Barn Owl** hunting a grassy field off Mt. Clinton Pike near the Weavers Rd pond on Jan. 17. The following evening, Shaphan found a **Northern Harrier** in the same location.

Mike Donaldson reported a **Greater White-fronted Goose** at Wildwood Park on Jan. 18.

The **American Tree Sparrow** at Lake Shenandoah, originally reported by Peter Norment on Dec. 28, continues to be reported. William Leigh reported two **American Tree Sparrows** at the lake on Jan. 23. Also at Lake Shenandoah, the **Virginia Rail** continues to be reported.

Silver Lake has hosted a number of duck species in January, including 60+ **Gadwalls**, over a dozen **Redheads**, **Bufflehead**, **Lesser Scaup**, **American Black Duck**, **Northern Pintail**, and an **American Coot**. On Jan. 22, Diane Lepkowski reported three **Common Goldeneyes** and on Jan. 28, William Leigh reported a **Greater White-fronted Goose** and Ben Spory reported an immature, **Black-crowned Night-Heron** at the lake.

Diane Lepkowski photographed a **Cackling Goose** at Lake Campbell on Jan. 29.

Randy Cline reported an **American Tree Sparrow** on the Friendly City Trail at Hillandale Park on Jan. 30.

Just south of the county line in Augusta County, two **Rough-legged Hawks** have been regularly spotted along Buttermilk and Westview School Roads over the last month.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Volunteers sought for Nominating Committee – *Mike Donaldson*

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 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)
- Member-at-large (members-at-large 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.

Seeking Earth Day presenters

Cub Run Elementary in Penn Laird is putting together an Earth Day-themed event for grades 3 through 5 that will take place on either April 23 or 24, depending on the availability of presenters. The event is called ERF Day: Environmentally Responsible Fun Day.

The 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon event will focus on all things environmental: wildlife, recreation, native plants/wildflowers, recycling, river ecosystems, land use, environmental concerns—anything that gets kids excited about nature and the environment! Classes will spend the morning rotating through interactive and engaging sessions lasting 15 minutes. A session can be structured as show-and-tell, hands-on, a game, or however the presenter prefers, and the topic can be whatever the presenter is environmentally passionate about.

Please contact Mike Donaldson (mike.donaldson@outlook.com) if you would like to represent RBC at this educational event.

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 14–17! Participate for 15 minutes or more, from wherever you are—details at www.bird-count.org. Stop by the Frances Plecker Education Center the week of February 10th to pick up a free checklist of local birds you're likely to spot.

You can also join us at the Frances Plecker Education Center on Saturday, Feb. 15th for one of our educational programs ([free registration required](#)):

Birding 101 with the Rockingham Bird Club Saturday, Feb. 15, 10:30–11:30 a.m. (program designed for adults, but interested kids are welcome)

Meet at the Frances Plecker Education Center (please dress for the weather). Join Mike Donaldson of the Rockingham Bird Club for a brief overview of local birds and how to find them and then go out into the Arboretum to do some scouting for the bird count!

Birding for Kids Saturday, Feb. 15, 11:45a.m.–12:45 p.m.

Meet at the Frances Plecker Education Center (please dress for the weather). If you watch birds, you never have to be bored. They're everywhere! Learn to identify birds by shape, size, and color, and practice your spotting skills with our binoculars. We will use recycled materials to make a bird feeder to take home and see what Arboretum birds are out and about. You'll have what you need to keep your eyes open everywhere you go for your new nature friends.

Bluebird Trail Leader Needed

The Bluebird Trail that our Club monitors at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds needs a new leader (chairperson) as soon as possible. In addition to the responsibilities listed below, the leader (chairperson) can choose to serve on the Club's Executive Committee or choose not to, according to their preference. Please contact Mike Donaldson (mike.donaldson@outlook.com) if you are interested in serving our club in this capacity or if you have any questions.

The Leader (chairperson) is responsible for:

1. Overseeing monitoring of the Bluebird trail at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds.
2. Ensuring all items are provided in the monitor's bucket (a list of all items in the bucket is available).
3. Maintenance of the Bluebird boxes if or when damage is reported.
4. Maintaining the list of monitor names, phone numbers and email addresses.
5. Creating the calendar of the monitoring season and sending it to all monitors.
6. Summarizing yearly results and reporting to the club as well as to the Virginia Bluebird Society.

Treasurer's Report – Audrey Shenk, Treasurer

At the latest RBC Executive Committee meeting in mid-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)
- 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)
- 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 2025!

Two Bags of Bird Seed Still Available

I still have two 10# bags of Nyjer for sale for \$25 each. I have been feeding this same seed this winter and the American Goldfinch and occasionally Purple Finch, are eating it up!

Kathy Byers
kkbyers77@gmail.com
540-820-6517

RBC 50 Years Ago – Art Fovargue, club historian

Fifty years ago, the Rockingham Bird Club published its first newsletter; Vol. 1, No. 1. It led with this poem titled *Catalyst* by David Russell:

Color wise, one cardinal
Can change a garden scene
From what had been a monochrome
Of unrelated green
Into a vibrant symphony,
Chromatic as the dawn,
By his one unifying note
Of scarlet on the lawn.

The first field trips were listed along with a recap of the January 1975 meeting which included a report on the Christmas Bird Count by Max Carpenter. If anyone would like to see a copy of this newsletter email Art at art.fovargue@gmail.com

Christmas Bird Count: VARC CBC Update – *Bill Benish, club compiler*

Again, great thanks to all our participants. With twelve people making this their first VARC (Rockingham County, Virginia) Christmas Bird Count!

Our 14 Feeder Watcher yard birders included 3 great grandchildren of members Don and Carol Perkuchin! These yard birders contributed from eight different households to identify 189 individual birds of at least 14 species.

Of our 34 field participants, our 11 field party leaders are listed in order beginning in the NNW proceeding roughly clockwise based on current sector numbers and splits: Matt Gingerich (1), Kenneth "Ken" Ranck (2 North of 33), Herb Myers (2 South of 33), Mike Shank (3 East of Dry River), Robyn Puffenbarger (3 West of Dry River), Bill Benish (4 Bridgewater/Mount Crawford), Bob Eggleston (4 Main), William Leigh (5), Kathy Byers (6 Briery Branch), Mike Smith (6 Hone Quarry), and Kathy Fovargue (6 Union Springs).

A Common Merganser in Bridgewater on the North River near the confluence with Dry River was the only bird requiring special documentation this year. Our four owl species and other sometimes hard to find or declining species have been welcome payoffs found by our dedicated efforts. Eleven finds this year, not found last year: Northern Shoveler, Common Merganser, Ruffed Grouse, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Killdeer, Eurasian Collared-Dove, Eastern Screech-Owl, Fox Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird, and Common Grackle.

We recently received review confirmation from our regional editor, so participants should expect an email update from me/Bill within a couple weeks with a complete list.

For anyone else who would like a copy of the summary report via email (wcbenish@gmail.com), please let me know.

Thanks again,
Bill Benish, VARC CBC Compiler

Bird Club Book Club

The BCBC will meet on Thursday, February 20th at 6:00 PM via Zoom to discuss the book *The Comfort of Crows: A Backyard Year* by Margaret Renki. Our March book selection is *The Social Lives of Animals* by Ashley Ward. 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



American Tree Sparrow – Lake Shenandoah, January 7, 2025

Photo credit: Mike Donaldson



Say's Phoebe – Shenandoah Valley Produce Auction on Lumbermill Rd, January 20, 2025

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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