



Goldfinch Gazette

The Newsletter of the Rockingham Bird Club

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

Volume L

Number 8

Apr 2025

DATE: Thursday, April 10, 2025

TIME: 7:00 PM

PLACE: Park View Mennonite Church, Fellowship Hall

PROGRAM: *American Bird Conservancy Overview* presented by David Wiedenfeld

David Wiedenfeld, a Senior Conservation Scientist with the American Bird Conservancy, will present an overview of the important work the organization does and new research on bird habitats in North America. David received his PhD from Florida State University. His work has focused on bird population ecology and conservation biology. He served for five years as Director of Research at the Sutton Avian Research Center, working primarily on prairie-chickens. He was also Head of the Department of Vertebrate Ecology at the Charles Darwin Research Station in the Galapagos Islands.

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, April 8: 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.

Madison Run / Browns Gap Fire Road (Shenandoah National Park), Saturday April 12, with Greg Moyers – Join Greg at 9:00 AM to seek some of our earliest returning warblers and more. This is a great spot to see Louisiana Waterthrushes and other early-returning birds such as Pine Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo, and Black-and-white Warbler. Meet at the fire road at 9:00 AM. We should conclude around noon. This is a fairly easy walk, with a gentle incline, along Madison Run on a well-maintained gravel fire road. Expect about a 3.5-4-mile round trip. There are no restroom facilities. Please contact Greg at gwmoyers@msn.com or 434-3029 if you plan to attend or need directions.

Lawn Chair Birding trip to Shenandoah National Park is being planned for **Wednesday, May 7** (rain date May 14) with a meetup time of 7:30 or 8:00 am for carpooling from Harrisonburg. We will likely leave for home around 3:00 or 4:00 pm.

We have done this trip in the past, and it involves a combination of stops at overlooks, short walks, and/or lawn chair birding at places such as South River and Lewis Mountain Picnic Grounds (both have restroom facilities). Our last stop is Big Meadows, where we again break out the lawn chairs and enjoy the birds and scenery. We actually sit and wait for birds to come to us!

We carry lots of snacks and drink as we relax in our lawn chairs (or picnic tables), breathe in the mountain air, and view birds and wildlife. Sitting is not required, and those that wish to roam a bit are free to do so. Participants should bring lawn chairs, jackets, plenty of food and snacks, water, insect repellent, and sunscreen.

Registration is required for this outing. Please contact Tom Mizell at ztomvaz@cs.com or 540-810-5898, or Kathy Byers at kkbyers77@gmail.com or 540-820-6517 to register. A Park pass (annual or lifetime) would be helpful for at least one participant in each vehicle in the group. Please include this information when registering, if appropriate.

TRIP REPORTS

March Hillandale Bird & Brunch Walk – Tom Mizell

The chilly (29 degrees) 11 March walk was attended by 17 birders. We found 23 species and thoroughly enjoyed the delicious brunch and fellowship hosted by Kathy Byers. Highlights of the March morning walk were the many vocal, Red-bellied Woodpeckers (Randy Cline counted at least 8) and Northern Cardinals. Another favorite was a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and at 10:10 AM an Eastern Meadowlark liftoff pleased the group as at least four took wing, fluttering they flew nearby and over the trail and at least one landed in a tree affording very good looks.

Brunch sightings, all highlights, included vegetarian and egg casserole, egg and sausage casserole, fruit salad, an assortment of donuts, bagels, orange juice and delicious coffee. A very enjoyable time! An anonymous quote: “The best part of the bird walk was Kathy Byers hosting a great Breakfast Brunch. Can't wait until next year.” A Big Thank You Kathy!

Come join us on Tuesday, 8 April, as we seek out more of our migratory friends along with the regulars of Hillandale Park.

Hillandale First Walk of Spring – Tom Mizell

On Thursday, March 20, 2025, sixteen “ready for Spring birders” showed up at 8:30 AM on a pleasant sunny day. Our wish list birds included Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Chipping Sparrow and Sandhill Crane. Guess which two we saw during the walk. Half an hour later, by the time we reached the northwest corner pedestrian bridge, we paused for a photo op. See Spring Birders in their spring plumage.

During the first 30 minutes we observed 12 species: American Robin, Bluejay, Northern Cardinal, Fish Crow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Mourning Dove, Hermit Thrush (At least 4 were seen this morning and in one locale there were two), White-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Flicker, White-throated Sparrow, and Carolina Wren.

Between the Northwest corner of the park and the slab, we added Carolina Chickadee and Downy Woodpecker. Although the Eastern Screech Owl had been sighted earlier in the morning, we did not see it during our walk. It's one of those birds that we always look for in or near its special tree along the trail.

Next, we digressed from quality sightings and added in this order: European Starling, Brown-headed Cowbird, and House Sparrow. Not sure why we employed that strategy, and I don't recall the “regal

three” being added in succession before. But now the quality viewing was over, and we moved on. By 9:50 AM we were headed West on the Bike Trail. We soon found Field Sparrow, Black Vulture and Northern Mockingbird. Randy Cline sighted an Eastern Meadowlark taking our count to 21 species.

Common Grackle, Song Sparrow, Turkey Vulture were next. A Brown Thrasher showed us that seasonal newcomers had arrived. Bob Eggleston sighted a pair of Kestrels. Shortly thereafter we added Tree Swallow flying over the golf course. Eastern Bluebird, American Goldfinch, Red-shouldered Hawk, Chipping Sparrow, Eastern Phoebe, and American Crow took our total for the morning to 33. We picked up at least five Spring migrants. You might reflect and circle the migrants on the above listing. Did you get 5?

Madison Run / Browns Gap Fire Road (SNP) & Ore Bank Rd, Woodcock Trip -- Diane Lepkowski

At about 6:45 PM on Wednesday evening, March 12, ten RBC members convened at the fire road, made our introductions, and discussed our target bird and its habits. Most of the group had never seen American Woodcocks display, and for many it would be a “life bird.” Uh-oh! Knowing this set the bar high to at least hear, if not see, the species’ amazing display! From our meeting spot, we drove north up Ore Bank Road to a roadside clearing at Deep Run Ponds Natural Area Preserve, where a well-known “scout,” Greg Moyers, had reported finding woodcocks a day or so before. Upon arriving, we perused the area and found it mostly quiet. With temperatures a lovely mid-60 degrees F, a slight breeze, and a nearly full moon, we stood quietly at sundown, hoping to hear a “peent” or two that would begin the show. Jackpot! The first “pent” was uttered about 13 minutes after sunset, and the displays continued for the next 20 minutes. We watched at least two birds, and most of us were able to see at least a couple of flight silhouettes and hear the complex, ethereal sounds of the aerial displays as birds fluttered and whirled back to earth.

We were tricked by a bat or two early on – nice to see them flying! Along with the woodcocks and bats, we also enjoyed a frog chorus, all making for a great trip! It was especially nice to have some new members along, and of course to see some old friends.

BIRD SIGHTINGS

The **Western Tanager**, first seen by a Broadway homeowner a few days before Valentine’s Day, was last seen on March 10. The bird frequently visited a peanut suet cake for a month!

The **Say’s Phoebe**, originally reported by Mike Donaldson on Jan. 15 at the Shenandoah Valley Produce Auction on Lumber Mill Rd, was last reported on March 22 at a nearby field.

Cory Taylor reported six **Common Goldeneyes** and the continuing **Tundra Swans** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on March 3. On March 8, Cory reported over 100 **Ring-billed Gulls** and large numbers of ducks, including 13 **Red-breasted Mergansers**, **Canvasbacks**, **Redheads**, **Ring-necked Ducks**, **American Coot**, and **Greater** and **Lesser Scaup** at the same location. Later that evening, as the **Ring-billed Gulls** circled before taking off, Greg Moyers took a photo and used it to count 124 gulls.

Greg Moyers and Diane Lepkowski reported a pair of **Red-breasted Mergansers** at Silver Lake on March 8.

Mike Smith had a **Pine Warbler** and two **Fox Sparrows** at his place east of Elkton on March 14.

Ken and Mildred Ranck heard the continuing **Virginia Rail** calling at Lake Shenandoah on March 16.

Ben Spory reported two **Pectoral Sandpipers** among the **Wilson's Snipe** at the pond on Fort Lynne Rd on March 17. Greg Moyers counted 58 **Wilson's Snipe** at this location on March 19.

Diane Lepkowski reported three **Double-crested Cormorants** at Lake Shenandoah on March 20.

Karen Seward reported 33 **Red Crossbills** at Briery Branch Gap on March 20.

Greg Moyers reported a **Rusty Blackbird** at Hillandale Park on March 22.

Herb Myers welcomed returning **Chipping Sparrows** in mid-March and a singing **Brown Thrasher** on March 22 at and around his place in Keezletown.

Taylor Mizzi reported **Purple Martins, Tree Swallows, Blue-winged Teal,** and **Wilson's Snipe** at Silver Lake, a **Black-crowned Night-Heron** at the usual spot on Rt. 42 in Dayton, and **Hermit Thrush** and **Winter Wren** at Lake Shenandoah during the third week in March.

Matt Gingerich reported **Pine Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo, Louisiana Waterthrush,** a pair of **Brown Creepers,** and a pair of calling **Barred Owls** while on a family hike at Hone Quarry on March 23. Matt reported a pair of **Long-tailed Ducks** at the Broadway Wastewater Plant on March 24.

Becky and Dan Knicely reported a male **Yellow-headed Blackbird** at their feeders west of Dayton on March 27. There are just two prior County records of this uber-rarity, the most recent in May 1987.

Diane Lepkowski reported that her wintering yard flock of dozens of **White-crowned Sparrows** flew the coop the night of March 31, with none left behind.

Karen, Everette, and Annie Shank reported that until around April 1, their feeders hosted at least 30 **Purple Finches**. As of April 2, at least two **Pine Warblers** have been visiting their suet feeder for over a month (and we KNOW how good Annie's suet is!)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

State of the Slate – *Mike Donaldson, Club President & Nominations Committee Chair*

The slate of nominees for the Club election in May has fallen into place and comprises the following candidates:

President: **Mike Donaldson**

First Vice President (programs): **Kathy Byers**

Second Vice President (field trips): **Matt Gingerich**

Secretary: **Allie Sawyer**

Treasurer: **Audrey Shenk**

Member-at-Large: **Miranda Troyer**

Diane Lepkowski is stepping away from the position of Second Vice President, ending a 15-year stint of dedicated service in that role. Her coordination of Club field trips during that time led to lots of outdoor learning, fun, and enduring memories of excellent bird sightings and warm camaraderie. Thanks so much, Diane, for all you've given in this role.

Our sincere thanks also extend to **Andrew Troyer**, who is finishing his two-year term as a Member-at-Large and has decided to forego a second term. We will miss his thoughtful and insightful comments and ideas as a member of the Executive Committee. Many thanks, Andrew!

The official final slate of nominees will appear in the May newsletter and will be voted on at the Club meeting on Thursday, May 8. The May announcement will include brief introductions to new faces Matt Gingerich and Miranda Troyer, to whom we are very grateful for their willingness to serve. Additional information about the elections and duties of the officers can be found within the Club's [Constitution and By-laws](#).

Cooperative Living Magazine, Shenandoah Valley Electric Coop (SVEC), April 2025 issue: the new issue highlights birding, featuring the Oakwood Drive Pond along with RBC members' recollections and photographs! Download the magazine here: <https://www.svec.coop/community/cooperative-living-magazine/>

RBC at Rocktown Author Festival – Mike Donaldson, Club President

Rocktown Author Festival is set for **Saturday, April 12, 2025, 10am–3pm** at Massanutten Regional Library's Central Library in downtown Harrisonburg and will include the unveiling of the new mural on the Bruce Street side of Central Library (weather permitting). RBC member Dr. Robyn Puffenbarger, one of the editors of the second edition of the [Birds of Rockingham County](#), has an author table reserved for the Author Festival. Please come out on April 12 to support her and the other participating local authors. The festival is free and open to the public, but advanced registration is required for the panel sessions. Registration is available online at www.mrlib.org.

Goldfinch Glory – Mike Donaldson, Club President

Some well-deserved shoutouts to Club members going the extra mile to contribute:

- **Lauren Jefferson** recently stepped up to help with a request to the Club from the coaches of Harrisonburg High School's Envirothon Team for help with bird identification. Lauren, a former teacher, developed a customized team training session on Virginia birds. Her session with the team on March 17 generated enthusiastic participation and perceptible progress among the students and sincere appreciation from the teachers. A+ work, Lauren!
- **Miranda and Andrew Troyer** have graciously offered to take charge of the name tags that offer such a nice touch at our Club meetings. Many thanks to them, as well as to **Joy and Wayne Beaman** who did such a nice job providing that service previously.
- **Randy Cline** has answered the call to serve as coordinator of the bluebird trail monitors that check the nest boxes on the Club's bluebird trail at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds. Thanks a million, Randy! Many thanks also to **Joy Beaman**, who did a stellar job serving in that role.

Best Bird Memory – Art Fovargue, Club Historian

Please don't forget about your Best Bird Memory. If you forget, your favorite avian species will never forgive you and may come pecking at your window.

Details at: <https://rockinghambirdclub.com/best-bird-memory-project/>

Remember, this is not a contest. You get to define what makes up your Best Bird Memory. It will be perfect whether your words are long or short, flowery or plain, complex or simple.

We want to reach at least 100 submissions as a tribute to our 50th anniversary, so your entry is important. And please encourage other family and friends. One doesn't have to be an RBC member.

This is the opportunity to archive and make permanent your Best Bird Memory.

RBC 50 Years Ago – Art Fovargue, Club historian

The April 1975 Rockingham Bird club newsletter was only a 1 page affair but still packed with information. In addition to announcing the April meeting “Ornithological Adventures on Bonaventure Island” by YuLee Larner of the Augusta Bird Club, field trips to Hillandale and Rapp's Farm were announced.

There was a short article under the heading “Bird Facts” that discussed the extinction of birds due to habitat loss and the introduction, by man, of various predators. Highlighted was the Elephant Bird, or Roc, last seen in 1660. This flightless bird of Madagascar was from 9 to 10 feet tall and weighed up to 965 lb.

To “Birdscape” your land, it was announced you could get a free catalog, which contained all kinds of “goodies”, from Dutch Mountain Nursery in Augusta, MI.

Bird Club Book Club

The BCBC will meet on Thursday, April 17th at 6:00 PM via Zoom to discuss chapters 5 through 9 of *The Social Lives of Animals* by Ashley Ward. Our May book selection is *Eight Bears: Myths Past and Imperiled Future* by Gloria Dickie. 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

Constitution and By-laws – Art Fovargue, Club Historian

As noted in last month's newsletter, starting in 2023, a special committee produced an update and revision to the RBC Constitution and By-laws. A summary of the changes was listed in the article.

At our upcoming meeting on April 10, it is planned for the RBC membership to vote on the proposed revisions. You can find the proposed version, the current Constitution and By-laws, and a marked up copy of the current version in the following RBC webpage:

<https://rockinghambirdclub.com/constitution-by-laws/>

We encourage you to check out the changes and to come to the April meeting to vote (and for the great program).

Have you heard of Birds & Beans Coffee? If you love coffee and birds, read more about Bird Friendly® Coffee!

What Is Bird Friendly Coffee?

Bird Friendly® Coffee is Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (SMBC) certified and represents a gold standard in ethical and sustainable coffee business.

Bird Friendly® Coffee is coffee that comes from family farms in Latin America that provide good, forest-like habitat for birds. Rather than being grown on farms that have been cleared of vegetation, Bird Friendly coffees are planted under a canopy of trees. These trees provide the shelter, food and homes migratory and local birds need to survive.

Birds & Beans Coffee - Our Bird-Friendly Coffee Story

Did you know that half of Americans start their day with a cup of coffee, yet few realize the environmental footprint of each sip?

At Birds & Beans Coffee, we believe in coffee that goes beyond taste — coffee that gives back. Founded in 2008 by Bill Wilson, a passionate conservationist and bird lover, our family-owned business began with a mission: to bring harmony to coffee consumption by supporting ecosystems that sustain our beloved bird populations. Today, with Bill's daughter Chessy joining the team, Birds & Beans has grown into a leading voice for sustainable coffee practices.

What sets us apart? Our unwavering dedication to certified standards that matter: USDA Organic, Fair Trade, and Smithsonian Bird Friendly® certification. These aren't just labels — they're promises to protect biodiversity and support ethical trade. And with every bag of coffee, 5% goes directly to conservation efforts, making each cup a small act of preservation.

We're proud to be your Bird Friendly Coffee company. Each bean, every bag, is carefully curated with respect for the environment, empowering you to make a positive impact with your daily coffee ritual.

Thank you for joining us in the journey toward responsible, sustainable coffee. Together, we can create a ripple effect that nurtures both people and the planet.

Source: <https://birdsandbeanscoffee.com/>



Puerto Rican Woodpecker at nest hole – Puerto Rico, March 2025

Photo credit: Herb Myers



Carolina Wren – JMU Arboretum, March 31, 2025

Photo credit: Richard Whelden



Chilly Hillandale Birders – March 11, 2025

Photo credit: Tom Mizell

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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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